

June 12, 2020

Honorable David R. Bernhardt
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt,

Thank you for your leadership and commitment during this pandemic to protect public health and safety while still meeting the U.S. Department of the Interior's mission. This pandemic coincided with the catastrophic failure of a drop structure on the St. Mary Canal and Conveyance Works system, compounding the economic impact and uncertainty faced by rural Montanans during these unprecedented times. We are grateful for the Bureau of Reclamation's responsiveness to this crisis, but would encourage you to continue monitoring reconstruction closely to ensure timely completion. We would appreciate any help your office can lend to ensure we minimize the burden placed on stakeholders as we pursue reconstruction of Drop 2 and Drop 5 of the Saint Mary Canal and Conveyance Works system.

On May 17, 2020, Drop 5 of the St. Mary Milk River Project experienced catastrophic failure stopping the flows from St. Mary that provide water for the irrigation of 121,000 acres of land, 18,000 water users and municipalities along the Hi-Line, including the Blackfeet Reservation and Fort Belknap Reservation. Eighty percent of water users in the region are at risk of being unable to receive flowing water by December if Drop 2 and Drop 5 are not repaired.

It has been nearly two decades since all five drops of Saint Mary Canal and Conveyance Works system were recommended to be replaced, with Drop 5 being the highest priority. In 2014, efforts were put forth to replace Drop 2 before Drop 5, as it was showing signs of rapid deterioration. Furthermore, the failure of Drop 5 poses a significant risk to crop production as it is predicted that irrigators will not have access to water as of July. The failure of Drop 5 poses a major threat to agricultural users and the surrounding communities. For that reason, we urge your full attention to this matter and request you explore all possible options to reduce the impact felt by Montanans.

Thank you for your time and consideration to this important priority for Montanans. We look forward to working with you to find an emergency solution to provide flowing water to the 18,000 Montanans who rely on the St. Mary Canal.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES
United States Senator



Greg Gianforte
United States Congressman