

May 18, 2020

The Honorable Brenda Burman
Commissioner, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
1849 C Street NW #7654
Washington, D.C. 20240


Dear Commissioner Burman,

For over 100 years, the St. Mary Canal and Conveyance Works system has provided supplemental irrigation to over 18,000 water users and supported over 121,000 acres of cropland along the Milk River. This was put into jeopardy yesterday when Drop 5 of the St. Mary Canal and Conveyance Works system experienced a catastrophic failure compromising the entire water system and the many communities that depend on it. The Milk River is the lifeblood of the Hi-Line and I am deeply concerned how this crisis will impact the upcoming irrigation season in northwestern Montana. For that reason, I urge you to take swift action to repair Drop 5 and use existing authorities to alleviate the cost to stakeholders.

The St. Mary Canal and Conveyance Works system provides between 70% and 95% of annual Milk River flows to support water for municipalities, recreation, and wildlife habitat in addition to irrigation. The St. Mary's facilities are not only among the oldest of Bureau of Reclamation's infrastructure, but also retain one of the highest cost shares for water-users meaning the needs are just as great as they are costly. I have long championed legislation to change the cost-share to avoid this very situation from occurring. I will continue fighting to fund the whole water system, but in the meantime, we must address this immediate need. It is imperative the BOR understand the urgency of this crisis and move quickly to confirm this project qualifies as emergency extraordinary operation and maintenance work. Doing so is necessary to complete the re-construction of Drop 5 ahead of the upcoming irrigation season and to provide some degree of financial relief.

I urge you to move expeditiously to determine this project merits emergency extraordinary operation and maintenance and work with the Milk River Joint Control Board on the rehabilitation of Drop 5. Thank you for considering my request and I look forward to continuing to partner with you to restore the entire St. Mary Canal and Conveyance Works system.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES
United States Senator