

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

GREG GIANFORTE
GOVERNOR



KRISTEN JURAS
LT. GOVERNOR

June 26, 2024

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Camille Calimlim Touton
Commissioner
Bureau of Reclamation
1849 C Street NW
Washington DC 20240

Secretary Haaland and Commissioner Touton:

On Monday, June 17, 2024, the St. Mary siphons suffered a catastrophic failure, destroying lands and flooding nearby structures on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation near Babb, Montana. The St. Mary siphons are a critical piece of the St. Mary Canal and Conveyance Works, which supplies irrigation and drinking water to communities along the Milk River including Fort Belknap Indian Reservation.

The failure of the siphons not only flooded and damaged property in the immediate area but also jeopardizes drinking water for 14,000 Montanans and irrigation for over 18,000 water users. The loss of over 121,000 acres of irrigatable land will be disastrous for Montana's farmers and ranchers as well as Montana's economy.

For over 100 years, the St. Mary Canal and Conveyance Works has augmented the Milk River Basin water supply. The Bureau of Reclamation built this system to provide irrigation water along the Milk River, but it has evolved into a multiuse project which provides water for municipalities, recreation, and wildlife habitat. This critical water supply accounts for 70 to 95 percent of the flows in the Milk River during periods of drought.

On behalf of the State of Montana, I urge you to take immediate action to authorize federal funds to replace the siphons under the authority granted in Public Law 111-11.¹ Montana's Legislature has authorized \$32 million in financial assistance to the project beneficiaries to replace the siphons and restore water to thousands of Montanans that rely on the Milk River.

¹ 43 USC 510b: The "Extraordinary operation and maintenance work performed by the Secretary" authority was utilized by the Department of the Interior and Bureau of Reclamation in response to the Drop 5 failure in 2020.

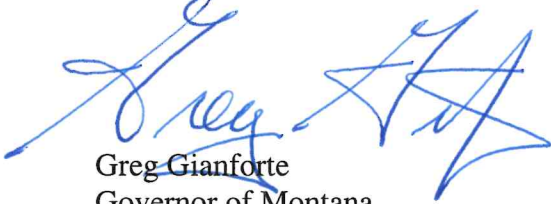
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Immediate federal response is critical to restore the lands damaged by the blowout and return water to the Milk River. Again, I encourage you to take swift action to authorize funds and engage the project beneficiaries to replace the siphons as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Greg Gianforte", is written over a printed name and title.

Greg Gianforte
Governor of Montana

CC: Milk River Joint Board of Control
Senator Jon Tester
Senator Steve Daines
Congressman Matt Rosendale
Congressman Ryan Zinke