

June 10, 2020

Senator John Hoeven, Chairman  
Senator Tom Udall, Vice Chairman  
U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs  
838 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Delivered via email

Dear Chairman Hoeven and Vice Chairman Udall:

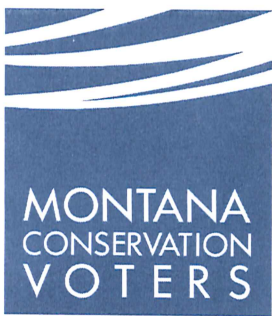
On behalf of the members of Montana Conservation Voters (MCV), a statewide not-for-profit advocacy organization, we submit this letter in strong support of S. 3019, the *Montana Water Rights Protection Act*, introduced in the U.S. Senate by Senators Steve Daines and Jon Tester.

MCV's members have been tracking the progress of this critical legislation which, at long last, codifies the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes's (CSKT) final settlement of claims to water rights, and transfers the National Bison Range (NBR) to the Tribes's management. The *Montana Water Rights Protection Act* is an important step toward course-correcting decades of injustices experienced by the Tribes, and MCV proudly supports any such effort.

The 2015 Montana Legislature ratified the CSKT's water compact with bipartisan support because it was negotiated in good faith. Montana legislators don't often agree on much, but this plan earned support from elected leaders across the Big Sky State. That speaks volumes about the quality of this proposal. We see no reason that the federal component of this compact—this legislation—should face any insurmountable political hurdles in the weeks and months ahead.

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes have a strong record of sound resource management, and the capacity to continue doing so following the finalization of this compact. It is also worth noting that this legislation will permanently protect water rights for many users on the Flathead Reservation, reducing uncertainty that often leads to litigation.

As for the National Bison Range, which sits entirely within the boundaries of the Flathead Reservation, S. 3019 finally and fairly resolves a long and painful dispute for the



Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Under this legislation, the NBR will continue to be open and accessible to the general public. The Tribes have used the lands and the resources within what is now the NBR since time immemorial—for thousands of years before the U.S. government drew its own political boundaries within the sovereign tribal land, without tribal consent. S. 3019 provides a hopeful conclusion to this chapter of injustice.

S. 3019 has earned bipartisan support. It is the product of government-to-government collaboration that falls directly in line with this organization's (and most Montanans') commitment to finding and supporting fair and equitable solutions for sovereign tribal governments and their lands, for our shared public lands, for bison and other wildlife, and for the precious resource of water. Section 13 of S. 3019 does exactly that.

MCV's mission includes "striving for racial justice, equity and inclusion, and learning from each other in an environment that does not perpetuate or tolerate injustice of any kind." The decades-long political process that culminated in the introduction of S. 3019 experienced a similar journey. Our members strongly support this bipartisan legislation and we urge all in Congress to pass it quickly and without delay.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Aaron Murphy", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Aaron Murphy  
Executive Director  
Montana Conservation Voters

CC:

- Chairwoman Shelly Fyant & Tribal Council Members, CSKT
- Senator Steve Daines
- Senator Jon Tester
- Representative Greg Gianforte
- Governor Steve Bullock