



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

May 18, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump:

On Sunday, May 17, 2020, Drop 5 of the St. Mary Canal and Conveyance Works system in northwest Montana had a catastrophic failure, which will jeopardize the upcoming irrigation season for over 18,000 water users on the system. Furthermore, the project provides water for the Blackfeet Nation, the Fort Belknap Indian Community, and many towns along the Hi-Line. Given the current crisis and concerns regarding our nation's food supply, losing over 121,000 acres of irrigatable land would be disastrous for Montana's farmers and ranchers as well as our overall economy. I urge swift action to repair Drop 5 and encourage your Administration to take a closer look at the cost share of the overall project.

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 supplemental irrigation water along the Milk River, but it has evolved into a multi-use project which provides water for municipalities, recreation enthusiasts and wildlife habitats. This critical water supply accounts for 70 percent of annual average Milk River flows during the irrigation season, and as high as 95 percent during severe drought when natural flows in the Milk River can be reduced to zero.

Since I was first elected to Congress, I have consistently said that this was the most important infrastructure project in the state, because many components of the St. Mary's facilities have exceeded their design life and are in dire need of repair or replacement. As recently as the beginning of March, I was in front of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee advocating for much needed repairs to the project. I will continue to push for funding on the whole project, but right now, we must immediately fix Drop 5.

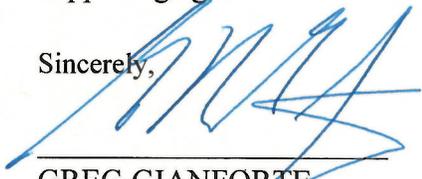
Further compounding the issue, the St. Mary's users have a 75 percent cost share of any rehabilitation on the project, one of the highest cost shares among Bureau of Reclamation projects. I have introduced legislation to address this challenge, but it has not passed out of

committee. I ask you to revisit the cost share for this project and act to correct it, if possible, via immediate executive action.

Again, I encourage you to take swift action to engage with the Milk River Joint Control Board to fix Drop 5 as quickly as possible. This project is over 100 years old and in dire need of a full upgrade. Fixing this drop structure will allow the project to continue moving water for the upcoming irrigation season. Without this repair, Montanans across the Hi-Line will soon turn on their faucets and no water will come out. I have attached photos of the Drop 5 failure.

I remain committed to work with you to find a quick, effective, and lasting solutions for the St. Mary's Drop 5 and for the overall rehabilitation of the project to avoid crises like this from happening again.

Sincerely,



GREG GIANFORTE
U.S. Congressman

Cc: Sec. David Bernhardt

Attachment: St. Mary Canal Drop 5 photos

