



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

July 14, 2020

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The Honorable, John Hoeven
Chairman
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
838 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable, Thomas Udall
Vice Chairman
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
838 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Support of S. 3019, the Montana Water Rights Protection Act

Chairman Hoeven and Vice Chairman Udall:

On behalf of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the oldest, largest, and most representative national organization comprised of tribal nations and their citizens, I write to express NCAI’s support for S. 3019, the Montana Water Rights Protection Act.

Permanent and reliable access to water creates significant health, cultural, and economic development benefits for tribal nations and surrounding communities. Securing this resource through water rights settlements meets these conditions by resolving past conflicts, providing future certainty, and ensuring “wet” water reaches tribal lands. For these reasons, NCAI membership codified its support for Congressional approval of the water rights compact negotiated between the state of Montana and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) by passing NCAI Resolution #MSP-15-038, [Support for the Water Rights Compact between the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, the State of Montana, and the United States of America.](#)

Additionally, tribal communities are often place-based and their relationship to their homelands extends from time immemorial and is rooted in tribal eco-cultural practices developed over millennia. When tribal nations have the ability to make culturally appropriate management decisions about their lands and natural resources they bring health and cultural and economic development benefits to their citizens and surrounding communities. In this regard, NCAI Resolution #SPO-16-006, [Support Legislation to Return the Land and Resources of the National Bison Range to Federal Trust for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes,](#) formalizes NCAI’s strong support for restoration of the bison range to CSKT and for their eco-cultural management approach to the care and continuity of the bison heard and the National Bison Range.

The Montana Water Rights Protection Act, S. 3019, would provide water security and certainty to future generations of citizens of CSKT, surrounding communities, and the state of Montana. With regard to the management of the National Bison Range, S. 3019 represents an appropriate management solution to the unique situation and

history of the National Bison Range and CSKT's relationship with the bison, wildlife, natural resources, and land. For these reasons, NCAI supports passage of S. 3019, the Montana Water Rights Protection Act.

If you have additional questions, please contact Darren Modzelewski, NCAI Policy Counsel, at dmodzelewski@ncai.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'KJ Allis', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kevin J. Allis
Chief Executive Officer