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Governor Steve Bullock Signs CSKT Water Compact Into Law

Helena, MT - Governor Steve Bullock today was joined by Sen. Chas Vincent and tribal leaders from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes as he signed the CSKT Water Compact into law. Once implemented, the Compact will honor tribal treaty rights, while protecting water access for farmers and ranchers both on and off the reservation, as well as avoiding the uncertainty that decades of litigation would cause. It is the final tribal water compact to be approved by the Montana Legislature.

"I am honored to sign the CSKT Water Compact into law. It is proof that when we put partisanship aside, work together and seek out solutions, we can tackle the biggest and most complex issues before us," Bullock said. "This Compact will ensure that we're living up to our treaty obligations while protecting the interests of Montana's farmers, ranchers, and businesses."

After the Legislature failed to approve the Compact during the 2013 legislative session, Bullock and the Tribe agreed to reopen limited negotiations on issues related to irrigation use and instream flows on the Reservation, as well as incorporating recommendations from the Montana Water Policy Interim Committee. After a series of public hearings, Sen. Chas Vincent, who opposed the Compact in 2013 agreed to be the lead sponsor of the bill in the Montana legislature.

"Water is no doubt the most valuable resource in the Montana. This Compact will ensure that all Montanans continue to have access to reliable water sources, whether they live on reservation or off," Vincent said. "I'm pleased that legislators from both sides of the aisle recognized not only the importance of passing this legislation, but also that this was a fair deal for all Montanans."

The Compact will make new water available for commercial and irrigation use, end the water administration void on the Flathead Reservation, allow for economic development under conditions of legal certainty on and off the Reservation, and facilitate the completion of the statewide general stream adjudication. In addition, the Compact would establish a technical team with irrigator representation to implement irrigation project upgrades to protect historic irrigation use and meet Tribal in-stream flow targets.

"This day will be remembered for years to come," said CSKT Chairman Vernon Finley. "We have more discussions to sort out with Congress, but we can always say that many joined with us as the

Montana Legislature did the right thing and supported the CSKT Water Compact. This is a historic day.”

In addition to Bullock and Vincent, the Compact received wide bipartisan support from farmers and ranchers, business groups, conservation organizations, and elected officials.

The Compact now goes to Congress and the CSKT’s Council for final approval.

PHOTOS: [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#)

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