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**Governor Bullock, Attorney General Fox Applaud Agreement on Flathead Water Rights Compact**

HELENA – Today, Governor Steve Bullock and Attorney General Tim Fox announced an agreement with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes on the Flathead Water Rights Compact. The Compact, which requires legislative, Congressional and Tribal approval, protects all existing rights for stockwater, municipal, domestic, commercial, industrial and other non-irrigation uses, while respecting tribal and treaty rights.

"I'm pleased that an agreement has been reached that respects tribal rights, while ensuring that irrigators and residents in the region continue to have access to a reliable water supply," Bullock said of the agreement. "The Compact is the result of constructive negotiations where all parties sought common ground in the best interests of the state and Tribe. I'm confident that the legislature will recognize the importance and fairness of this agreement."

The Compact, which was negotiated through the Reserved Water Rights Commission and includes recommendations from the legislature's Water Policy Interim Committee, will make new water available for commercial and irrigation use, end the water administration void on the Flathead Reservation, allow economic development under conditions of legal certainty, and facilitate the resolution of the statewide water adjudication process. In addition, the Compact establishes a technical team with irrigator representation which will implement water compact provisions relating to diversions of water into the irrigation project so that irrigator historic use is protected and tribal in-stream flow targets are met.

"Over the last several months, we have been heavily involved in discussions amongst stakeholders," Fox said. "My primary concerns have been that the Compact be constitutional and that it guarantees irrigators receive sufficient water to continue farming today and in future generations. This Compact, which is significantly better than the previous one, does both. After long and difficult negotiations, the state, the Tribes, and the federal government have reached an agreement that is good for Montana. I urge our legislators to carefully review and ratify it."

The Compact also establishes a \$30 million fund that can be tapped to pay for water pumping to ensure that both irrigation and in-stream flow targets are met, and to mitigate impacts of compact implementation on project water use, even in dry years. In low water years, the Compact provides for shared shortages, and this fund will allow for additional pumping capacity to meet irrigation needs.

Through the Compact, irrigators served by the Flathead Indian Irrigation project can have a water delivery entitlement specific to their lands as long as they are in compliance with their operation and maintenance obligations. This delivery entitlement will be transferrable to those who inherit or purchase those lands. Irrigators will receive a delivery entitlement statement as proof of the entitlement.

The Compact has been subject of more than a decade of negotiations. The 2013 legislature did not approve a previous version of the compact. This summer, Bullock and tribal leaders agreed to open limited negotiations on language in the Compact. This revised Compact will be presented to the 2015 legislature for approval.

The legislature has approved water compacts for every other tribal reservation in Montana.

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