

January 3, 2014

Water Compact Interim Committee  
State Capitol  
Helena, MT 59620

To the Committee:

Although the Lake County Commissioners have individually supported the compact for some time, it has been our position to neither show support nor opposition to the Flathead Water Rights Compact. Our reason for taking this position was that since Lake County government did not have a seat at the bargaining table during creation of the compact, it would be improper for the commissioners to attempt to influence the debate over the compact. We now are of the opinion that our failure to take a position is being perceived as non-support of the compact.

The Lake County Board of Commissioners support the acceptance of the Flathead Water Rights Compact as proposed. It is our opinion the compact should be approved for the following reasons:

- We believe that the process followed to create the compact was fair, reasonable, and equitable to all citizens of Lake County. We recognize that negotiated agreements can only reach a successful conclusion if all the negotiating parties are prepared to make concessions that lead to a mutually beneficial settlement. We believe that negotiations were held in good faith by all parties, and that a sufficient period of time was provided for crafting the compact.
- We do not believe that the protracted and expensive litigation that would certainly follow rejection of the compact by the legislature is in the best interests of citizens of our county. If funds are not appropriated by the legislature to pay for litigation, private citizens in our county would bear the cost. Some local irrigators are already seeing the cost of litigation reflected in raised irrigation rates. There is also no assurance that litigation will provide county residents with a better "deal" than what is provided in the proposed compact.
- We believe that the debate in our county has been centered on project irrigation issues, and as important as these issues are, they are only part of the compact debate. Equal importance should be placed on the guarantee afforded the approximate 3000 private wells at stake, the municipal water supplies, i.e. Polson, Ronan, & St. Ignatius, and for irrigation waters outside the project.
- We believe that acceptance of the proposed compact will prove to be an economic benefit to Lake County. The compact resolves all Tribal claims to water which promotes stability in private property values. Many domestic wells drilled since 1996 would become legally approved under the compact. The Tribes would also accept junior water rights on all

domestic wells that produce less than 100 gallons per minute. The compact also provides water for future growth and economic development in our towns and cities that we do not have now.

- We believe that it is in the best interests of our citizens to promote a favorable and cooperative working relationship with tribal and state governments that will benefit all the citizens of Lake County.

We thank the Committee for the time and consideration it is giving to this important issue.

BOARD OF LAKE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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Ann Brower, Chairman

William D. Barron, Member

Gale Decker, Member