

November 27, 2017

The Honorable Rex Tillerson  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street Northwest  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson:


We write to you today regarding transboundary water issues, which negatively impact Montana's economy and potentially, public health. As you might be aware, Lake Koochanusa is a large reservoir located within the Kootenai River watershed, straddling the United States and Canadian border in northwest Montana. The Kootenai River is part of the Columbia River Basin. In British Columbia ongoing metallurgic coal extraction has threatened water quality, which requires timely and aggressive management in order to protect the United States' waters. We are encouraging the U.S. State Department to address the larger bilateral concerns within the Kootenai River watershed, in order to protect Montana's water and to ensure it remains clean for future generations.

The State of Montana determined that selenium is a critical pollutant of concern for which British Columbia and Montana do not have a formally adopted water quality standard/objective. Going through the site-specific process to identify a selenium standard for Lake Koochanusa with British Columbia will likely address the most serious and widely held concerns in a single effort. It is our belief that from a human health and aquatic life perspective, Lake Koochanusa is the most sensitive point in the Kootenai watershed affected by selenium. A strong bilateral water quality standard, developed with British Columbia, is the first step in communicating and protecting Montana's water quality needs.

However, other water quality issues have been identified that would benefit from U.S. State Department involvement. For example, it is well accepted that coal mining will continue to generate contaminants including but not limited to selenium in the Kootenai River watershed for future generations. Given the international, multi-state, and tribal interests in this watershed we feel it is appropriate to identify federal resources to support long term fish tissue and water quality monitoring within Montana and Idaho. In order to properly address this and potentially other needs, we would encourage the U.S. State Department to work with the State of Montana, Tribal Nations, the EPA, the Department of the Interior, and other stakeholders to lead an effort to clearly identify and document the additional bilateral needs and to provide support to ensure those needs are successfully addressed.

We look forward to your response to this matter. We stand ready to assist you in ensuring the health of this watershed.

Sincerely,



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Jon Tester  
United States Senator



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Steve Bullock  
Governor