

**FY 2024 TESTIMONY OF ASHLEIGH WEEKS, GENERAL MANAGER
ASSINIBOINE AND SIOUX RURAL WATER SUPPLY SYSTEM
HOUSE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES
APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE**

FORT PECK RESERVATION RURAL WATER SYSTEM (\$4,204,000)

The Assiniboine and Sioux Rural Water Supply System (ASRWSS) submits this testimony in support of \$4,204,000 in funding for continued Operations, Maintenance, and Replacement (OMR) of part of the Fort Peck Reservation Rural Water System as authorized by PL 106-382.

ASRWSS is the tribally chartered entity charged with the planning, design, construction, operation, maintenance, and replacement (OMR) of the Assiniboine and Sioux Rural Water Supply System, which is the part of the Fort Peck Reservation Rural Water System on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation. We are strong partners with Dry Prairie Rural Water System (DPRWS), which operates the off-Reservation part of the Project.

The most basic of governmental functions is the delivery of clean, safe, and reliable drinking water. We are honored to provide water to the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribal members and to service northeastern Montana off-Reservation population in a 7,750 square mile area connected by 3,200 miles of pipeline when completed in 2024. Completion of all construction is expected in FY 2023 and upon completion, the project will provide drinking water to an area larger than New Jersey and just smaller than Massachusetts.

ASRWSS wants to thank the Subcommittee for the full funding of OMR costs of the Water Project at \$3.432 million in FY 2023 and for full funding in all previous years.

As the Project works toward completion of construction, OMR needs continue to increase. Thus, for FY 2024 we will need an additional \$772,000 to reach the \$4.204 million in appropriations for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Construction account.

The increase is a significant increase over the last several years and is due to:

- i) inflation in FY 2021 through FY 2023 for all OMR items, particularly
 - (1) chemicals
 - (2) fuel
 - (3) power and heating
 - (4) asset replacement

- ii) continuing construction to advance service to more users on the
 - (1) west side of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation
 - (2) Scobey area of Dry Prairie

- iii) increase in production of water at treatment plant from 795 million gallons in 2018 to 1,112 million gallons (0.795 to 1.112 billion gallons) in 2022.

The funding increase of \$772,000 is necessary to:

- i) safely operate, maintain, repair and replace system features,
- ii) employ the necessary level of qualified and certified staff
- iii) purchase chemicals for treatment
- iv) purchase power for pumping and treatment facilities.
- v) address inflation, (see above)

The Congress (Energy and Water Subcommittee) will have appropriated over \$381 million to complete the project through FY 2023. The amount required for completion includes a considerable inflation amount over the last 2 years and results in an increase of \$27 million overall. This increase is a small portion of the remaining construction costs that required re-pricing by the Bureau of Reclamation. The ASRWSS/DPRWS projects are 95% complete and full funding will be available to complete the project in FY 2023 and 2024. It is imperative, through Interior appropriations (and a DPRWS non-federal cost share), that ASRWSS maintain the investment of Congress in the ASRWSS infrastructure valued at \$240.4 million and held in trust by the United States.

The DPRWS cost share covers the OMR cost of their use common facilities as agreed upon between ASRWSS, DPRWS and the Secretary in a Water Service Agreement. DPRWS makes monthly payments on a timely basis. DPRWS will provide an estimated \$759,000 in FY 2024 to supplement appropriations.

ASRWSS provided drinking water to more than 17,400 residents in Northeast Montana in 2022. In 2024 over 18,000 residents will be served. Ultimately, 31,000 residents will be served as the population of the region continues to grow over the next several decades. The population served at the end of 2016 was less than 10,000, and with population growth, OMR funding needs have increased accordingly. The project also serves social and governmental agencies, including the BIA Agency Office, schools, clinics, hospitals, Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Fort Union Trading Post National Historic site, U.S.- Canadian border stations, and the towns of Poplar, Wolf Point, Frazer, Culbertson, Medicine Lake, Scobey, Nashua, St. Marie, Fort Kipp, and Brockton. The small Reservation communities of Reserve and Lustre were added in 2022 and the off-Reservation town of Opheim will be served in 2023.

The Fort Peck Reservation Rural Water System was authorized by the Fort Peck Reservation Rural Water System Act (“Act”) of 2000, Pub. L. 106-382. The Act ensured a safe, adequate, and reliable municipal, rural and industrial water supply for the residents of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation and the residents of Roosevelt, Sheridan, Daniels, and Valley Counties outside the Reservation. As noted in the President’s previous budget requests: “*Groundwater from shallow alluvial aquifers ... for the municipal systems . . . is generally poor with concentrations of iron, manganese, sodium, sulfates, bicarbonates and total dissolved solids above recommended standards.*” This project provides a perpetual remedy to historic water quality issues that impaired health and stunted economic growth.

The Project called for the construction of a single treatment plant on the Missouri River near Wolf Point, Montana, that will distribute water through 3,200 miles of pipeline to both the Reservation Tribal system and through three completed and operational interconnections to

DPRWS. A single water source on the Missouri River replaced nearly two dozen individual community water sources and ensured a clean, plentiful, and safe water supply.

The Federal legislation authorizing the Fort Peck Reservation Rural Water System mandates that the OMR costs of ASRWSS, infrastructure held in trust by the United States, are fully funded. The OMR funding is included in the Interior appropriations to BIA. The OMR funding mandate is consistent with the federal trust responsibility to the Tribes to fulfill the promise of a permanent homeland when the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes agreed to move to the Reservation. A permanent homeland necessitates safe drinking water. The funding request enables ASRWSS to continue to deliver superior drinking water, meeting all federal and state standards, to all the people, towns, and federal, tribal, state, public and private agencies, and businesses.

Thus, the \$4.204 million requested in FY 2024 for the OMR of this vital infrastructure project is critical. The increased funding of \$772,000 over the FY 2023 level for the OMR of the Project is needed as the Project buildout increases the service population and requires additional personnel, power, chemicals, repairs, replacements and improvements to operate the water treatment plant and other facilities.

Again, we thank the Subcommittee for the continued support of OMR funding for ASRWSS as authorized by PL 106-382.