

thank you, Chairman Huffman and Ranking Member McClintock. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before the committee today and it is great to be back in Natural Resources.

The Milk River Project is the most important infrastructure project in Montana. It's a source for clean water for Montanans along the Hi-Line and for irrigation for over 121,000 acres our ag producers. But the 100-year-old project is in disrepair and getting worse. The recent failure of Drop 5 makes clear why we need to act now. The federal government should step up and reduce the burden hardworking Montanans bear for the project's repair and maintenance.

This project was built by the Bureau of Reclamation to provide supplemental irrigation water along the Milk River but has evolved into a multi-use project which provides water for municipalities, recreation enthusiasts and wildlife habitats.

This critical water supply accounts for 70% of annual average Milk River flows during the irrigation season, and as high as 95% during severe drought when natural flows in the Milk River can be reduced to zero. Furthermore, the project provides water for the Blackfeet Nation, the Fort Belknap Indian Community, and numerous towns along the Hi-Line.

Since I was first elected to Congress, I have consistently stated that this was the most important infrastructure project in the state. Many components of the St. Mary's project have exceeded their design life and are in dire need of repair or replacement.

Generally, water user systems are responsible for a portion of the maintenance. The St. Mary's users have a 75% cost share of any rehabilitation on the project, one of the highest cost shares among Bureau of Reclamation projects. The project users cannot afford to pay 75% of the cost to rehab a 100 year old project that stretches for miles. I have introduced legislation to change the cost

share of work on this project. My bill, the St. Mary's reinvestment Act would increase the Federal cost share and reduce the water users' share to 25%

On May 17th, 2020, Drop 5 of the St. Mary Canal and Conveyance Works project in northwest Montana had a catastrophic failure, which now will jeopardize the upcoming irrigation season for over 18,000 water users on the system. You can see the photo behind me.

Given the current crisis and concerns regarding the food supply, losing over 121,000 acres of irrigatable land would be disastrous for Montana's farmers and ranchers and our overall economy.

As recently as the beginning of March, I was in front of the House Transportation Committee advocating for much need repairs to the project. I will continue to push for funding on the whole project, but right now, we must immediately fix Drop 5, as well as the diversion and Drop 2. Because of the immediacy of Drop 5, Drop 2, and the

Diversion structure, my office has been working with BOR and our Senate Colleagues to focus our bill on the immediate concerns.

On a more positive note, I received word this week that the joint board of control has already begun work on Drop 5, with a goal to complete the construction this season. This will almost deplete the financial reserves of the joint board that coordinates the project without addressing what until recently seemed to be the most urgent needs. The cost share will still need to be addressed, but there is hope on the Hi-Line.