



**MONTANA  
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FEDERATION**

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February 3, 2026

Rep. Troy Downing

RE: MFBF Support for HR 6568, "Lower Yellowstone River Native Fish Conservation Act"

Dear Representative Downing:

The Montana Farm Bureau Federation applauds your sponsorship and introduction of HR 6568, the Lower Yellowstone River Native Fish Conservation Act. The Montana Farm Bureau Federation represents over 19,000 member families, many of whom make their living raising crops and livestock across the state, including far eastern Montana where the Lower Yellowstone Irrigation Project is vital to individual farmers and the community in general. Your legislation will provide farmers, ranchers, and the impacted rural communities with the long-term certainty they need to continue raising high value crops which support the full economy. Solidifying the responsibility of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to maintain the Lower Yellowstone Fish Bypass Channel contributes greatly to the long-term success of the Project and assures safe passage around the irrigation diversion for pallid sturgeon, a federally protected species.

The Lower Yellowstone Irrigation Project has provided irrigation water to farmers in Montana and North Dakota for over one hundred years, bringing essential irrigation water to 58,000 acres. Irrigation water provided by the project enables farmers to raise more productive and higher value crops than they could without the benefit of water. Even still, profit margins are thin and farmers rely on the affordable irrigation water the project provides to remain profitable. If the costs of maintaining the fish bypass were transferred to the irrigators, it is estimated that irrigation tax costs to farmers would at least double. Furthermore, the irrigation districts do not have the staff, equipment or expertise to maintain the bypass, which could lead to the degradation of this infrastructure which was only recently constructed.

It is also important to note that the Fish Bypass was constructed as a mitigation solution after the pallid sturgeon was listed under the Endangered Species Act in 1990. The U.S. Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation designed and constructed the bypass, utilizing a variety of federal funds. The bypass exists outside the boundaries of irrigation district boundaries. The listing of the pallid sturgeon was not caused by irrigators and the cost of maintaining a mitigation structure built beyond their control should not become their responsibility.

Again, thank you for introducing this essential legislation, assuring the continued vitality of an important rural farming community, protecting individual farmers and ranchers, and maintaining critical infrastructure.

Sincerely,

Scott Kulbeck  
Executive Vice President

We Care for the Country