

Ms. Grosskopf, it was a pleasure to discuss my submittal of an opinion letter on the controversial Water Compact issue with you. I am enclosing the long version of my letter as it was published March 2 in the Editorial section of the Kalispell, Montana, Daily Inter Lake newspaper. I modified the letter slightly to address a much broader audience as you suggested. Please let me know if further changes need to be made. John Merlette

Author's Note: The following letter describes a Constitutional crisis raging in northwestern Montana south of Kalispell. However, this issue actually pertains to everyone in America and, thus, should be a concern of everyone who cherishes our heritage and freedoms. The federal government is actively usurping water rights from other Western states, not just Montana, using Native Americans as proxies to achieve its goal. Many of the concerns expressed herein may soon apply to you if they haven't already.

The Water Compact Scam...  
If it ain't broke, don't fix it!

By John Merlette  
Bigfork, MT  
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Last week I learned about a money-making scheme that surely Al Gore and his "global warming" scam would envy. You wouldn't give con artists from Nigeria your hard-earned savings, so why do you sit idly by while the federal government and its slick team of lawyers attempt to steal valuable natural resources from Montana citizens? I'm talking clean, fresh water, an asset that in some parts of the world is more valuable than oil. There's a dark cloud hanging over us, and in the words of Bob Dylan, "You don't need to be a weatherman to know which way the wind blows."

Hearing about it reminded me of the 1974 film classic, "Chinatown." Here's how the scam works. The "spread the wealth" connivers convince the leadership of the 5,000 hapless members of the Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) that live on the reservation that they'll all get rich IF they play along. The game is to cleverly convince historically-challenged state legislators that fishing rights granted by the federal government to the tribe over a century ago were intended to include control over all water flowing into their lands extending upstream, outside the reservation boundaries, clear back to the source. Using high-spirited double-talk, suddenly, vast amounts of additional water is needed for irrigation by the CSKT, even though there is more water available than could ever be used by the 50 or so tribal members that farm. As I see it, and this is just my opinion, the real objective of the federal reserved water rights compact, like most other mind-numbing government programs these days, is to gain control... control, not just of western Montana's water supply but also, consequentially, more control over the citizens of the state. The feds wouldn't be spending the big bucks on this effort that they are if there wasn't an immense amount of money to be made after the law's passage. The authors of the agreement even go so far as to declare it valid "for time immemorial" (unlike other state statutes) if it becomes law. Now why would they feel it necessary to do that?

By taking control of surface and irrigation well water extending outside the borders of the CSKT reservation (an area that encompasses 11 counties affecting some 350,000 people), somebody eventually (maybe not initially) will be making a phenomenal amount of money with our asset... and it sure as heck won't be you or me. Notice how the environmentalists jump all over any attempt to remove oil or coal from our lands, but the prospects of removing our water and thus disrupting the ecological balance doesn't seem to warrant so much as a peep from the "greenies."

I feel empathy for the farmers that struggle to make a living on reservation lands legally acquired many generations ago. They are threatened with severe cutbacks to their irrigation water allocations as a consequence of this ominous bill, even though their current water rights were issued years ago. By cutting back on water allotments, farms become less profitable and face an increasing risk of foreclosure.

I talked to some of these non-tribal and tribal farmers, and they tell of driving to the state capitol (Helena) to voice their objection to the bill, only to be denied a chance to speak by the chairman of the Reserved Water Rights Compact Commission (RWRCC). What happened to the Constitutional rights of free Americans? How can this abuse of power be tolerated in our state? And why do Democrat state legislators condone the unlawful violation of the water rights of Montana citizens by opposing the efforts of Republican lawmakers to kill this horrible bill?

The farmers also told me stories of how tribal leaders threatened newspaper reporters with loss of their jobs and even citizens who wished to opine on the subject with economic sanctions for daring to oppose the water compact. And why do county commissioners publicly endorse this vile legislation? Admitting they haven't really studied the details of the 132-page bill (1,200+ pages with supporting documents) doesn't cut it. People's livelihoods will be affected by this discriminatory piece of odious bureaucratic nonsense. It is a very serious matter, not one a legislator should risk endorsing just because his/her political cronies like it. Wise up! You officials were elected to protect and represent ALL the people equally, not just the ones who tell you how wonderful you are.

As for the rest of you, maybe you think this is someone else's problem, so why bother? Well, let this sink in as you pour yourself a glass of water... By locking up the water supply all the way to the Canadian border, as this federal reserved water rights compact will do, all of us, including all of Flathead and Lake County, will find ourselves in a "defacto" closed basin. That means no new surface water rights for our kids and grandkids. Such will hurt business growth and tax revenues. These are serious consequences that will affect all of us in western Montana... forever... not just a few farmers south of Polson.

The hard-working people from Lake County that I talked to have already spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees fighting the tsunami of professional litigators, lobbyists, and others who will reap huge profits for themselves if they succeed in getting the Water Compact passed by the state legislature and signed by the Governor. They need your help. If you don't have any compassion for the struggle of the people most affected by this outrageous power grab by our government, you must be a visitor from our nation's capitol. The citizens of Montana that I know help their neighbor when Constitutional rights are being violated. If you do care, call or write your legislator and tell them how you feel, and do it NOW! They need to hear from you more than the slick-talking agents of "spread the wealth." Frankly, state management of Montana's water seems to be working just fine. Heed the saying: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."