

United States Senate

June 17, 2024

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Haaland and Secretary Vilsack:

I write regarding a catastrophic failure that occurred earlier today on the Milk River Project near Babb, Montana. One of the main siphons on the St. Mary's canal burst causing thousands of gallons of water to flood the surrounding area. While it will be impossible to assess the full extent of the damage until the water slows, it is clear that this failure has already caused extensive damage to nearby businesses and that the siphons on this section of the Milk River Project will need to be replaced.

The timing of this failure could not be worse because hundreds of farmers and ranchers are currently depending on the Milk River Project to irrigate their crops. Again, while it is too early to know the overall effect this failure will have on irrigation, it is clear that the siphon failure will harm the farmers and ranchers that rely on the Milk River Project.

This is a disaster that requires the immediate and full attention of the Department of Interior and the Department of Agriculture. I ask that you swiftly work to ensure that the local community and the irrigators have the resources they need to confront the challenges that lay ahead. I intend to stay in close contact in the coming days and hours as we work to support the citizens of north central Montana and confront this crisis.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester