

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

GREG GIANFORTE
GOVERNOR



KRISTEN JURAS
LT. GOVERNOR

July 11, 2023

Mr. Doug Baus
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Chairman
Columbia River Technical Management Team

Mr. Baus,

I share Montanans' concerns with drought conditions in northwest Montana. Low water levels in Flathead Lake continue to disrupt the lives and livelihoods of all who call the Flathead Valley home. The waters of the Flathead drainage are the lifeblood of the region, supporting small business owners and family farmers and ranchers who rely on this precious water resource for their livelihoods. Wise water management practices are essential to preserving our way of life across the State of Montana, and we must not lose sight of those most impacted by water management decisions. It is imperative that we consider every possible option to provide relief to the residents of the Flathead Valley, including additional releases from the Hungry Horse Project (Hungry Horse).

Given the significant consequences of these low water levels to the region, I have discussed this issue with Department of the Interior leadership and sought information regarding the ability of the federal government to address this issue. I continue to meet with residents and local officials regarding specific impacts and strategies to mitigate those impacts.

Additional releases from Hungry Horse would be beneficial to Flathead Lake levels. Reclamation provided the State of Montana information and data showing that in order to fill Flathead Lake to within 12 inches of full pool (i.e., approximately 8 inches up from current levels) by July 31, Reclamation would need to lower Hungry Horse water levels approximately 15 feet. There is currently no estimate of the amount of water needed to fill Flathead Lake to full pool from Hungry Horse. Based on this information, any and all solutions must be fully discussed at the upcoming meeting of the Technical Management Team.

First, I request that the Technical Management Team discuss the extent additional flows from Hungry Horse would improve the situation in Flathead Lake and whether they are permissible under current federal law and regulation.

Second, if permissible under federal law and regulation, I request discussion and analysis of the potential impacts of such releases to Flathead Lake. This analysis should include a range of outcomes based on different release volumes from Hungry Horse.

Finally, I request that the Technical Management Team review the Hungry Horse operations plan to determine whether changes need to be made in order to allow more flexibility for future releases when actual runoff falls below forecasts as it did this year.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Greg Gianforte". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a large initial "G".

Greg Gianforte
Governor

cc: Tommy Beaudreau, Deputy Secretary
Department of the Interior

Martha Williams, Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Camille Touton, Commissioner
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation