

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 28, 2017

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Perdue and Secretary Zinke:

We commend you for your leadership at your Departments to restore trust in land management agencies with the American people, strengthen cooperation with local communities, and help federal land management work more efficiently for the people we serve and the natural resources we are all called to steward. In your review of your Departments, we urge you to prioritize two important projects to Montana, the Montanore and Rock Creek projects that demand close attention by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). We also urge you to quickly resolve any staffing challenges, which may also be causing delays.

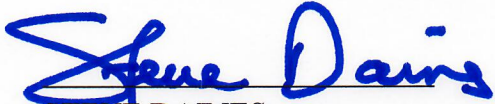
The Montanore and Rock Creek projects located in Lincoln and Sanders Counties will produce two of only four world-class silver and copper deposits in the U.S. Both projects require additional analysis and coordination now between the USFS and USFWS, and we understand your Departments have many competing priorities. Given the length of time these projects have been under review or in litigation and the benefits they will each bring to the community, we believe they require the highest prioritization within your Departments.

These projects have been thoroughly vetted, researched and reviewed, beginning as early as the 1990s for Rock Creek project and 2001 for the Montanore project. The economic benefits of these projects will be welcomed by the local communities, who struggle with some of the highest unemployment rates in Montana and the U.S. According to the USFS the first phase at Rock Creek could employ a total of 131 direct and indirect workers with an annual payroll of nearly \$10 million. Should these projects then move to full development, the Montanore project alone could employ over 400 full time workers with an annual payroll over \$30 million. The Rock Creek project would have a similar significant economic impact on the region. The evaluation phase at Montanore will utilize only existing land disturbance and the Rock Creek project would impact only about 10 acres.

Due to a recent federal court ruling, a new Biological Opinion is required for the Montanore project. The Rock Creek project also requires an updated Biological Opinion and completion of the objections period and finalization of the USFS Record of Decision. Many in the local community are concerned this work will once again be needlessly delayed, this time by the level of agency prioritization and staffing issues for work on the Biological Opinions. We urge you to resolve these challenges as expeditiously as possible.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We stand ready to assist the completion of these projects in any way we can, including through legislative vehicles. We look forward to continuing to work with you on this and other important matters to the state of Montana.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES
United States Senator



GREG GIANFORTE
Member of Congress