

Water rights settlement bill includes public land

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U.S. Sen. Jon Tester introduced Bill 3113 to settle water rights claims with the Fort Belknap tribes last December.

Now, after election time, he quietly reintroduces it. This bill gives the tribes 58,553 acres of our public land that Tester said he would protect. This is the Grinnell Notch land that the tribes have been paid twice before and compensated with greater acres off the reservation.

No public meetings or recent articles in the paper to explain why. A secret deal?

There's nothing in the bill to address all the private property within the Grinnell Notch that will be devalued due to being surrounded by reservation land. This involves several land owners and over a thousand acres.

The water rights deal should stand on its own without our public land being given to a sovereign nation. This is mountain land with bighorn sheep, elk and deer and presently, access.

Consider the precedence this sets for all tribes.

This water rights issue is for farmable land on the north end of the reservation along with 200 or 300 million dollars of our tax money. The Grinnell land is on the south end of the reservation and is not farmable land.

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