

Fort Belknap Indian Community

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Fort Belknap Indian Community
(Tribal Govt.)
Fort Belknap Indian Community
(Elected to administer the affairs of the community and
to represent the Assiniboine and the Gros Ventre
Tribes of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation)

March 2, 2005

Rep. Rosalie Buzzas, Chair
Rep. Carol C. Juneau, Vice Chair
Rep. John Witt, Vice Chair
Appropriations Committee Members

Dear Committee Members:

The Fort Belknap Indian Community Council would like to thank you for taking the time to consider an issue of profound importance to the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Tribes of Montana – the reclamation of the Zortman and Landusky Gold mines.

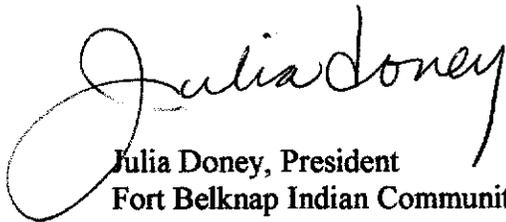
For the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Tribes of Fort Belknap, implementing the most thorough reclamation plan as soon as possible in order to protect tribal health and resources is our most fundamental concern. It is for this reason that we testify here today. Both the U.S. Bureau Land Management and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality agree that money is needed for immediate investment in order to ensure the perpetual operation of water treatment plants at the Zortman and Landusky mine sites. This money must be obtained to protect the surface and ground waters of Phillips and Blaine Counties from acid mine drainage. BLM and DEQ engineers have stated that water treatment will need to go on forever. Without this money, the water treatment plants will cease functioning by 2028, if not sooner, at which time surface and ground waters will become contaminated by acid mine drainage.

The Fort Belknap Tribes has opposed these mines since they were first proposed in 1977. Despite our strong objection, the State of Montana permitted the mines to be developed. Between 1979 and 1990, the DEQ issued a total of 21 amendments to the original operating permits, increasing the total size of the mines from 529 acres to 1,215 acres. We have lost much because of the mines: our cultural use of the mountains will never be the same; we will never again be sure that our water is safe; the mountains cannot, with current technologies, be fully restored.

The Fort Belknap Indian Community Council is aware that the state is facing a severe financial crisis and that legislature must make difficult decisions this session. Clean water is a basic need. We need it for our drinking water, for irrigation and for our

livestock. The Fort Belknap Tribal Government is available to sit down with any appropriation committee member after the hearing and make more specific plans about how we can work together to ensure our water is safe. Once again, thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julia Doney". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Julia Doney, President
Fort Belknap Indian Community Council