

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 29, 2023

M. Camille Calimlim Touton
Commissioner
Bureau of Reclamation
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Commissioner Touton,

We write to you today to request your assistance addressing the drop in water levels on Flathead Lake. The extremely warm, and often rainy, month of May has greatly depleted the snowpack in the northern reaches of the Flathead basin.

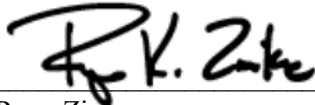
The snowpack that would normally support continued high flows through the month of June and into early July was all but gone at the end of May. The current June streamflow volume forecast is at 40% of average and July is at 36% of average. The SKQ Dam project decreased the lake outflow to minimum streamflows for the lower Flathead River at the beginning of June. However, due to the low inflow into Flathead Lake, the elevation is beginning to drop and is expected to continue to drop until approximately mid-July. Without substantial precipitation or an increase in streamflows, the lowest level is anticipated to be near 18 inches or 1.5 feet below full pool.

This 18-inch drop will have extremely adverse environmental, economic and safety ramifications for the entire greater Flathead Lake community. The lower water level will result in decreased tourism and risk to docks and infrastructure surrounding flathead lake as well as increased safety hazards from previously submerged rocks and obstacles for boaters.

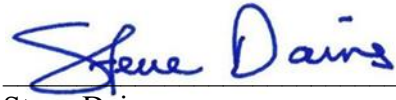
We are requesting that Reclamation increase flow to mitigate rapidly dropping Flathead Lake levels. A similar situation was encountered in 2001 when Reclamation released water designated for salmon flows on the Columbia River system, thus partially mitigating the drop in Flathead Lake water levels.

We are requesting your attention to this issue and would appreciate the ability to communicate any further concerns to you.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Ryan Zinke in black ink.

Ryan Zinke
Member of Congress

Handwritten signature of Steve Daines in blue ink.

Steve Daines
United States Senator

RZ/xx