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WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Crow Tribe Apsáalooke Nation, the United States of America and the State of Montana executed the Crow Tribe-Montana Water Rights Compact in an historic signing ceremony today at the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, Crow Chairman Cedric Black Eagle and Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer signed the compact—marking a major milestone in implementing the Crow Tribal Water Rights Settlement Act of 2010.

Today's event signifies the resolution of more than three decades of litigation and negotiations, clearing the way to address pressing needs on the Crow Reservation for safe drinking water and the rehabilitation of the dilapidated Crow Irrigation Project.

"The Obama Administration is proud to be a party to the Crow-Montana Compact. Signing the Compact today demonstrates the Administration's continued commitment to resolving Indian water rights and providing settlements that truly benefit Indian tribes," Secretary Salazar said. "The Compact not only ensures delivery of a much-needed safe supply of water for the Crow community, but will also bolster their economic security."

With signing of the Compact today, the Settlement Act authorizes $460 million, calling for the Bureau of Reclamation to plan, design and construct a Municipal, Rural and Industrial (MR&I) water system for the tribe and to rehabilitate and improve the Crow Irrigation Project.

"Today is a significant day for the Crow people," said Chairman Black Eagle. "We began negotiating the Crow-Montana Compact over a decade ago and with continued commitment by all of the parties, including the State and the United States, we were able to come together today and sign the Compact," said Chairman Black Eagle. "Water is life. This Compact ensures that Crow people will have water and the necessary infrastructure for generations to come. Now the hard work continues to implement the Compact and Settlement legislation to ensure that Crow people realize these benefits from the settlement."

"Today is an important day in Montana history," Governor Schweitzer said. "The signing of the Crow-Montana Compact evidences the State's dedication to successfully resolving both Indian and federal reserved water rights claims through settlement negotiations."

The signatories also thanked both U.S. Senators from Montana—Sen. Max Baucus and Senator Jon Tester—for their leadership. As Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Sen. Baucus worked diligently to build a bipartisan compromise around the Crow-Montana Water Rights Compact to help successfully pass the legislation in 2010. Sen. Tester has been a strong supporter of the Crow Water Settlement both during his time as a Montana State Senator and as a U.S. Senator.

The signing ceremony with tribal, state and federal representatives was livestreamed to the public, including participants at the reservation in Montana. A recording of the ceremony is available at

www.livestream.com/interior.

BACKGROUND

On December 8, 2010, President Obama signed Public Law 111-291, the Claims Resolution Act of 2010. Title IV of the Act, the Crow Tribe Water Rights Settlement, authorizes and directs the Secretary of the Interior to execute the Compact.

Together, the Settlement Act and the Compact quantify the Tribe's water rights and authorize funding of $131.8 million for the rehabilitation and improvement of the Crow Irrigation Project and $246.4 million for the design and construction of the MR&I water system to serve numerous reservation communities, as well as funding totaling more than $81 million for tribal water administration and for a portion of costs for the irrigation and municipal water systems. The Settlement also provides funding to boost energy development projects such as hydropower generation at Yellowtail Afterbay Dam, clean coal conversion, and other renewable energy projects.

The existing drinking water system on the reservation has significant deficiencies in terms of both capacity and water quality, and many tribal members at times must haul water. The Crow Irrigation Project is in a state of significant disrepair and currently cannot support the Reservation's mainstay of farming and ranching.

Litigation concerning the Tribe's water rights has been ongoing since 1975. Negotiations with the State of Montana and the Crow Tribe on the Compact began nearly thirty years ago in the mid-1980's. In June 1999, after reaching agreement with the Tribe, the State legislature ratified the Compact.

In March 2011, the members of the Tribe voted to ratify the Compact and Settlement Act. On July 15, 2011, Secretary Salazar and Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Mike Connor visited the Crow Indian Reservation to participate with Chairman Black Eagle and a crowd of 200 celebrating the Crow Tribe Water Rights Settlement.

The Crow Reservation is the largest reservation in Montana, encompassing about 2.3 million acres, and is home to approximately 8,000 of the 11,900 enrolled Crow tribal members.