



# United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Washington, D.C. 20240



In Response Reply to:  
FWS/ANRS/064865

JAN 18 2017

The Honorable Jon Tester  
United States Senate  
311 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-2604

Dear Senator Tester:

Thank you for your letter of January 5, 2017, requesting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) thoughts on the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) legislative proposal that would return management authority of the National Bison Range to the CSKT.

As you know, President Theodore Roosevelt established the National Bison Range in 1908 within the boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation, home of the CSKT, with the purpose of conserving bison during a time when they were on the verge of extinction. In the late 1800s, the population of bison had plummeted from 30 to 60 million to a low of 100 in the wild. From an initial herd of 40, today, 350-500 bison call the National Bison Range home.

The Service, along with other Federal, State, and Tribal partners, has made significant strides in conserving bison and re-establishing herds throughout their historic range. Our collective success in the management of bison in the West has led the Service to support a transfer of the lands comprising the National Bison Range from the National Wildlife Refuge System to be held in trust for the CSKT to manage for the purpose of conserving bison, wildlife, and other natural resources. By transferring these lands, bison, and other natural resources into a trust for the benefit of the CSKT, the Service can focus our limited resources on more pressing landscape-scale conservation priorities while ensuring that the successful conservation of bison in the West continues.

The Service supports provisions that ensure that lands comprising the National Bison Range will continue to be managed in accordance with their original conservation purpose and allow for continued public access. Both of these provisions were included in the CSKT's revised draft legislative proposal.

This potential transfer of these lands into trust is unique because the National Bison Range was established wholly within a Reservation boundary for a narrowly defined purpose: the conservation of bison. The Service considers the CSKT to be experienced land and resource managers that have a long history of successful wildlife conservation and we expect the bison conservation success story will continue if the CSKT's legislative proposal is adopted.

We have confidence the CSKT will maintain the high conservation standards that have been established at the National Bison Range, preserving its conservation legacy and therefore support their legislative proposal.

Sincerely,

Director