



Conversation Contents

Discussion with the CSKT about the National Bison Range

Noreen Walsh <noreen_walsh@fws.gov>

From: Noreen Walsh <noreen_walsh@fws.gov>
Sent: Fri Feb 05 2016 16:12:44 GMT-0700 (MST)
To: FW6 All Employees <fw6_all_employees@fws.gov>
Subject: Discussion with the CSKT about the National Bison Range

Dear Mountain-Prairie Region,

I want to inform you of a discussion the Service started today with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) regarding the National Bison Range. Many of you know that we have been working with the CSKT for about 20 years on the idea of a partnership at the National Bison Range that would be outlined in an Annual Funding Agreement which would allow them to manage and implement some of the activities on the refuge. This process has required much time and effort on the part of many, and despite valiant efforts all around, the parties have been unable to come to terms on a mutually-acceptable agreement.

In an effort to achieve the best, long-term solution for our many conservation priorities, the specific conservation goals of the National Bison Range, and to support the principles of Indian self-determination there was a discussion today with the CSKT about the potential for the Service to support legislation that would transfer the lands comprising the National Bison Range to be held in trust by the United States for the CSKT.

I wanted you all to know why we entered into these discussions. The National Bison Range was established in 1908 within the boundaries of the Flathead Reservation, home of the CSKT, for the express purpose of conserving the American bison during a time when the species was on the verge of extinction. Since then, the Service as well as our federal, state, and tribal partners have made great strides in conserving bison and re-establishing herds throughout their historic range. Also, while we have desired a meaningful partnership with CSKT at the National Bison Range, a mutually-acceptable agreement has been elusive. Given that we are today in a much better place regarding the future of bison, that we have much work to do on landscape-scale conservation efforts, and that we want to strengthen our partnership with the CSKT, we believe that now is the right time to investigate the possibility of transferring the refuge, which was

long ago carved out of tribal lands, into trust for the benefit of the CSKT.

Such a proposal would require Congressional approval and therefore, at this point, we don't know if or when such a transfer would occur. Today was our first discussion with the CSKT about the idea. As we go forward, my pledge is to ensure that wherever the discussion leads us, the talented and committed staff of the National Bison Range are taken care of. To this end, Will Meeks, Mike Blenden, and I spent the afternoon at the Refuge where we talked about the ideas under discussion. In our conversations, I emphasized that they will all remain valued employees of the Service, regardless of the outcome of these discussions.

I know that many of you will have thoughts and questions about this idea. This was not an easy decision to come by, nor one that was taken lightly, but in the end, I believe that this is a good path for the Service, the CSKT, and for the conservation of our fish and wildlife resources.

As always, I value your feedback and questions.

Noreen

Noreen Walsh
Regional Director
Mountain-Prairie Region
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Serena Baker <serena_baker@fws.gov>

From: Serena Baker <serena_baker@fws.gov>
Sent: Fri Feb 05 2016 16:20:49 GMT-0700 (MST)
To: Noreen Walsh <noreen_walsh@fws.gov>, Will Meeks <will_meeks@fws.gov>, Mike Blenden <mike_blenden@fws.gov>
Subject: FW: Discussion with the CSKT about the National Bison Range

Hello Noreen, Will, and Mike,

I can't even imagine the tough spot you all were in today, while fielding some difficult questions for

which we may not yet have answers, and that can stir emotions even higher. What I do know about each of you, is that you will do what you absolutely believe is the right thing for everyone involved, and that the Refuge, employees, and resources involved are in the very best of hands.

Hang in there! We're behind you 100%!

Serena Baker

From: Noreen Walsh [mailto:noreen_walsh@fws.gov]
Sent: Friday, February 05, 2016 4:13 PM
To: FW6 All Employees
Subject: Discussion with the CSKT about the National Bison Range

Dear Mountain-Prairie Region,

I want to inform you of a discussion the Service started today with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) regarding the National Bison Range. Many of you know that we have been working with the CSKT for about 20 years on the idea of a partnership at the National Bison Range that would be outlined in an Annual Funding Agreement which would allow them to manage and implement some of the activities on the refuge. This process has required much time and effort on the part of many, and despite valiant efforts all around, the parties have been unable to come to terms on a mutually-acceptable agreement.

In an effort to achieve the best, long-term solution for our many conservation priorities, the specific conservation goals of the National Bison Range, and to support the principles of Indian self-determination there was a discussion today with the CSKT about the potential for the Service to support legislation that would transfer the lands comprising the National Bison Range to be held in trust by the United States for the CSKT.

I wanted you all to know why we entered into these discussions. The National Bison Range was established in 1908 within the boundaries of the Flathead Reservation, home of the CSKT, for the express purpose of conserving the American bison during a time when the species was on the verge of extinction. Since then, the Service as well as our federal, state, and tribal partners have made great strides in conserving bison and re-establishing herds throughout their historic range. Also, while we have desired a meaningful partnership with CSKT at the National Bison Range, a mutually-acceptable agreement has been elusive. Given that we are today in a much better place regarding the future of bison, that we have much work to do on landscape-scale conservation efforts, and that we want to strengthen our partnership with the CSKT, we believe that

now is the right time to investigate the possibility of transferring the refuge, which was long ago carved out of tribal lands, into trust for the benefit of the CSKT.

Such a proposal would require Congressional approval and therefore, at this point, we don't know if or when such a transfer would occur. Today was our first discussion with the CSKT about the idea. As we go forward, my pledge is to ensure that wherever the discussion leads us, the talented and committed staff of the National Bison Range are taken care of. To this end, Will Meeks, Mike Blenden, and I spent the afternoon at the Refuge where we talked about the ideas under discussion. In our conversations, I emphasized that they will all remain valued employees of the Service, regardless of the outcome of these discussions.

I know that many of you will have thoughts and questions about this idea. This was not an easy decision to come by, nor one that was taken lightly, but in the end, I believe that this is a good path for the Service, the CSKT, and for the conservation of our fish and wildlife resources.

As always, I value your feedback and questions.

Noreen

Noreen Walsh

Regional Director

Mountain-Prairie Region

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Mike Blenden <mike_blenden@fws.gov>

From: Mike Blenden <mike_blenden@fws.gov>
Sent: Fri Feb 05 2016 17:34:49 GMT-0700 (MST)
To: Serena Baker <serena_baker@fws.gov>
Subject: Re: Discussion with the CSKT about the National Bison Range

Thank you Serena! Very kind and thoughtful. Will and Noreen made me proud. The staff

took it well and as expected but it was a hard day.

Sent from my iPhone

On Feb 5, 2016, at 4:20 PM, Serena Baker <serena_baker@fws.gov> wrote:

Hello Noreen, Will, and Mike,

I can't even imagine the tough spot you all were in today, while fielding some difficult questions for which we may not yet have answers, and that can stir emotions even higher. What I do know about each of you, is that you will do what you absolutely believe is the right thing for everyone involved, and that the Refuge, employees, and resources involved are in the very best of hands.

Hang in there! We're behind you 100%!

Serena Baker

From: Noreen Walsh [mailto:noreen_walsh@fws.gov]
Sent: Friday, February 05, 2016 4:13 PM
To: FW6 All Employees
Subject: Discussion with the CSKT about the National Bison Range

Dear Mountain-Prairie Region,

I want to inform you of a discussion the Service started today with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) regarding the National Bison Range. Many of you know that we have been working with the CSKT for about 20 years on the idea of a partnership at the National Bison Range that would be outlined in an Annual Funding Agreement which would allow them to manage and implement some of the activities on the refuge. This process has required much time and effort on the part of many, and despite valiant efforts all around, the parties have been unable to come to terms on a mutually-acceptable agreement.

In an effort to achieve the best, long-term solution for our many conservation priorities, the specific conservation goals of the National Bison Range, and to support the principles of Indian self-determination there was a discussion today with the CSKT about the potential for the Service to support legislation that would transfer the lands comprising the National Bison Range to be held

in trust by the United States for the CSKT.

I wanted you all to know why we entered into these discussions. The National Bison Range was established in 1908 within the boundaries of the Flathead Reservation, home of the CSKT, for the express purpose of conserving the American bison during a time when the species was on the verge of extinction. Since then, the Service as well as our federal, state, and tribal partners have made great strides in conserving bison and re-establishing herds throughout their historic range. Also, while we have desired a meaningful partnership with CSKT at the National Bison Range, a mutually-acceptable agreement has been elusive. Given that we are today in a much better place regarding the future of bison, that we have much work to do on landscape-scale conservation efforts, and that we want to strengthen our partnership with the CSKT, we believe that now is the right time to investigate the possibility of transferring the refuge, which was long ago carved out of tribal lands, into trust for the benefit of the CSKT.

Such a proposal would require Congressional approval and therefore, at this point, we don't know if or when such a transfer would occur. Today was our first discussion with the CSKT about the idea. As we go forward, my pledge is to ensure that wherever the discussion leads us, the talented and committed staff of the National Bison Range are taken care of. To this end, Will Meeks, Mike Blenden, and I spent the afternoon at the Refuge where we talked about the ideas under discussion. In our conversations, I emphasized that they will all remain valued employees of the Service, regardless of the outcome of these discussions.

I know that many of you will have thoughts and questions about this idea. This was not an easy decision to come by, nor one that was taken lightly, but in the end, I believe that this is a good path for the Service, the CSKT, and for the conservation of our fish and wildlife resources.

As always, I value your feedback and questions.

Noreen

Noreen Walsh

Regional Director