



June 21, 2019

Ron Trahan
Tribal Chairman
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
42487 Complex Blvd.
Pablo, MT 59855

Dear Chairman Trahan,

Montana Wilderness Association (MWA) is a non-profit conservation organization working with communities to protect Montana's wilderness heritage, quiet beauty, and outdoor traditions, now and for future generations. I write today to express our support for the National Bison Range Restoration Act under which the lands of the National Bison Range would be restored to federal trust ownership for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes for "continued bison and wildlife conservation, for continued public access, and for other purposes."

Given the historical circumstances surrounding these lands, we believe this restoration is just. As described in the bill, the lands that currently compose the National Bison Range were taken from the Tribes without consent. Additionally, the text of the bill is explicit in requiring continued conservation of the land and wildlife. It states that the purpose of the Act is to acknowledge the history, culture, and ecological stewardship of the Tribes; to ensure that the land and bison continue to be protected; and to continue to provide for access and education. The Act's requirement for the Tribes to continue public access to the Bison Range is consistent with the public access that the Tribes already provide to most Tribal land on the Flathead Indian Reservation. It further states that the land will continue to be used for "bison conservation" as well as wildlife management and non-conflicting tribal uses and that "the Tribes shall provide public access and educational opportunities." Ongoing wildlife conservation and public access on these lands align with the interest of our organization and our members. Moreover, the Tribes have consistently demonstrated their commitment to conservation: they established the nation's first Tribal Wilderness in the Mission Mountains and have restored threatened and endangered species to their lands.

We recognize that this bill is in response to a very unique set of historical circumstances, specifically that reservation lands were taken without consent from the Tribes in 1908 and in violation of the 1855 Treaty of Hell Gate. And we agree with the language in the bill that states, "[t]he provisions of this Act are uniquely suited to address the distinct circumstances, facts, history, and relationships involved with the subject bison, land, and Tribes. These



provisions are not intended, and shall not be interpreted, as a precedent for any other situation regarding Federal land, property or facility.”

For these reasons, Montana Wilderness Association fully supports the National Bison Range Restoration Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ben Gabriel', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ben Gabriel
Executive Director
Montana Wilderness Association