



September 16, 2016

Vernon Finley, Chairman  
Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes  
PO Box 278  
Pablo, MT 59855

RE: Letter in Support of the National Bison Range  
Restoration Act of 2016

Dear Chairman Finley,

On behalf of the Natural Resources Defense Council, I write to express our support of the National Bison Range Restoration Act of 2016. We fully support this bill “to restore the lands of the National Bison Range to federal trust ownership for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Indian Reservation, and for other purposes.”

Given the unique history of these lands, we support their return to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. We acknowledge the clear protection and conservation mandate contained in the bill. Regarding the future of the National Bison Range lands, the draft bill clearly states that the lands restored under this Act shall be “managed by the Tribes, consistent with the purposes of this Act, solely for the care and maintenance of bison, wildlife and other natural resources, including designation or naming of the restored land. As part of its management, the Tribes shall provide public access and education opportunities, and shall at all times have a publicly-available management plan for such land, bison and natural resources . . . .” This protection is consistent with the interest of NRDC and our members.

In regard to the unfortunately hot issue of privatizing public lands or transferring federal public lands to states – both of which NRDC vigorously opposes – the draft bill also makes clear that “[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 precedent for any other situation regarding Federal land, property or facility.”

We have worked with multiple CSKT members on the Yellowstone bison issue, and we have had the honor and privilege of attending bison meetings on the Flathead Indian Reservation. We fully support the National Bison Range Restoration Act of 2016, and we look forward to the CSKT’s excellent management of these lands.

Sincerely,

Matt Skoglund

**NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL**