



April 28, 2017

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

Dear Chairman Finley,

The Wilderness Society (TWS) is committed to working with diverse communities across America to preserve our nation's rich natural legacy for future generations. On behalf of our 700,000 members and supporters, I am writing to express our support for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe's (CSKT) goal of restoring the lands of the National Bison Range (NBR) to federal trust ownership for the Tribes of the Flathead Indian Reservation.

We welcome the opportunity to work with the CSKT and others to ensure that the NBR remains 1) accessible to the public; and, 2) is managed solely to maintain bison, wildlife and other natural resources. Our support for the return of the NBR into Federal Trust ownership on behalf of the CSKT is contingent upon safeguarding these two values. Given the NBR's unique history, location and mission, the restoration of management to CSKT will in no way establish a precedent regarding the disposition of other federal lands.

Currently a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System, the NBR is located entirely within the borders of the CSKT Reservation and had been reserved by the CSKT in the 1855 Treaty of Hellgate. The wanton slaughter of the bison by market hunters, the United States government and its agents over a hundred years ago, decimated the bison, with devastating consequences for the Native American people that depended upon them. In recognition of the imminent extinction of the bison and to save the species, Congress and President Theodore Roosevelt established the NBR in 1908. But without CSKT tribal members who originally helped to preserve the last of the wild bison through establishment of a herd on the Flathead Indian Reservation in the late 1800's, there would have been no bison to place in the newly created refuge.

Today, the NBR is home to hundreds of bison and other native species. It is a popular destination for travelers to Montana from all over the world who come to learn about

**James C. Williams, President**

the natural, cultural and spiritual significance of the bison to American Indians and to our country.

TWS supports restoration of the NBR to federal trust ownership for the Tribes of the Flathead Indian Reservation because it is good national policy that supports tribal sovereignty and wildlife. In addition, the proposal does not constitute a transfer of public lands out of the public estate which TWS would not support. The proposal would return ancestral lands to the CSKT while maintaining the trust responsibilities of the Federal Government without setting any precedent regarding the disposition of public lands or a reduction in access to the public

Now is the time for Americans to come together to ensure that our public lands reflect the cultures and perspectives of people and communities across our nation, and inspire people to care about the outdoors. TWS believes that the NBR is a good example of such an effort that will support and honor the land and the people for generations to come.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jamie White". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.