



National Wildlife Federation

Northern Rockies, Prairies, and Pacific Regional Center
240 North Higgins, Suite 2 • Missoula, Montana 59802 • 406-541-6731
100 W Harrison, South Tower, Suite 410 • Seattle, Washington 98119 • 206-285-8707
6641 SE Lake Road • Milwaukie, OR 97222 • 503-616-3613

June 24, 2020

Senator John Hoeven, Chairman
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Tom Udall, Vice Chairman
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Hoeven and Vice Chairman Udall:

On behalf of the National Wildlife Federation, we write in support of S. 3019, the Montana Water Rights Protection Act, jointly introduced by Montana Senators Steve Daines and Jon Tester. This legislation will provide Congressional approval for the water compact negotiated between the State of Montana and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) and transfer the National Bison Range from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to CSKT. The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) strongly endorses both of these objectives.

The water compact is the result of years of negotiations between the State of Montana, the Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Department of the Interior, and it was ratified by the Montana Legislature in 2015. In agreeing to the compact, the Tribes relinquished considerable legal rights in order to accommodate water uses that have developed subsequent to the Hellgate Treaty of 1855—and to ensure productive, cooperative management of waters throughout western Montana.

The National Wildlife Federation supports the negotiated agreement not only because it reflects a collaborative solution to often contentious water use issues, but also because of its innovative approach to habitat restoration and protection, water conservation, and instream flows that are essential to fish and wildlife populations on and off the Flathead Reservation. The Compact agreement reflects a positive, forward-looking approach to water management, community development, and ecosystem recovery.

The National Wildlife Federation has also long supported efforts by the Salish and Kootenai Tribes to assume greater management responsibility for the National Bison Range. As the bill recognizes, bison have tremendous social and cultural importance that for Salish and Kootenai

and the Tribes played a pivotal role in saving bison from extinction in the late 1800's. Given these facts, it was always wrong to exclude the Tribes from a management role in the National Bison Range, and S. 3019 corrects this by transferring the range to the Tribes for bison conservation purposes.

Having worked closely with the Salish and Kootenai Tribes for many years, the National Wildlife Federation looks forward to their stewardship of the National Bison Range and the important tribal perspectives that they will bring to both management and interpretation for the thousands of people that annually visit the Bison Range.

The National Wildlife Federation works closely with many tribes in both the U.S. and Canada who join together to conserve and restore buffalo on both tribal and non-tribal lands. On behalf of these partners, we would like to draw your attention to the attached 2016 resolution supporting transfer of the National Bison Range to the CSKT.

We appreciate the Committee holding this important hearing, and we ask that this letter and the attached Buffalo Treaty Tribes Resolution be entered into the hearing record for S. 3019.

Sincerely,



Tom France
Regional Executive Director
National Wildlife Federation



Garrit Voggeser
Director, Tribal Partnerships Program
National Wildlife Federation