



June 23, 2020

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Support for S. 2165 and S. 3019

Dear Chairman Hoeven and Ranking Member Udall:

On behalf of The Wilderness Society and our more than one million members and supporters, we write to offer our views on S. 2165, the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony Act, and S. 3019, the Montana Water Rights Protection Act, and S. 2192, the Blackwater Trading Post Land Transfer Act.

S. 2165 - Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony Act - SUPPORT

TWS supports S. 2165, the Safeguard Tribal Object of Patrimony Act, by Senators Heinrich and Murkowski. This important, bipartisan legislation will prevent the illegal export of sacred Native American items and increase penalties for stealing and illegally trafficking cultural patrimony.

The legislation is necessary to help safeguard Native American heritage, including the art, cultural patrimony, and other objects that are sacred to Native people. For too long, looting and theft have destroyed sacred Native American art and culture. The legislation will help prevent the continued theft and desecration of Native American culture, while empowering the United States to ensure that foreign governments honor Native American cultural heritage. For these reasons, we support S. 2165, and urge the committee to advance this important legislation.

S. 3019 - Montana Water Rights Protection Act - SUPPORT

TWS supports S. 3019, the Montana Water Rights Protection Act, by Senators Daines and Tester. This legislation is necessary to fulfill the United States' treaty and trust obligations to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. The legislation will end the decades of uncertainty over water use in northwest Montana, settle damages to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, prevent costly litigation, and facilitate tribal economic development.

Importantly, the legislation will take into trust the 18,500-acre National Bison Range for the benefit of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. This land is in the center of the treaty-

reserved Flathead Indian Reservation, and was illegally taken by the United States. Restoring the land to trust status for the benefit of the tribes rights a historical wrong while supporting tribal sovereignty. The proposal does not transfer public lands out of the public estate. Instead, it returns ancestral lands to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes while maintaining the United States' trust responsibilities as well as public access. Based on the unique circumstances of the establishment of the National Bison Range, the transfer into trust will not set precedent for other public lands.

For these reasons, we support S. 3019 and urge the committee to advance it.

S. 2012 - Blackwater Trading Post Land Transfer Act - SUPPORT

TWS supports S. 2192, the Blackwater Trading Post Land Transfer Act, by Senators McSally and Sinema. This bill would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to place approximately 55.3 acres of land in Pinal County, Arizona into trust status for the Gila River Indian Community. Due to the Arizona Water Settlements Act, taking any lands outside the existing reservation boundaries into trust status requires Congressional action. The Blackwater Trading Post has long been a community center for the Gila River Indian Community and the Community purchased this land in 2010, recognizing the cultural and historical significance of the Trading Post and the land it sits on. Since 2012, the Community has been trying to have this land taken into trust status so that it will effectively be part of the reservation and preserved as a place of cultural significance. For these reasons, we support S. 2192 and urge the committee to advance it.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,



Paul Spitler
Director of Wilderness Policy