



June 30, 2020

The Honorable Chairman John Hoeven
U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
383 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Vice Chairman Tom Udall
U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
383 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Steve Daines
United State Senate
320 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester
United States Senate
311 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: WCS Support for S. 3019 and the Restoration of the National Bison Range

To Whom it May Concern,

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) is writing to offer this letter for the hearing record in support of S. 3019, *The Montana Water Rights Protection Act*, which was heard by the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on June 24th, 2020. WCS stands in strong support of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) and their efforts to bring closure to and resolve long-standing resource issues addressed in S. 3019, and particularly Section 13 of the bill which addresses restoration of the National Bison Range.

WCS was founded as a science-based conservation organization in 1895 in large part to help support the conservation of species like the American Bison. Today WCS works in over 60 countries to help conserve wildlife and wild places through science, conservation action, education, and inspiring people to value nature. WCS's own organizational history is deeply intertwined with efforts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to help prevent American Bison from becoming extinct. WCS helped to found the American Bison Society in 1905 and was intimately involved in the establishment of the National Bison Range in 1908, including providing animals from WCS's Bronx Zoo for reintroduction.

Today, 112 years later, WCS recognizes the sovereign rights of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and stands in solidarity with CSKT and the provisions of this bill in: (1) acknowledging the history, culture, and ecological stewardship of the Tribes of these lands, natural resources, and bison; (2) ensuring the protection and enhancement of these lands, resources, and bison; (3) continuing access and educational opportunities; and (4) a smooth transition and restoration of the stewardship of these lands, resources, and bison to CSKT, which is recognized as an international leader in wildlife conservation.

Part and parcel of this restoration is a reconciliation with the past and the wrongful taking of the Tribes' lands, a recognition of the Tribes' use of these lands and resources since time immemorial, the Tribes' reservation of these lands through the Treaty of Hell Gate on July 16, 1855 (12 Stat. 975), and their protection under Federal law.

WCS is proud to support this bill and its efforts to restore the National Bison Range, bison herds, and property and resources associated with these lands to the rightful stewardship of CSKT. It is long overdue.

We wish to thank Chairman Hoeven and Vice-chairman Udall and Members of the Committee for hearing this bill, and sponsors Senator Daines and Senator Tester for their leadership in carrying this critical piece of legislation. There is a no more timely moment than the present to advance this piece of legislation and WCS looks forward to its hopeful adoption this year. Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Should you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to be in contact.

Our sincerest thanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cristina Mormorunni', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Cristina Mormorunni
Director
U.S. Field Conservation
Wildlife Conservation Society

cc:
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
U.S. Department of the Interior
The Honorable Governor Steve Bullock