

From: National Wildlife Refuge System, Chief <chief_national_wildlife_refuge_system@fws.gov>
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Subject: National Bison Range

Today the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began discussions with Indian Affairs and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) about the potential for the Service to support legislation that would transfer the lands comprising the National Bison Range in Montana to be held in trust by the United States for the benefit of the CSKT. While the transfer will require Congressional approval, the decision to move forward was not made lightly.

The National Bison Range was established by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908 within the boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation, home of the CSKT. It was established for a defined purpose: to prevent the extinction of bison. We have been hugely successful in meeting that mission. The Bison Range's conservation legacy will live on and we have confidence that the CSKT will maintain the high conservation standards that we established at the Bison Range. It is time for the Service to focus our efforts on landscape-scale conservation.

I want you to know that every employee at the Bison Range will be taken care of. Employment options and opportunities are being discussed. Anyone who knows the history of the Bison Range knows that our employees have worked and lived with uncertainty regarding the Bison Range for many years now.

I know that many of you will have varying thoughts, opinions and questions. This decision was not made lightly and does not represent a new direction for the Refuge System. Rather, it is a response to a specific set of circumstances in a specific location at a specific point in time.

Since 1999, the Service has established more than 40 new national wildlife refuges and national conservation areas. Service employees are justifiably proud of hitting new conservation milestones year after year. And we will continue to do so. We have a vibrant and strong National Wildlife Refuge System and we will continue to conserve and manage these wild lands and wild places for wildlife and future generations.

The expertise, creativity and dedication of Service employees are limitless. I thank you for all you do on behalf of wildlife conservation and the American people.

Cynthia Martinez

Chief
National Wildlife Refuge System