

## **CSKT Statement**

**April 13, 2017**

*Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke recently contacted Vernon Finley, the Chairman of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, to advise that the Interior Department, through the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, is shifting its focus to exploring Tribal management of the National Bison Range. Certainly, the Tribes recognize the difficult balancing act facing Secretary Zinke in managing vast resources with limited budgets.*

*The Tribes have worked hard for decades to participate in management at the Bison Range and are excited to work with the Secretary and fellow Montanan, Ryan Zinke to make our shared management goals a reality. Restoration of the National Bison Range to federal trust ownership for the Tribes will always be a logical solution to future management. In fact, we continue to receive unprecedented support for the draft National Bison Range Restoration Act legislation, which the Tribes drafted and revised in 2016. In 2016 the Tribes also conducted extensive public outreach resulting in widespread support throughout the robust comment process. The National Bison Range will benefit from Tribal participation in any form. For this reason, the Tribal Council is committed to the hard work and transparency it has exhibited for more than two decades in working to enhance the Bison Range, which holds unique cultural significance to Tribal membership, whether it's through restoration legislation or a management agreement.*

*Chairman Finley expressed appreciation for the personal call from Secretary Zinke in light of the Department's altered approach towards Bison Range restoration legislation. Chairman Finley further appreciates the Secretary's recognition of the Tribes' interests and capabilities with respect to the Bison Range.*

*"The National Bison Range is located in the heart of the Flathead Indian Reservation and will always be a central part of the conservation areas managed by the Tribes' nationally-recognized Natural Resources Department," said Chairman Finley. "Our stewardship interests there remain, and I look forward to continued discussions with Secretary Zinke and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service regarding Tribal management."*