

To: Steven A Williams

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Subject: National Bison Range - Annual Funding Agreement PM

I know that a number of you have been following the negotiations of the Annual Funding Agreement (AFA) for the Bison Range very closely and I appreciate the comments and concerns that some of you expressed to me over the last few months. The Service and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) have reached a final agreement that will be signed by both parties on Wednesday, December 15th.

The comments provided by those in the refuge system as well as our partners have helped us produce a better AFA. And while I expect some will not be happy with this final agreement, I am confident that we can make this AFA a success.

Additional information on the details of the AFA will be available soon. However, I want to ensure you that final decision making authority on every aspect of the management of the Bison Range has been retained with the refuge manager. In addition, all employees currently working at the Bison Range that will be affected by the AFA will not lose their jobs. They will have the option of remaining as a Service employee but working for the tribe under an IPA, going to work directly for the tribe or asking to be relocated to another refuge in the system.

I believe, as do many of you, that we can accomplish more for the resource by working with tribal governments where our interests are congruent. I am aware that we have done so informally for many years. I am also aware that the AFA process is new to us and we are working through how to follow the process for tribal AFA's required by law. However, I believe that we have learned from this AFA as well as the AFA that was recently signed with the Athabascans in Alaska. Accordingly, I have asked Assistant Director for Refuges Bill Hartwig to begin the process of creating policy for the National Wildlife Refuge System to follow in all future AFA proposals. I understand the significance of such a policy for the Refuge System, tribal governments, and our traditional support groups. Your input as well as that of all of our partners will be crucial to developing a good policy.

Thank you for taking the time to voice your concerns and suggestions for improving the AFA process.