

Draft Environmental Assessment for a Draft Annual Funding Agreement

*National Bison Range Complex
Montana*

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Summary

We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, want to continue forging long-term partnerships with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes at the National Bison Range Complex in Montana. We have conducted this environmental analysis to evaluate options for entering into an annual funding agreement with the Tribes for managing or assisting with the operations of some portions of the National Bison Range Complex.

Located in northwestern Montana, most of the National Bison Range Complex is located within the boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation, a 1.3 million-acre area established in 1855 through the Treaty of Hellgate with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.

Under the authority of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, as amended, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes were one of the first to achieve self-governance. The 1994 amendment to that law, known as the Tribal Self-Governance Act, gave self-governing tribes the opportunity to exercise their inherent self-governing powers through greater control over tribal affairs and enhanced tribal governmental responsibilities. This amendment also allowed tribes to request negotiations for annual funding agreements with Department of the Interior agencies for “other programs, services, functions, and activities, or portions thereof ... which are of special geographic, historical, or cultural significance to the participating Indian tribe requesting a compact.”

On November 10, 2011, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes requested negotiations with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for a 5-year annual funding agreement allowing them to manage programs on the National Bison Range Complex. This annual funding agreement would only cover the activities occurring in the parts of the National Bison Range Complex within the boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation:

- National Bison Range
- Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge
- Pablo National Wildlife Refuge
- Nine waterfowl production areas in the Lake County portion of the Northwest Montana Wetland Management District

The remaining National Bison Range Complex units, including Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge and those portions of the Northwest Montana Wetland Management District outside the Reservation boundary, would not be included in any AFA. In addition, the management and enforcement of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s conservation easement agreements would remain with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The National Bison Range Complex is best known for the bison herd that roams the National Bison Range. More than 205 bird species have been recorded in the area—many nesting on or migrating through the National Bison Range Complex. Its units are generally surrounded by private

land that is mostly used as livestock pasture and for hay or other crop production. These lands also border some State and tribal lands that are managed for conservation purposes.

We prepared this environmental assessment to document our analysis of alternatives for an annual funding agreement with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Implementation of any of the alternatives would involve changes to the staff and administration of the National Bison Range Complex, so we developed a range of alternatives with different levels of program management by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and various staff configurations. In this environmental assessment, we describe in detail the following alternatives and their expected consequences:

- Alternative A—No Action
- Alternative B—Draft Annual Funding Agreement (Proposed Action)
- Alternative C—Annual Funding Agreement for Fire and Visitor Programs
- Alternative D—Annual Funding Agreement Same as Alternative C Plus Addition of More Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Staff in All Programs
- Alternative E—Annual Funding Agreement Same as Alternative D Plus District Programs with Combined U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Staff in All Programs

Abbreviations

Administration Act	National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966
AFA	Annual funding agreement
BIA	Bureau of Indian Affairs
Bison Range	National Bison Range
cfs	Cubic feet per second
CSKT	Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
district	Northwest Wetland Management District
DOI	Department of the Interior
EA	Environmental assessment
°F	degrees Fahrenheit
FWRC	Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes' Division of Fish, Wildlife, Recreation, and Conservation
FWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
GS	General Schedule
IPA	Inter-Governmental Personnel Act of 1970
NBR	National Bison Range
NBRC	National Bison Range Complex
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
Ninepipe Refuge	Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge
Pablo Refuge	Pablo National Wildlife Refuge
range	National Bison Range
refuge complex	National Bison Range Complex
Refuge System	National Wildlife Refuge System
reservation	Flathead Indian Reservation
Self-Determination Act	Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975
Self-Governance Act	Tribal Self-Governance Act of 1994
Service	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Tribes	Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
U.S.	United States
U.S.C.	United States Code
USHR	United States House of Representatives
WG	Wage Grade Schedule

