

January 30, 2017

Dear Representative Zinke:

I would like to tell you how excited I am that a Montanan has been nominated to be the next Secretary of Interior. I am especially pleased because of your strong stand on preserving and protecting public lands from transfer to other entities.

I have written to you prior about my concern about the proposed transfer of the National Bison Range, one of the premier National Wildlife Refuges in the country, out of the Fish and Wildlife Service's management. The Service has protected a very special place and a very special mammal (the bison - our national mammal) for over 100 years and deserves the consideration to allow it to continue its mission of preserving and conserving lands and wildlife for all Americans.

Currently, my biggest concern is the fact that the US Fish and Wildlife Service Mountain/Prairie Region (FWS Region 6) has seriously curtailed/cut staff and funding to the Refuge over the last four years while various efforts have been made to remove management from the FWS. Currently, three supervisory positions have not been filled (lead biologist, 4 years, outdoor recreation planner, over 2 ½ years, deputy project leader over 1 1/2 years) and it has gone almost a year without permanent law enforcement. This is beginning to show some major impact on the Refuge, its resources, public use opportunities, and staff morale.

Regardless of this reduced staffing and funding, the FWS recently published intent to prepare a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the National Bison Range (Federal Register FWS-R6-R-N221): (FXRS12610600000-178-FF06R00000). While it is critical that all refuges conduct and implement CCPs, there are a few major concerns which I have on this process:

1. The Bison Range is long overdue to develop its CCP. In this light, I am all for doing this. Please note, however, that while the Bison Range has been waiting for an Environmental Assessment to be completed (nothing since comments were due in August of 2015) regarding the last Annual Funding Agreement with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) as well as waiting the results regarding the proposed legislative transfer of the Refuge to the CSKT, the Mountain/Prairie Region of the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS, Region 6) has seriously curtailed/cut staffing and funding. This means the Refuge does not have the staff nor the funding in place to conduct a CCP at this time.

2. This CCP (along with an Environmental Impact Statement) has listed two of its three alternatives to transfer lands to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) or to negotiate an AFA with the CSKT. Please realize that a CCP is set up for the US Fish and Wildlife Service to manage a Refuge. It cannot allow transfer of lands to another entity – that is up to Congress. If this is the intent of Congress, then conducting a CCP would be a great waste of tax-payer funds. If, on the other hand, the National Bison Range is to continue as a part of the National Wildlife Refuge System (my preference), then conducting a CCP is a great idea IF the Bison Range is given adequate staff and funding to manage the Refuge and conduct the CCP.

I seriously urge you to contact the directorate of the Mountain/Prairie Region of the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS Region 6, Denver) and direct them to remember their duty to all US citizens and provide adequate staffing/funding for the protection and conservation of the National Bison Range as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Regardless of whether or not the Bison Range changes management hands sometime in the future, it is the duty and obligation of the directorate of FWS Region 6 to take care of it **TODAY**. They have neglected this very special public resource for far too long.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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Letter to Ryan Zinke

1 message

Pat Jamieson <bisonbird@charlo.net>

Mon, Jan 30, 2017 at 1:06 PM

To: w.c.reffalt@comcast.net, risingwolf@gmail.com, lmjones@littleappletech.com, kastree@polson.net, marvplener@yahoo.com, brisleybcc@montanasky.net, robinbown@aol.com, gjestson@gmail.com, laura_king@fws.gov, Jeff_King@fws.gov

Hi - see attached

I needed to push someone to deal with the funding/staffing crisis at the Bison Range NOW - the Refuge can no longer wait until legislation/court cases/etc are done.....

Feel free to pass along as you see fit - we need more folks pushing for this.

Pat Jamieson

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