



National Bison Association

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Department of Interior Bison Management Priorities

Background

Department of Interior lands support 17 bison herds in 12 states, for a total of approximately 10,000 bison over 4.6 million acres of DOI and adjacent lands. The Department's role in bison restoration extends far beyond the herds under its direct stewardship. Native American tribes, private ranchers and other public herd managers interface with the Department of Interior in many ways.

As the National Bison Association and its partners move toward the goal of restoring one million bison to North America, we are intent on strengthening our working relationship with the DOI to optimize our opportunities for restoration, while minimizing potential conflict with neighboring private landowners and other interest.

Here are three priority areas.

DOI Bison Management Plan

The *Looking Forward* report, issued in 2014, identified a master plan for addressing bison management on federal public lands with particular emphasis on:

- Grand Canyon National Park
- Great Sand Dunes National Park; and
- Badlands National Park

All of these goals pose potential conflict with Private landowners, including bison ranchers. The Department acknowledges this risk, per the report, "DOI proposes that innovative collaboration amongst tribes, states, landowners, conservation groups, commercial bison producers, agricultural interests and others interested in bison, will be crucial to build partnerships amidst larger landscapes suitable for ranging bison, while concurrently generating and maintaining sustainable local and regional economies and communities."

We want to work with the Department to establish the collaborative process. Bison reintroduction sometimes leads to conflicts with cattle producers and other private landowners. Nowhere has this been more evident than in areas of eastern Montana, where counties and conservation districts have implemented a series of ordinances aimed at severely limiting bison herds, including those on private lands. Development of formal stakeholder working groups in these areas could be a valuable first step toward addressing these conflicts.

Identification of BLM lands appropriate for bison grazing, and developing policies that allow bison producers to bid for available grazing rights

BLM Lands encompass an ecosystem that evolved under the interaction of bison and other indigenous ruminants. As BLM grazing leases come available, policies that allow bison producers—

private and tribal—to participate will provide an opportunity for increased incomes, agricultural diversification, along with ecosystem management of these public lands.

Coordination between the DOI and USDA on issues related to bison restoration and management

The organizations championing the passage of the National Bison Legacy Act—the National Bison Association, the InterTribal Buffalo Council, and the Wildlife conservation society—proposed in 2015 to expand the Interior Bison Leadership Team and Interior Bison Working Group, both established by Secretarial Order in 2007, to include the U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This proposal takes on new importance as those organizations commit to working with all federal agencies to identify and implement policies that can help bring one million bison back to North America.