

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee—

My name is Annie Glover, and I am here on behalf of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.

The CSKT respectfully opposes HB 318.

Bison are of profound historical and cultural importance to the CSKT, as they are to all Montana tribal nations. Wild bison are an essential part of our heritage and identity as Montanans, and the CSKT is committed to preserving that heritage. The CSKT are committed to restoring wild bison to the natural landscape of Montana and are currently working with the state and federal governments to arrive at a solution that meets the tribes objectives without putting Montana domestic livestock at risk.

The tribes have entered into a government to government working partnership, in good faith, to ensure the success of the Interagency Bison Management Plan. According to the Hellgate Treaty of 1855, CSKT tribal members have treaty rights to hunt and fish on open and unclaimed lands, off the reservation, that make up the Salish and Kootenai aboriginal lands. Courts have upheld this right as being limited to public lands.

Tribal sovereignty is inherent, treaty-based and long recognized and established through the history of federal Indian law in the courts. Federal and state sovereignty are provided for in the U.S. Constitution. The counties have a history of requesting recognition as a government for the purposes of joining the IBMP partnership and have been turned down. The IBMP is currently encouraging the counties to join in a citizens working group forming to allow for more public input to the IBMP partnership, but the Tribes feel the counties interests are more than represented through the state agencies that are already IBMP partners, Fish Wildlife and Parks and Livestock.

This bill would elevate the parochial county interests and constituent servicing to a level equal with the federal, state and tribal interests in the Yellowstone bison. The counties are not land or wildlife managers, hold no treaty rights, and should not hold a form of veto power over the implementation of the IBMP or FWP bison reestablishment goals.

There may be other ways to ensure that county government voices are heard in bison management, but the tribes oppose any effort to provide county governments with the ultimate power and last say on bison management and relocation.