



THE CONFEDERATED SALISH AND KOOTENAI TRIBES  
OF THE FLATHEAD NATION

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A Confederation of the Salish,  
Pend d' Oreilles  
and Kootenai Tribes

Montana State House of Representatives  
House Agriculture Committee  
Hon. Lee Randall, Chairman  
63<sup>rd</sup> Montana State Legislature  
Capital Building  
Helena, Montana

TRIBAL COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Joe Durglo - Chairman  
Carole Lankford - Vice Chair  
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Jim Malatare  
James Bing Matt  
Terry Pitts

February 19, 2013

RE: **House Bill No. 507 "An Act Generally Revising Management of Wild Buffalo and Wild Bison, etc."**

Chairman Randall and Committee Members:

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes ("CSKT" or "Tribes") strongly oppose the passage of HB 507, a bill that would significantly alter the status and management of Yellowstone Bison in Montana. Passage of HB 507 would virtually remove the wild bison from their migratory homelands in Montana and would end a multi-government effort to return wild bison to their rightful place in the Montana ecosystem.

Our interest in this bill stems from the CSKT's unique status. When we signed the Hellgate Treaty in 1855 (12 Stat. 975), the Tribes reserved the right to hunt and fish in usual and accustomed places in our aboriginal territory—a right that includes hunting buffalo in the Greater Yellowstone Area. Our tribal members have a long history of hunting buffalo, and we continue to rely on them to sustain us physically and spiritually. Passage of HB 507 would significantly hinder our ability to keep the buffalo as part of our diet and culture, and it would destroy our hope of seeing the last remaining wild buffalo herd play a role in the lives of CSKT members for generations yet to come.

The CSKT have great concerns regarding the proposed definition of wild bison under HB 507. Other than on lands designated for year-round tolerance that are contiguous to Yellowstone National Park, all bison in Montana would be considered livestock and subject to management by the Department of Livestock. This bill would also eliminate the opportunity for disease-free bison to be restored as wildlife in other parts of Montana, which is something that the Tribes have long supported. It is clear that the intent of this bill is to eliminate wild, free roaming bison from the Montana landscape, thwarting years of intergovernmental work, as well as directly impacting the CSKT treaty reserved bison hunt.

If HB 507 were enacted into law, it would end the intergovernmental partnership that has developed between the Tribes and the State, and it would very likely result in lengthy and expensive litigation over the future of bison in Montana. We value the relationship that has been forged between the treaty-hunt tribes and the State of Montana. Our bison management goals have been based on a mutual commitment to a biologically sustainable hunt and a desire to see bison respected as a valued game species. We participate in yearly tribal-state intergovernmental hunt management meetings focused on coordinating bison harvest, hunter safety, regulatory enforcement, and the long-term viability of the herd.

The CSKT are also a full partner in the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP). Although not without its limitations, the IBMP has been successful in fulfilling its twin goals of increased bison tolerance in Montana and maintenance of the state's brucellosis-free status. Bison management is undoubtedly a complex issue, but it is important to note that there has never been a documented bison-to-cattle transmission of brucellosis while the IBMP has been in place. Moreover, as long as the elk population of the Greater Yellowstone Area carries the disease, brucellosis will remain in that environment. With the recent modifications to federal regulation, the threat of Montana losing its brucellosis-free status has been greatly reduced.

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes are prepared to continue our treaty hunt, as well as our good working relationship with the State of Montana, and hope to continue co-managing this public resource for the good of both tribal and state citizens. The Tribes respectfully urge this committee to vote NO on House Bill No. 507.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Durglo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joe" being the most prominent.

Joe Durglo, Chairman  
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal Council