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TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES

Presented by: Ervin Carlson, President  
Inter Tribal Buffalo Council  
Fiscal Year 2015  
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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

My name is Ervin Carlson and I am a member of the Blackfeet Nation in Montana and the President of the Inter Tribal Buffalo Council (ITBC). Please accept my sincere appreciation for this opportunity to submit written testimony to the honorable members of the House Committee on Appropriations; Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies. ITBC was granted a federal charter in 2009 pursuant to Section 17 of the Indian Reorganization Act and is comprised of fifty-eight (58) federally recognized Indian Tribes in nineteen (19) states with headquarter offices in Rapid City, South Dakota.

American Indians have a long-standing connection with the buffalo. Historically, buffalo provided the Tribes with food, shelter, clothing and essential tools for survival. Indians maintained a strong spiritual and cultural connection with the buffalo that has not diminished with the passage of time. ITBC Member Tribes believed the restoration of buffalo on Tribal lands would create numerous cultural, health and economic opportunities for Tribes

On behalf of the Member Tribes of ITBC I would like to address the following issues:

1. FUNDING REQUEST

The InterTribal Buffalo Council respectfully requests an appropriation for FY 2015 in the amount of \$4,500,000.

2. FUNDING HISTORY

ITBC has been funded through various methods: President's budget, Congressional earmark or administrative action since 1992. ITBC's approximate annual funding is as listed:

FY 1992 - 1993      \$ 400,000.00 Congressional Earmark

FY 1994 - 1999	\$ 650,000.00 President's Budget
FY 2000 - 2001	\$1,100,000.00 President's Budget; Congressional Earmark
FY 2002 - 2003	\$1,560,000.00 President's Budget; Congressional Earmark
FY 2004 - 2005	\$2,200,000.00 President's Budget; Congressional Earmark
FY 2006	\$4,100,000.00 President's Budget; Congressional Earmark
FY 2007	\$1,000,000.00 Administrative Action BIA
FY 2008	\$1,000,000.00 Congressional Earmark
FY 2009 - 2010	\$1,400,000.00 Congressional Earmark; Administrative Action BIA
FY 2011	\$1,750,000.00 President's Budget; Administrative Action BIA
FY 2012	\$1,400,000.00 President's Budget
FY 2013	\$1,600,000.00 President's Budget; Administrative Action BIA
FY 2014	\$1,400,000.00 President's Budget Requested

It is noteworthy that the Senate Interior Appropriations Report 107-36, in 2002 for instance included funding for the ITBC under the following category and with the following language: Other recurring programs.-The committee recommends \$587,053,000 for other recurring programs, an increase of \$20,197,000 above the fiscal year 2001 enacted level and an increase of \$7,625,000 above the budget request. Increases above the request include \$2,000,000 for operating grants for Tribally Controlled Community Colleges, \$1,000,000 for the Western Washington shellfish program (Boldt decision), \$3,541,000 for the Timber-Fish-wildlife Project, and \$454,000 for the bison program.

Clearly this is not only a "program" - as opposed to a "project" but it is in fact a "recurring" program, in that it has been funded for many years in a row. From the mid-1990s until budget nomenclature changed around 2007 it was under what was called a "recurring program." It has been listed under Fish and Wildlife; Tribal Management and Development Programs. It is a national program benefitting 58 Tribes in 19 states, with more tribes joining the organization to establish bison herds every year. Therefore it should not be treated as project or a line-item since it is on an ongoing program.

### 3. FUNDING SHORTFALL

ITBC is structured as a member cooperative and 100% of the appropriated funds are expended on the development and support of Tribal buffalo herds. A significant portion of ITBC funding is distributed directly to ITBC Member Tribes via a Herd Development Grant program developed and administered by the ITBC Members.

The reduction in funding from the FY 2006 level critically curtailed ITBC's successful marketing program at a point when Tribes were close to accessing secure markets that would facilitate self-sustaining herds. Further, the funding cut seriously reduced efforts to solidify the ITBC Health Initiatives that had the potential to positively impact the incidence of diet related health problems among American Indians.

### 4. UNMET NEED

Recent surveys of ITBC Tribes indicates unmet project needs at an approximate cost of \$14,000,000.00. These project needs range from staffing needs to infrastructure including

fencing, water development, harvesting and processing needs. Specific Tribal Bison Project Proposal summaries detail the unmet needs for each member Tribe and are on file with ITBC and available for your review.

There is a need for ITBC for costs associated with the partnerships we have developed with the federal parks for population management through roundups and distribution of buffalo to Tribes from the parks. These costs are approximately \$100,000.00 per year. ITBC is also managing the buffalo being removed from Yellowstone National Park for population control that need to be processed due to the diseased status of the YNP herd and ITBC is developing a quarantine program which will allow for buffalo to be transferred from the Park to Tribes alive. These actions have an annual cost of \$500,000.00.

## 5. CURRENT ITBC INITIATIVES

ITBC's primary objectives are to restore buffalo to Tribal lands, conserve and enhance existing Tribal herds through the promotion of traditional Tribal practices and beliefs. ITBC strives to offer assistance and opportunities to Tribes that meet the needs and desires of individual Tribal programs. ITBC attempts to balance the varying interests of member Tribes from maintaining herds for spiritual purposes to the utilizing buffalo as viable business endeavors. ITBC accomplishes these objectives via the following actions:

### 1. Technical Assistance to Tribes:

ITBC assesses current and potential Tribal buffalo programs to determine technical service needs and infrastructure needs and provides technical assistance in the areas of wildlife management, ecological management, range management, buffalo health, cultural practices and economic development. Further ITBC assists with fencing, corrals, facility design, water development and equipment research. ITBC provides annual training sessions (national and regional) designed to enhance Tribal bison management.

### 2. Surplus Bison Program:

ITBC collaborates with the National Park Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to obtain surplus bison from National Parks for distribution to Tribal Buffalo Projects. ITBC assists with the roundups and transportation of bison from participating parks.

### 3. Education and Outreach:

ITBC staff provides educational presentations on bison restoration, conservation efforts, and the historical, cultural relationship between bison and American Indians.

### 4. Partnership and Collaboration:

ITBC is a member of various working groups, comprised of Federal and State agencies organized to address bison issues. ITBC is a full partner on the Inter Agency Bison

Management partnership established to address the Yellowstone National Park bison brucellosis issue. ITBC is actively managing the bison that are removed from YNP through the processing of animals for population control and the establishment of quarantine facilities to get bison from YNP to Tribes and other groups alive.

5. ITBC Marketing Program:

ITBC strives to develop markets for bison meat and products for interested member Tribes at the local and national level. ITBC procures bison from Tribes and sells the meat products under a joint Tribal and ITBC label.

6. Outreach and Education:

ITBC staff will provide educational programs and materials to Tribes, regarding the benefits of incorporating low fat buffalo meat into their regular diets to combat diet related health problems.

7. Health Care Initiative:

ITBC has six Member Tribes serving Tribal raised buffalo into their school lunch programs to address health concerns. ITBC anticipates expanding this program to 20 Tribes in the next three years.

## V. CONCLUSION

ITBC has existed for over 20 years to assist Tribes with restoration of buffalo to Tribal lands for cultural purposes and now evolving into sustainable herds that may support economic development efforts. No other national program exists to assist Tribes with buffalo restoration and protection.

ITBC and its member Tribes have created a new Indian Reservation industry that includes job creation and new revenue for the Tribal economies. ITBC ultimately hopes to restore Tribal herds large enough to support local Tribal health needs and generate sufficient revenue to achieve economically self sufficient herds.

ITBC and its member Tribes are appreciative of past and current support from the Congress and the Administration. I urge the Committee to consider restoring ITBC funding close to the FY 2006 level of \$4,500,000.00 to enhance ITBC's abilities to serve its member Tribes and meet the objectives outlined above.

I would like to thank this Committee for the opportunity to present testimony and I invite you to visit ITBC Tribal buffalo projects and experience first hand their successes.

Questions and/or comments regarding any of the issues presented within this testimony may be directed to Mr. Ervin Carlson, President, or to Mr. James Stone, Executive Director, at (605) 394-9730.