



InterTribal Buffalo Council
520 Kansas City St, Suite 300
Rapid City, SD 57701
Phone: (605) 394-9730
Fax: (605) 394-7742
www.itbcbuffalonation.org

February 18, 2020

Honorable Ruben Gallego, Chairman
Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States
Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Gallego,

Thank you for holding the hearing on May 5, 2020 on HR 5153, the Indian Buffalo Management Act. Below is our response to the follow up Questions for the Record that were submitted by Ranking Member Bishop.

1. Can you expand on what the InterTribal Buffalo Council does and what assistance is provided to its member tribes?

The InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC) is a federally chartered Native American organization that seeks to return buffalo to tribal nations to restore the cultural, spiritual, and traditional connection between buffalo and indigenous people, provide economic development opportunities, and supply a sustainable food source. ITBC strives to aid tribes to 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 utilizing buffalo as viable economic development endeavors. ITBC accomplishes these objectives as follows:

ITBC distributes \$1,000,000 of its funding directly to ITBC member tribes via Herd Development Grants (HDG). ITBC members use these funds for a variety of purposes including water development, range management, fence and corral construction and repair, purchasing handling equipment and supplemental feed, and administrative costs. These funds create new jobs in Indian Country, create sustainable tribal buffalo herds, and allow tribes to utilize buffalo for economic development.

ITBC is a member of various federal and state working groups organized to address buffalo issues. Since its inception, ITBC has partnered with the National Park Service on buffalo management efforts including population management through roundups and distribution of buffalo to tribes. When herds of buffalo at these parks exceed the carrying capacity of park land, surplus buffalo are moved out with the help of ITBC. Not only does this protect the park's ecosystems but it also avoids slaughtering these surplus buffalo and the negative publicity that would accompany needless slaughters.

ITBC assesses current and potential tribal buffalo programs to determine technical service and infrastructure needs. After this assessment, ITBC then provides technical assistance in the areas of wildlife management, ecological management, range management, buffalo health, cultural practices, and economic development. Further, ITBC assists with construction of fencing and corrals, facility design, water development, and equipment research.

2. Please elaborate on how the Indian Buffalo Management Act would help the InterTribal Buffalo Council support its member tribes.

With an authorization in place that would hopefully lead to an increase in funding, this Act would allow ITBC to create additional buffalo-related employment and enhance tribal infrastructure to ultimately expand tribal member access to buffalo. Additionally, the IBMA will expand tribal services to its membership by providing funds for the basic infrastructure required to establish and grow a buffalo herd including items discussed in the previous question such as fence and corral construction and repair, purchasing handling equipment, supplemental feed and other aspects relating to infrastructure needed to establish and grow a viable herd.

Sending buffalo to meat processing facilities has always been a struggle for tribes. These facilities are few in number and are sometimes hundreds of miles for tribal buffalo herds. Additionally, few tribes have the resources to construct their own facilities. ITBC would like to operate several mobile slaughter units. These units would be USDA certified and travel to the buffalo herds and process buffalo meat on site for ITBC member tribes. This would be a significant savings to many tribes.

ITBC has a long-term objective to prevent and treat diet related diseases in Native American populations through the reintroduction of buffalo meat into daily diets. ITBC would like to help our member tribes introduce raised buffalo in their school lunch programs to address health concerns of school-age children.

However, these efforts to coordinate with health care providers have been limited by the lack of scientific evidence of the health benefits of natural, grass-fed buffalo diets. ITBC believes research to develop concrete evidence of these health benefits will facilitate ITBC partnerships with health programs to prevent and treat diet related diseases in Native American populations. This critical research will support ITBC's efforts to provide buffalo meat to school lunch programs as a healthy alternative to other meat products. ITBC wants to partner with IHS to fund this research to promote traditional, healthy tribal diets.

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.

3. Can you describe some of the limitations the current funding scenario has on tribal buffalo management?

The HDG funding has been stagnant despite the continued growth of the Tribal membership of the organization. With limited funding, ITBC and Tribes cannot make meaningful investments into existing herds to move them toward self-sufficiency. Current funding does not allow growth of

economic opportunities and barely allows maintenance of herds that cannot provide optimum benefits to tribal members. In FY 2020, unmet needs for ITBC members to enhance, stabilize and maximize benefits from herds, exceeded the \$14 million authorized by the legislation. ITBC attempts to award funding to all member Tribes that apply but, the limited amount of funding and growing number of Tribes, prevents awards that could have resulted in significant benefit to member Tribes.

ITBC cannot participate to its full potential and serve as a meaningful partner in Federal and State working groups due to a lack of funding for these collaborative efforts. As interest in buffalo continues to grow in government agencies, ITBC needs to be involved to promote tribal interests in these sacred animals. In addition, ITBC bears the costs of transporting surplus buffalo but has not been funded for its role in these activities.

Current funding levels do not allow ITBC to be responsive to the needs of the growing ITBC membership. ITBC only has two technical services providers which limits the frequency our member tribes receive this support. The hiring of more technical services providers would assist Tribes with reaching goals of self-sufficient herds. Additionally, ITBC would like staff to provide educational presentations to school-age youth, tribal buffalo managers, and others. The topics of these presentations would range from buffalo restoration, conservation efforts, and the historical, cultural relationship between buffalo and Native Americans. However, current funding amounts significantly limit outreach, educational efforts, and staff training.

Thank you and Mr. Bishop for the questions. Please let us know if you or any other member of the Subcommittee or full Committee has any further questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ervin Carlson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ervin" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Carlson".

Ervin Carlson
Board President

cc: Hon. Paul Cook
Hon. Raul Grijalva
Hon. Rob Bishop
Hon. Don Young
Hon. Deb Haaland
Hon. Tom Cole