

National Archives and Records Administration
REQUEST FOR DISPOSITION AUTHORITY

Records Schedule Number: DAA-0022-2024-0004

Status: APPROVED
Date Approved: 04/14/2026

General Information

Agency or Establishment	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
Record/Scheduling Group	0022 - Records of the U.S. Fish And Wildlife Service
Records Schedule Applies To	Agency-wide
Schedule Subject	Records of the National Bison Range
Additional Schedule Information	<p>The Refuge formerly known as the National Bison Range (NBR) consists of 18,766 acres in the center of the 1,250,000-acre Flathead Indian Reservation. When President Theodore Roosevelt established the Refuge in 1908, it was the first time Congress appropriated tax dollars to buy land specifically to preserve wildlife. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the NBR was one of several national preserves, including Wichita Forest and Game Preserve, Wind Cave National Park, and the Niobrara Reservation where the U. S. Government, in collaboration with the American Bison Society, established federal conservation herds of genetically pure bison. The proliferation of these and other government-protected bison herds throughout the early twentieth century played an essential role in the survival of the species.</p> <p>By all historical accounts, tribal bison conservation on the Flathead Indian Reservation predates federal conservation efforts by several decades. Before the establishment of the NBR, the largest herd of Bison in the United States (over 300 animals) grazed on Reservation lands near the future site of the Refuge. According to Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), sometime in the 1870s, a Qlispé (also known as Kalispel or Pend d'Oreille) man named Little Falcon Robe received approval from tribal leaders to bring orphaned bison calves across the Continental Divide to the Flathead Indian Reservation for purposes of starting a herd for subsistence and conservation purposes. By the early 1880s, the calves had grown, and the herd numbered thirteen when Little Falcon Robe's stepfather, Samuel Walking Coyote sold the herd to two ranchers and Tribal members on the Reservation, Michel Pablo and Charles Allard. When Allard died in 1896, his family sold his share of the Pablo-Allard herd, some of which went to the Conrad Ranch in Kalispell, Montana in the early 1900s. Pablo continued to graze the herd on the Reservation, and by 1902, it had become the world's largest bison herd. Of the 40 bison that comprised the original herd at the NBR, 36 were from, or descended from the Pablo-Allard herd.</p>

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In 1971, the Court of Federal Claims determined that the United States had unconstitutionally taken the land for the NBR. Lawsuits followed, but on December 27, 2020, the land was finally transferred back to the CSKT through the Consolidated Appropriations Act (Public Law 116-260), which repealed the statute that created the NBR. The land is held in trust for the CSKT by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and is now referred to as the Bison Range. The transfer marked the first time that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service returned land to Tribes.

Is There a Classified Version of This Schedule?

No

Is consultation and coordination with Tribal Governments required?

Yes and completed - a consultation with Indian Tribal governments was conducted

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Item Count

Total number of disposition items: 1

Number of Temporary disposition items: 0

Number of Permanent disposition items: 1

Number of Items with Disposition Not Approved: 0

Number of Inactive disposition items: 0

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Outline of Records Schedule Items for DAA-0022-2024-0004

Item #	Title	Disposition
0001	Records of the National Bison Range	Permanent

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Records Schedule Items

DAA-0022-2024-0004-0001		STATUS: Active
ITEM GENERAL INFORMATION		
Item Title	Records of the National Bison Range	
Item Description	<p>Historically significant records created throughout the existence of a Refuge that is no longer under the control of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). They include textual materials, photographs, negatives, transparencies, maps, motion pictures, audio reels, and original manuscripts. Textual formats include letter and legal sized paper, carbon paper (onion skin) and large format paper and mylar (for maps, drawings, schematics etc.). The series has a wide variety of record types including but not limited to tabular datasets, financial records, administration records, correspondence, reports, manuscripts, plans, compliance documents, maps, drawings, schematics, still photography, aerial photography, motion picture, audio recordings, and mixed media files. The NBR collection provides primary source evidence related to the operations of the Refuge under the Service from the early-twentieth century to the transfer of the Refuge to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) in December 2020. The collection contains many records that pertain to the nature and status of Service-CSKT relations throughout that period. There are also primary source records related to significant events, such as the birth, life, and death of the world-famous white buffalo, "Big Medicine," whom the CSKT revered as a sign of spiritual power, hope, and good will for the Tribes. Collectively, these records provide valuable historical context for the unprecedented restoration of the National Bison Range to its prior legal status under the Hellgate Treaty of 1855.</p>	

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	The records as a collection contain an intrinsic value in the document itself by both the form and function of the NBR and its subsequent transfer. The records provide information about the time period and historical significance of the NBR over time. The original records can enhance the appreciation of the time period and understanding of the subject matter. Preservation risks is present if deconstructing the records for digitization which would include physical damage to the original records, loss of contextual information leading to fragmented understanding of the content and compromising the historical artifact.
Is this item media neutral?	No
Media limitation	Paper/analog only
Is this item a Big Bucket?	No
MANUAL CITATION	
Agency Code	Not applicable
Manual Title	Not applicable
SUPERSEDED AGENCY DISPOSITION AUTHORITIES AND GRS DEVIATIONS	
Does this item supersede existing disposition authorities?	No
Is this item a deviation from the GRS?	No
DISPOSITION INSTRUCTION	
Final Disposition	Permanent
Cutoff Instructions	Other: Cutoff when National Bison Range ownership passed from USFWS ownership to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.
Are there multiple instructions for this item?	No
Transfer Instruction	Other: Transfer to the National Archives immediately upon approval of this schedule.
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	
Current Records Format	Analog still images:5 cuft ; Analog - Paper Records:157 cuft ; Analog - Maps and Charts:10 cuft
Approximate first year of records covered by this authority	1890
End year of records covered by this authority	Year: 2021
Date span of the initial transfer	From: 01/01/1890 To: 12/31/2021
Frequency of transfer	0

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Are any of the records covered by this item subject to a FOIA exemption? No

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Signatory Information

Action	User	Date
Approve	Edward Forst (Acting Archivist)	04/14/2026



Office of the Chief
Records Officer for the
U.S. Government

This schedule was signed outside of the ERA system using Standard Form 115.

NARA staff updated ERA to reflect this approval, moving the record schedule into an approved status. The approved status allows for generation of a PDF indicating that the schedule has been approved, and allows an agency to use the schedule in ERA to create transfer requests. The approved date in the system and on the PDF version of the records schedule reflects the system actions.