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## **NWRA questions new negotiations at National Bison Range - calls upon Assistant Secretary Lavery to publish tribal AFA policy**

**Washington, DC-** The National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) today called into question this week's renewed talks for an Annual Funding Agreement (AFA) at the National Bison Range in Montana between the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). In a letter to Lyle Lavery, Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks for the Department of the Interior, NWRA pressed for completion of a national AFA policy for FWS prior to conducting further negotiations.

"It is inappropriate for such negotiations to take place absent a FWS policy governing such agreements," said Evan Hirsche, President of the National Wildlife Refuge Association, in the letter. "We again urge the Department of the Interior to expeditiously publish a draft FWS AFA policy in the Federal Register so as to provide the public with an opportunity to comment on the proposed conduct of the Service relative to creation of such agreements."

Under the Tribal Self-Governance Act of 1994, native tribes can enter into AFAs with agencies within the Department of the Interior, including the FWS at national wildlife refuges. The NWRA has repeatedly called for a national AFA policy for the FWS that would guide how such agreements are managed, and ensure that such agreements advance the mission and purposes of the refuge and Refuge System. The lack of such a policy contributed to the breakdown of a previous AFA at the Bison Range between the CSKT and the FWS in December 2006. Without guidance from a national FWS AFA policy, it is unclear how the same issues that plagued the first AFA will not condemn a future one.

In November, Assistant Secretary Lavery instructed FWS Director Dale Hall to complete a new AFA at the Bison Range by March 28, 2008. Initial negotiations are set to begin this week between the CSKT and the FWS. The NWRA has adopted good governance principles that should be reflected in an AFA policy and any agreement arrived at in connection with the National Bison Range. These were provided to the CSKT, FWS and Assistant Secretary Lavery in anticipation of this week's meetings. To view NWRA's letter to Assistant Secretary Lavery, and NWRA's AFA principles, visit [www.refugeassociation.org](http://www.refugeassociation.org).

*The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge Association is to protect, enhance and expand the National Wildlife Refuge System, America's premier network of lands and waters set aside to conserve our diverse wildlife heritage.*

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