

## OPINION

### Bison Range management

An op-ed piece recently published in the Inter Lake expressed the opinion that the National Bison Range should be given to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. The authors are four leaders of recognized conservation organizations. I would like to express my thoughts on why I do not agree with their reasoning. I believe I am qualified to pass judgment on their stance because my 30-year career managing rangeland encompassed the hands-on management of native rangelands in Lake County. I served on the board of directors of the professional Society for Range Management and also served on a National Academy of Sciences Committee dealing with range condition criteria.

What real range management experience do the four authors have?

The authors are mistaken in their assertion that the CSKT established the Bison Range. It was created by the U.S. government with the purchase of the land in 1908 at the land price value at that time and the American Bison Society purchased the initial bison from a private herd. The range is often considered the crown jewel of the all the National Wildlife Refuges.

The primary goal of managing the Bison Range is to properly manage the health of the rangeland.

Bison and other wildlife depend on healthy, robust rangeland. Based on my almost 60 years of living in Lake County and being involved in range management, it is my observation that the CSKT has not exhibited good stewardship on the rangelands that they manage, especially their grazing leases. They may have established wilderness areas, etc., but these areas do not require the annual, hands-on-management that rangelands require, like weed control, fencing, water development, rotation grazing and proper stocking rate. Based on my observations of both Tribal rangelands management and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife management of the Bison Range, I believe it would be in the best interest in the health of the land and of the American people that the range be retained under its current ownership status.

—Chuck Jarecki, Polson