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## Blackfeet Fish & Wildlife Bison (Innii) Reintroduction

<b>Applying Organization</b>	Blackfeet Fish & Wildlife Department	<b>Application Date</b>	6/1/2026
<b>Applying Contact</b>	Ryan Running Wolf	<b>Status</b>	Submitted
<b>Record Type</b>	Member Collective	<b>Created By</b>	Ryan Running Wolf, 6/1/2026, 12:19 PM
		<b>Create Account</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Project Overview

<b>Project Name</b>	Blackfeet Fish & Wildlife Bison (Innii) Reintroduction	<b>Requested Amount</b>	\$50,000.00
<b>Project/Campaign Name</b>	Blackfeet Fish & Wildlife Bison (Innii) Reintroduction		
<b>Type of Project</b>	Restoration	<b>Project Multiple Locations</b>	
<b>Project Location (State or Territory)</b>	MT	<b>Longitude</b>	N 113°31'49.4"W
<b>Latitude</b>	48°56'42.7"N		

### Organization Details

<b>Organization Name</b>	Blackfeet Fish & Wildlife Department	<b>Primary address for organization</b>	24 Starr School Road Browning, Montana 59417 United States
<b>Contact Name</b>	Ryan Running Wolf	<b>Contact Title</b>	Chief Mountain Guardian
<b>Contact Email Address</b>	rrunningwolf@blackfeetnation.com		
<b>Annual Operating Budget</b>	\$50,000.00	<b>Tax Status/Organization Type</b>	None of the Above
<b>Staff Size</b>	2	<b>Main Phone</b>	406-338-7207
<b>Total Membership</b>		<b>Organization Website/Social Media Feed</b>	<a href="https://www.blackfeetfishandwildlife.net">https://www.blackfeetfishandwildlife.net</a>
<b>BIPOC-led</b>	Yes	<b>C-Suite Staff</b>	95% Blackfeet tribal members, Brandon Kittson, Director Blackfeet Fish & Wildlife Department.

### Grant Details

<b>Awarded Amount</b>		<b>Awarded Date</b>	
<b>Funding Program</b>			
<b>Primary Project Type</b>		<b>Secondary Project Type</b>	
<b>Term Start Date</b>		<b>Term End Date</b>	

### Proposal Questions

**Mission/History Of Organization**

The purpose of the Blackfeet Fish & Wildlife Department establishment was to ensure the maximization of quality and quantity of life for all fish and wildlife of the Blackfeet Nation and the connection to our people. The Blackfeet Tribe established a fish and wildlife program in 1978 that has grown and expanded over the years. During the early years of the program, hunting seasons were established and key wildlife habitat was set aside to protect elk, moose, and other big game species. Providing big game subsistence hunting opportunities for tribal members has always been an important goal of the program. Since then the Blackfeet Fish & Wildlife Department has expanded and incorporated a game warden program to enforce tribal laws, annual regulations, and the Blackfeet Tribal Code, Endangered Species program, Fisheries, Chronic Wasting Disease Program, and the first ever completely indigenous led Guardianship Program in the United States.

**Location Details**

The protected area is a 32,000 acres of land that is in close proximity to Chief Mountain on the northwestern region of the Blackfeet Reservation. It is a highly revered area to our people. This project was designed with not only Bison, fish, and wildlife but how our relationship was formed with our people historically through our culture and way of life. It was put in place to revitalize the importance of Bison to our society, culture, and environmental needs. This area was previously used for livestock grazing. The Blackfeet Tribe has since pulled the leases for this project to take place in hopes of bringing Bison back and allowing an opportunity for our people to reconnect with the land and the animals that are in the unit. The Blackfeet Tribal Business Council has also purchased the former, Grizzly Ridge Bison Ranch, in 2025. Approximately 20,000 acres of that went under the Blackfeet Fish & Wildlife Department. The ranch is adjacent to the Chief Mountain Unit and will be used as a wintering range for the Chief Mountain Unit and Bison movement. It is also being looked at to implement conservation and restoration of land and water, allowing only native wild species.

**Final Success**

With approximately 46,000 acres of land to utilize, success will look like having a completed wild Bison reintroduction to manage, harvest, and reconnect our people with the land and Bison.

**Impact on Climate and Bioversity**

Bison are improving grassland restoration and are also known for being "ecosystem engineers" that help restore grasslands by grazing, which prunes vegetation, lengthens the growing season, and stimulates plant growth. Another component being carbon sequestration, their grazing, along with their nutrient-rich dung, nourishes the grasslands, increasing the productivity of plants and enhancing the ecosystem's capacity to capture and store atmospheric carbon dioxide. They increase and enhance native habitats by their grazing behaviors that also help other species and increase biodiversity. They are also vital to soil health as well which also helps other plants and animals.

**Expected Economic & Recreational Impact**

With the reintroduction of Bison, all the positive impacts it has on the land and water that an increase of animals, plants, and aquatic life will vastly improve. This will in turn, create a better environment for more successful harvesting of plants for medicine, ingestion, and ceremonial purposes. It will also increase the quality and quantity of wildlife which will benefit our hunters and any form of outdoor recreation for our people, and increase and improve the natural water systems inside of the unit that will increase in fishing, netting, drinking, and also be used for ceremonial purposes. All of which benefits our Nation and our people which connects us to our land.

**Strategy & Timeline For Final Success**

Strategies being used by the Guardianship Program for the reintroduction of Bison include a "soft release" of Bison in September/October of 2025. GPS Collars are being placed on approximately 70 Bison to track migration routes, feeding areas, water areas, and other data collection information. The Blackfeet Tribal Business Council has given a 9 year lease to the Blackfeet Fish & Wildlife Program, with the possibility of creating a conservation easement forever if this project is successful, which it will be. Relevant projects being done are certain fencing projects inside of the unit. One being a 3 mile radius "soft release" fencing project to monitor approximately

10-15 Bison before the entirety of the herd is released. The other, which is currently in the bidding process, is the entire northern border of the Blackfeet Reservation to Pike Lake, approximately 5 miles of 4 strand barbed wire fencing, to be wildlife friendly, while also keeping our Bison from entering into Canada. There are currently studies being done to look at the impacts of Bison and soil/vegetation, Bison and how they interact and impact beaver, how Bison improve streams and creeks that contain Bull Trout and protected westslope cutthroat trout, and other. The Guardianship Program is the primary role in overseeing this project take place under the umbrella of the Blackfeet Fish & Wildlife Department and the Blackfeet Tribe.

#### Key Decision Makers

The Blackfeet Tribe is the key decision makers in this project. We as a Nation make this very clear. This project is done by our people for our people and is all completely indigenous led. We look for support and partnerships that we form very close bonds with and work well with. All of our interactions are done out of respect and admiration of others to support and help make this project as successful as possible. Yes very much so, we've seen engagement from the business community and appreciated their support. They hear about what we are doing with Bison and all work being done in the unit and want to be involved. This is a very successful and very unique project and it's amazing to be a part of.

#### Working With Business Community

Engagement from the corporate outdoor business community is vital to amplifying the Chief Mountain Unit Bison Project. Outdoor brands can support our efforts through three distinct avenues: Brand Advocacy & Storytelling: Corporate partners can use their global marketing platforms to share the story of the first completely Indigenous-led Guardianship Program in the U.S., elevating tribal sovereignty and ecological restoration to a broader audience. Technical & Gear Partnerships: Our Guardians face harsh Montana winters while monitoring 32,000 acres. Partnerships with outdoor apparel, footwear, and field-tech brands can directly equip our team with the rugged gear and GPS/communication tools needed for field operations. Corporate Volunteering: We welcome outdoor industry staff to participate in hands-on stewardship, such as pulling old livestock fencing to open wildlife corridors, fostering a deep connection to Blackfeet land.

#### Elevate Voices

The Chief Mountain Unit Bison Project is entirely built upon the self-determination, leadership, and cultural preservation of the Blackfeet Nation. Rather than just engaging a community, this project is designed, managed, and executed by our people, for our people. First, our leadership and operational teams are 100% Indigenous. Every staff member, field technician, and board member under the Blackfeet Fish & Wildlife Department is an enrolled member of the Blackfeet Nation. The project is spearheaded by our first-of-its-kind, completely Indigenous-led Guardianship Program. By placing our own tribal biologists, ecologists, and traditional land guardians at the head of this initiative, we ensure that indigenous ecological knowledge (TEK) guides every scientific protocol, fence line, and data collection effort. Second, the Blackfeet Tribe is the sole decision-maker. To make this

#### Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

Over the next 12 months, the project will achieve the following tangible on-the-ground outcomes: Establish a Free-Roaming Herd: Reintroduce and establish a founding herd of wild, free-roaming Bison (linnii) across the 32,000-acre Chief Mountain Unit landscape. Secure Tribal Land Protection: Formalize the 9-year Blackfeet Tribal Business Council land lease, permanently removing commercial livestock grazing from 100% of the acreage. Fulfill Permanent Protection Criteria: Complete the required field monitoring and guardianship metrics necessary to transition the 32,000-acre unit from a temporary lease into a permanent conservation easement. Remodifying an "unfriendly" wildlife Bison fencing that was left behind on the former Grizzly Ridge Bison Ranch, and modifying it to be 100% wildlife friendly.

project a reality, the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council actively reclaimed sovereignty over our ancestral lands by pulling commercial livestock leases across 32,000 acres, prioritizing the return of the linnii (Bison) over outside commercial interests. Third, the project addresses systemic health and economic disparities by restoring local food sovereignty. Reintroducing free-roaming Bison provides a sustainable, lean, and traditional food source. This directly counters food insecurity and health crises that historically plague our community due to forced dietary shifts. Finally, the project revitalizes cultural and recreational access. Restoring the Bison improves the entire local ecosystem, rejuvenating native plant species used for traditional medicines, ingestion, and ceremonies. It strengthens big game subsistence hunting opportunities and restores the historical bond between our youth, elders, and the sacred landscape of Chief Mountain (Ninastako). We are elevating our community's voice by restoring the very landscape that defines it.

**TCA Funding Plan**

TCA's support will provide the critical funding needed to sustain on-the-ground management and secure the permanent protection of the Chief Mountain Unit. Specifically, this grant moves our efforts forward in three key ways: Sustaining Critical Guardianship: As the Chief Mountain Guardian, my position receives zero federal or tribal monies and is solely dependent upon funder support. TCA's grant directly funds this dedicated, independent role to ensure continuous field oversight and management of the reintroduction. Unlocking the Permanent Easement: The Tribal Business Council's 9-year lease includes a formal commitment to convert these 32,000 acres into a permanent conservation easement if this phase succeeds. TCA's funding ensures the consistent field presence required to fulfill this condition. Validating Indigenous Sovereignty: Funding this completely Indigenous-led project strengthens our position as we manage this ancestral landscape for our people.

**Confidential Items**    **No.**

**Other Relevant Application Details**

No

