

This proposal drives visitation to public lands and fuels outdoor recreation

Feel free to use this guidance to encourage BLM to properly consider and analyze the proposal's impact on increasing multiple use of public lands. The expansion of an American bison herd will increase visitation in the region for wildlife watchers and outdoor enthusiasts. In conjunction with the Reserve's long-term goals of improving public access in the region and building a more robust outdoor recreation infrastructure, the proposal will help to restore wildlife habitat and therefore improve wildlife hunting opportunities.

BLM should analyze how the proposal increases visitation to public lands

The American public is fascinated with bison, evidenced by the 2016 National Bison Legacy Act that designated the American bison as the official mammal of the U.S. The establishment of a large conservation bison herd can be a significant draw for tourists, hunters, educators, students, artists, scientists, and others. This proposal can help connect more people to their public land and increase multiple use of that land.

In other areas of the country, large conservation bison herds have been shown to fuel visitation, grow outdoor recreation, and are an important part of the visitor experience. In Yellowstone National Park, one recent survey found that about 50% of visitors indicated "seeing bison" was a reason for their trip. Other nearby national parks within 350 miles of the Reserve that contain a mixed-grass prairie ecosystem and an established bison herd illustrate the potential for increased visitation. In 2015, the Badlands, Theodore Roosevelt and Wind Cave National Parks netted \$62.2 million, \$35.9 million, and \$60.6 million in annual visitor spending, respectively.

Wildlife is also an important draw for the local region. In 2005, Russell Country received 976,140 non-resident visitors, of which 40% cited "wildlife watching" as one of the reasons for their visit. Of the 283,013 nonresident visitors to Missouri River Country in 2005, 39% cited "wildlife watching" as important. A recent analysis by the University of Montana suggests that the development of American Prairie Reserve and its association with the CMR Refuge could augment existing visitation and generate between an annual \$13.4 - \$56.3 million additional non-resident expenditures if the Reserve's vision is fully realized.

BLM should analyze how the proposal is consistent with efforts to improve outdoor recreation

The proposed action is consistent with efforts to build a more robust recreation infrastructure in the region to support and encourage year-round visitation. This year, the Reserve endorsed a plan to build a multi-million-dollar National Discovery Center in Lewistown to help the town establish itself as an anchor and gateway to American Prairie Reserve. The Reserve is constructing a Campground and Welcome Center along Highway 191, just 20 miles from the communities in the southern portion of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. The Reserve is also in the process of building an affordable hut system to host additional visitors. When completed, the system will allow visitors to traverse 200 miles of the project area on foot, bicycle, canoe, and horseback.

BLM should analyze how the proposal increases public opportunities for harvesting wildlife and bison

The proposed action would enhance public hunting and harvest opportunities by restoring wildlife habitat and improving wildlife movement through removal of interior fences on public lands. Additionally, bison- and biodiversity-focused management on the Reserve will result in a greater abundance of ungulates overall. Restoring wildlife habitat through this proposed action will benefit the health of regional wildlife populations and gradually allow the Reserve to provide a richer and more satisfying public hunting experience in coming years.

The Reserve is already partnering with the public and state of Montana to offer public wildlife hunting opportunities. In 2017, the Reserve enrolled 23,000 deeded acres in Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks Block Management program. The Reserve provided 4,159 hunter days in 2017 through this program and an additional 259 hunter days through other managed hunts on Reserve properties. Hunting opportunities for wildlife on the Reserve will continue to expand as a result of this proposal.

Further, as the Reserve's population of native bison continues to grow as a result of this proposal, managers will increasingly use harvest as a bison management tool to replicate natural predation. In 2018, the Reserve offered its first public bison harvests. Public opportunities to participate in bison harvests would continue to grow over time in conjunction with an expanding bison herd.

BLM should analyze how the proposal is consistent with commitment to improve public access

The proposed action is fully consistent with the American Prairie Reserve long-term goals of improving access to public lands. Access to quality wildlife habitat remains one of the most significant factors impacting hunting and fishing participation throughout the country

The Reserve's network of private land holdings are already open to the public for visitation and recreation. In addition, some of the private lands owned by American Prairie Reserve no longer block access to adjacent federal and state lands, which was not the case with previous owners. This is an important public benefit that should be taken into consideration.