



January 28, 2026

Honorable Doug Burgum, Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Sonya Germann, State Director
Montana/Dakotas BLM State Office
5001 Southgate Drive
Billings, MT 59101

RE: Opposition of the Bureau of Land Management Notice of Proposed Decision to American Prairie Reserve re Buffalo Leases Dated January 16, 2026

Dear Secretary Burgum and Director Germann,

I am the Chairman of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, a federally recognized Tribe in South Dakota, part of the Great Sioux Nation with one of the largest Tribal land bases. It was our Tribe – through the family of Fred and Mary Dupree – who was essential to saving the buffalo from the United States attempt to make them extinct. Today, with over 2,500 head, we have the largest Tribal government owned buffalo herd in the United States, and one of the largest Tribal owned buffalo meat processing companies. However, we were not consulted on this decision to revoke buffalo grazing leases from federal lands.

We have been very pleased with the Secretary's commitment to Tribal sovereignty and to buffalo. So, we are disappointed to see this Bison Grazing Lease Revocation - Proposed Decision by the Secretary and BLM and I write today in opposition.

No Tribal Consultation. The Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe has the largest Tribal buffalo herd in the Nation, and we were never consulted on these new definitions. Not only are we concerned about these definitions excluding Tribal buffalo from BLM public grazing lands, but they also set a terrible precedent for USFS grazing and for the work we are trying to do with USFS National Grasslands, DOI USFWS, DOI National Park Service, and with co-stewardship. CRST proudly has both cattle and buffalo herds on our lands. This BLM Decision creates a weapon for cattle ranchers to unfairly use against buffalo herds.

BLM Lands Are Traditional Tribal Lands & Buffalo Lands – Buffalo Are the Best Land Managers. This decision is very painful and triggers memories of the genocide the Federal government attempted to commit against us and our relative the buffalo. The federal efforts of the last century to try and eradicate and exclude buffalo from all lands. All BLM lands are Traditional Tribal Lands from time immemorial – much of those lands with existing Treaty Rights on them. All BLM lands are former buffalo lands.

Buffalo are essential to land management for example the Taylor Grazing Act (TGA) was passed because non-Native cattle and sheep ranchers destroyed our grasslands. Land that the buffalo successfully managed since time immemorial. Buffalo are the best land managers; they increase the biodiversity of the grasslands by over 100%. It is offensive and unacceptable that the federal government would still seek to keep any buffalo off these lands.

Largest Most “Production-Oriented” Tribal Herd – Still Ineligible Under BLM’s New Definition of “Domestic.” The Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Buffalo Authority (CRST Buffalo) is wholly owned by the Tribe and is responsible for managing our buffalo herds. With over 2,500 bison across 24,000 acres, CRST Buffalo manages the largest Tribal buffalo herd in the United States and the largest Tribal-owned meat processing company in the region.

In addition to our commercial sales, our buffalo herd and meat processing company feeds between 2,000 and 3,000 Tribal members per month. We serve both as a key buffalo meat source for the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and the main processing hub for a network of Tribes and ranchers across the Northern Great Plains. As such, we are most likely eligible under the new “production-oriented” requirements of the new proposed BLM definitions, even though this is not the case for most Tribal herds.

Disrespects Tribal Sovereignty & Tribal Management Practices. Even with this, our Tribal herd would probably not qualify under the new definitions for “*domestic*.”

The new definition that states an animal is not “domestic” if you “Treat as Wild.” The buffalo is our relative and is a wild animal. Even though they are behind fences, and they provide for us –we work very hard to honor them and to treat them as wild, as do all Native and Tribal herd managers. Because we treat our animals as wild, we would likely not qualify under this new “domestic” definition.

Honor the buffalo and treat them as what they inherently are, wild. If you exclude a herd that is being managed as the Tribes do and have advocated for – you directly reject Tribal indigenous buffalo management practices.

Montana’s Local Bigotry Against Buffalo is Affecting Everyone. The deep-seeded historical intolerance against buffalo, Indians, and wildlife in Montana needs to be contained and stopped from spreading. The Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe has public Tribal lands, and we lease to both cattle and buffalo herds. Montana cattlemen’s tantrums are impacting everyone else and infringing on Tribal sovereignty and on our relative, the buffalo – whose lands they are on.

Respectfully,



Ryman LeBeau
Wicáša Yámni
Chairman, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe
chairmanlebeau@crstmail.com

CC:
Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal Buffalo Authority
Billy Kirkland, Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs
Janel Broderick, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs
Scott Davis, Deputy Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs