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# "Fenced-In Place": White Settler Colonialism as Opposition to Increased Tribal Management of the National Bison Range

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“FENCED-IN PLACE”: WHITE SETTLER COLONIALISM AS OPPOSITION TO  
INCREASED TRIBAL MANAGEMENT OF THE NATIONAL BISON RANGE

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Thesis

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## Abstract

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“Fenced-in Place”: White Settler Colonialism as Opposition to Increased Tribal Management of the National Bison Range

Chairperson: Robin Saha

Since the Tribal Self Governance Act was passed in 1994, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) in western Montana have sought increased management responsibilities at the National Bison Range, which is fully encompassed by the Flathead Indian Reservation. Though the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has managed the Bison Range since it was established in 1908, the Tribes assert that they were the original stewards of bison in the area, and have requested both the reinstatement of the National Bison Range to Tribal trust ownership and increased management responsibilities through negotiated Annual Funding Agreements with the Department of Interior. In their negotiations, however, the CSKT and their advocates are met with ongoing local and national opposition that has been characterized by the Montana Human Rights Network as anti-Indian racist. Using literature on settler colonialism theory and concepts from critical whiteness studies like white fragility and colorblind racism, this research examines how and the degree to which present-day opposition to increased Tribal management perpetuates a settler colonialist project at the National Bison Range. Additionally, this work explores the nature of the claims opponents make and articulates how settler colonialism is a form of structural racism. Through a qualitative analysis of 68 public comments and the transcripts of 17 in-depth interviews, this study finds that opponents of increased Tribal management furthers a settler colonialist project at the National Bison Range through racialized settler discourse that exhibits white fragility and colorblind racism. That the CSKT continue to reject their own erasure, however, prevents the completion of the settler colonialist project. Finally, this work suggests that future research might continue to link settler colonialism with concepts like white fragility and colorblind racism to better describe settler colonialism as a project of white supremacy, particularly for natural resource management issues in the United States.

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*“Revolution is based on land. Land is the basis of all independence. Land is the basis of freedom, justice, and equality.” —Malcom X*

*“If you are Christian and you don’t see any crosses out there, or you don’t have your corner church ... there’s no external connection, [no] symbolic iconic notion that strengthens and nurtures those beliefs....So it goes with the buffalo.” —Leroy Little Bear*

*“People got in the way just by staying at home.” —Deborah Bird Rose*

## **Introduction**

One of the United States’ premier wildlife refuges, the National Bison Range<sup>1</sup> (NBR) in western Montana is, for many, an exceptional and unforgettable place. Named “Fenced-In Place” in Salish, the Range attracts up to 200,000 local and international visitors each year who desire to view wildlife such as Rocky Mountain elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, pronghorn antelope, bighorn sheep, coyotes, mountain lions, grizzly and black bears, bobcat, and over 200 species of birds. Also valued for its unique flora, the 18,000 acres within the boundaries of the National Bison Range boast a diverse ecosystem of grasslands, Douglas fir, and ponderosa pine forests, riparian areas, ponds, and picturesque views of the Mission Mountains (USFWS website 2018). Most significant for many visitors, however, is the managed herd of 300-500 plains bison.

In 1908, the United States government carved the National Bison Range out of the Flathead Reservation, home of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT). Since its inception, the Range has been the subject of conflict over who should manage the animals and land that make up the wildlife refuge. While the Tribes have expressed discontent with their degree of involvement at the National Bison Range for decades, the Tribal Self Governance Act of 1994 gave the CSKT a legal mechanism through which they could request to contract responsibilities at the National Bison Range. Since 1994, the Tribes have continuously requested increased management responsibilities

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<sup>1</sup> The National Bison Range is additionally referred throughout this paper as “the NBR,” “the Range,” or “the Bison Range.”

that range from contracting programmatic work at the Bison Range to requesting restoration of the lands to be held in trust for the benefit for the CSKT. The Tribes' requests for land restoration and increased management responsibilities have been met with extreme opposition from both local and national groups and concerned individuals. Discourse among those opposed to increased Tribal management at the National Bison Range evolved out of white supremacist groups in the area that have existed at least since the 1970s and has been described as "racist to the core" (MHRN 2000:5).

The purpose of this research is to work towards an understanding of the nature of opposition to Tribal management of the National Bison Range, and to illuminate and name structural anti-Indian racism in context of this specific conflict. As such, my research questions for this project are: *To what degree does opposition to increased Tribal management of the National Bison Range further a settler colonialist project?* And, further: *What is the nature of the claims opponents make?* Following sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's caveat in his book, *Racism without Racists*, I want to clarify that the purpose of this paper, like in Bonilla-Silva's work, is not to "demonize whites or label [people] 'racists' " (Bonilla-Silva 2006:15). Instead, I seek to move away from the approach to race relations that aims to categorize people as "good" and "bad," or "tolerant" and "intolerant" (Bonilla-Silva 2006:15). The broad goal of this research, instead, is to uncover the collective, structural practices that help reinforce the contemporary racial hierarchy and settler colonialism. Nevertheless, some readers may feel discomfort while reading this study; since "color-blind racism is the dominant racial ideology; its tentacles have touched us all and thus most readers will subscribe to some—if not most—of its tenets, use its style, and believe many of its racial stories" (Bonilla-Silva 2006:15).

While the theoretical framework of settler colonialism assists in conceptualizing how struggles for land are often ongoing projects rooted in power relations, concepts within critical whiteness studies, specifically white fragility and colorblind racism, advocate for the deconstruction of the white experience as baseline reality for people of all races, and assist to examine the social construction of whiteness as an ideology tied to social status. Research data include both semi-structured interviews and written comments submitted to the public record. Results of this research

show that opposition to Tribal management of the National Bison Range furthers settler colonialism by using discursive strategies indicating both white fragility and colorblind racism. Tribal resistance, however, including the CSKT's and their allies' consistent demands for Tribal recognition disrupts the settler colonialist project, indicating that settler colonization of the National Bison Range is incomplete.

After describing the historical and legislative background on the formation of the National Bison Range and Tribal efforts towards gaining an increased management role, I attend to the nature of historical opposition to Tribal management of the Range and anti-Indian racism in the area in general. I provide a review of settler colonialism theory and critical whiteness studies concepts of white fragility and colorblind racism and explain the methodology used in this study, followed by an outline of the results of my qualitative research. Finally, I argue that the present-day settler narrative of opposition to Tribal management at the National Bison Range exhibits both white fragility and colorblind racism as a part of a larger, ongoing settler colonialist project at the National Bison Range. Further, I suggest that the Tribes' requests for increased management responsibilities of the Range require their recognition, and have--so far--prevented the settler colonialist project from reaching completion. In conclusion, I discuss how this case of settler colonialism in the United States contributes to a broader body of literature on settler colonialism and provide suggestions for future research on issues of settler colonialism.

## Background

The National Bison Range in western Montana is situated in the rolling hills of the Mission Mountain Valley, adjacent to the Flathead River, and is fully encompassed by the Flathead Indian Reservation. While management and ownership of the Range has been contentious since its inception in 1908, it continues to uniquely garner attention from various groups and individuals who feel deeply connected to both the landscape and the American bison who roam the area today. Developing an understanding of the rich historical and legislative contexts that provide context for the National Bison Range, and prior attempts at co-management, is imperative to understanding present-day opposition to Tribal management, as narratives about the CSKT and the history of the Bison Range vary widely and are used in making claim to the Bison Range. In this chapter, I provide a short history of the Flathead Reservation and context for how and why the National Bison Range was created. I then briefly explain the types of relationships people have with the Range, followed by a description of the history of management at the National Bison Range. Finally, I discuss opposition to increased Tribal management of the National Bison Range, particularly focusing on the nature of the claims opponents to the CSKT have made since the early 1970s.

### *History of the Flathead Reservation*

In 1855—though the Salish, Pend d’Oreille, and Kootenai tribes have occupied western Montana since time immemorial—the Tribes and the U.S. Government signed the Treaty of Hell Gate (“Hellgate Treaty”), causing the CSKT to cede over 20 million acres of traditional territory (Saha and Hill-Hart 2015:156). According to the Tribes, the U.S. Government “saw tribal ways of life as contrary to ‘progress’....felt that Indians occupied far more land than they would ever use....did not understand tribal relationships with the land, or the old ways of hunting, fishing, and gathering....[and] could not see [how] all of the land was used by the tribes in a gentle, sustainable way” (Salish-Pend d’Oreille Culture Committee 2012). In exchange for the Tribes’ peace and the land they traditionally occupied, the U.S. government promised the CSKT 1.2 million acres to be reserved

for their exclusive use; this land was declared the Flathead Reservation (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:156). Through the General Allotment Act of 1887, the Federal Government then reconfigured tribal lands across the country by dividing communally owned reservation land into fee-simple plots, typically of 80 or 160 acres (Salish-Pend d'Oreille Culture Committee 2012). Allotment was “an attempt to force individual Indians to live sedentary” lives, much like those of non-tribal homesteaders (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:156). According to the Salish-Pend d'Oreille Culture Committee, U.S. Government officials forced allotment upon recognizing that doing so would undermine the Tribes' historical relationship with land (Salish-Pend d'Oreille Culture Committee 2012). After 25 years, land deemed un-allotted was declared “surplus” and opened to sale to non-tribal settlers without compensation to the respective tribes (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:156).

Through the Flathead Allotment Act of 1904, a similar but separate act of Congress, the Federal Government specifically divided the communally owned Flathead Reservation land into fee-simple plots for Tribal members with any remaining land allotted to non-Tribal settlers seeking to begin their homesteads. Additional tribal lands were deeded to non-Tribal settlers to be used for dams, irrigation, towns and roads (Salish-Pend d'Oreille Culture Committee 2012). This practice created a “checkerboard” land ownership pattern on the Reservation in addition to the forfeiture of some tribal allotments due to personal debt, the combination of which resulted in the transfer of over 500,000 Flathead Reservation acres out of Tribal possession (Upton 2014:56).

During the same time that the Federal Government was transferring tribal land ownership on reservations in the name of homesteading, European American settlers were slaughtering bison to near extinction (Upton 2014:56). By the early 1880s, prolific bison herds that once roamed all over the United States had been almost completely decimated (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:158, Upton 2014:56). This sustained slaughter was designed to undermine the resource base and economy of the Plains Indians, facilitate the establishment of railroads, and make way for settlers and their livestock in the American West (Smits 1994). The combination of total land reconfiguration on the Flathead Reservation and the slaughter of bison to near extinction, in addition to a newly found desire among

some white-European settlers to conserve bison, formed the basis for the creation of the National Bison Range.

### ***Creation of the National Bison Range***

By the late 1800s, bison in the United States had reached alarmingly low numbers, causing concern in both Indigenous and settler communities across the country. Prior to allotment in the early 1900s, CSKT members had noticed that bison were being slaughtered to unsustainable levels. Upon noticing that the bison were in danger of extinction, a Pend d'Oreille Tribal member collected four bison calves from the eastern side of the Continental Divide and brought them to the Flathead Reservation to create what was essentially the first conservation herd (Upton 2014:56). By 1884, the herd had grown to 13 animals, and was acquired by local ranchers Michael Pablo and Charles Allard (USFWS website). The herd continued to be free-ranging and grazed on both sides of the Flathead River which runs through the center of the Flathead Reservation. By 1906, however, Pablo and Allard had sold their animals to various parties in the city of Kalispell, Montana, and in Canada (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:159). According to the Tribes, Michel Pablo was forced to sell his herd because of pressures stemming from allotment and fencing; a free-ranging herd could not be maintained or economically viable under these settler structures (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:159).

In 1905, a group of conservationists and sportsmen in New York formed the American Bison Society. With former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt as honorary president, the organization's mission was to protect, conserve, and advocate for bison in the American West (USFWS website). The American Bison Society estimated that only 325 wild bison remained out of the tens of millions that had once roamed the American West, and together with Theodore Roosevelt they urged Congress to establish a protected area for bison on the Flathead Indian Reservation (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:158). Despite numerous pleas of opposition from CSKT citizens, the Federal Government appropriated 18,524 acres from the Flathead Reservation to establish the National Bison Range in 1908, one of the first wildlife refuges in the country (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:159, Upton 2014:56, 73).

Though Congress allocated funds to pay the Tribes \$1.56 an acre for the land, the Tribes did not intend to sell and received much less than the actual value of the land, even considering an additional settlement made in the 1970s (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:159). To stock the Range with bison, the American Bison Society purchased many animals from the original Pablo-Allard herd, meaning that the present-day bison herd at the National Bison Range directly descends from the Pablo-Allard herd (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:159). According to the Salish-Pend d’Oreille Culture Committee, prior to the formation of the National Bison Range, “the heart of tribal ways of life was tribal ownership of land — land held in common by all members of a tribe, and not owned by any individual person” (Salish-Pend d’Oreille Culture Committee 2012). Ignoring the CSKT’s values of communal land ownership, upon establishing the National Bison Range the U.S. Government erected a fence demarking the lands dedicated to the protection of bison. Because the CSKT had previously held those same lands in common by all their members, the Tribes felt that the constructed fence around the NBR marked the Federal Government’s intent not only to designate *themselves* as primary caretakers of the land and animals within the boundaries of the Range, but also to keep the Tribes out. As such, the Salish name for the National Bison Range, translated to English, is “Fenced-In Place.”

### ***Relationships to the National Bison Range***

Recognition of the CSKT’s historical relationship with bison is critical to understanding present-day conflict over management of the National Bison Range. In addition to land allotment policies that encouraged private land ownership and homesteading on treaty-reserved lands, the creation of the National Bison Range was one of many changes in the landscape that adversely affected Tribal relationships with wild bison (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:159). Historically, the Salish and Pend d’Oreille tribes occupied lands both east and west of the Continental Divide in what is now the state of Montana (Upton 2014:67). Bison thrived on the east side of the Divide and the Tribes relied on them for food, blankets, tools, and many other necessities for centuries (Upton 2014:67). For the CSKT, the cultural and spiritual significance of bison stems from an enduring relationship in which

bison play a central role in the Tribes' cultural traditions, spiritual practices, religious beliefs, and essential lifeways (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:159). It is this relationship which has persisted for time immemorial that forms the basis of the Tribes' requests for increased management responsibility at the National Bison Range today. As CSKT Tribal Council Chairman Fred Matt has proclaimed,

The National Bison Range sits at the heart of our reserved homelands. Historically, we are connected by the foresight of our direct ancestors who preserved the forebears of the bison that roam the Range today. And most importantly, the life-sustaining, cultural connection to the bison, and the land of the Range, is also an honored part of our tradition and value system as Indian People today (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:165)

At the same time, many non-Tribal settlers who live on or near the Flathead Reservation and wider American society in general see the National Bison Range as an iconic unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System, partly because of the symbolic nature of the American bison, as a representation of what was once wild, rugged western American resourcefulness, and recovery from the brink of extinction (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:160). For example, an informational document linked on the USFWS National Bison Range web page states:

The Range animal and plant complex is the result of dedicated Service employees, volunteers and partners seeking ways to overcome difficulty and achieve desired outcomes. The National Bison Range represents a full Century of successful development and application of important land and habitat management practices for large mammals within a dynamic, enclosed system. It is a National Treasure, a gift from the past for future generations (USFWS website)

Further, the passage from the USFWS informational document juxtaposed with the quote by Tribal Chairman Fred Matt is representative of the varying ways in which Indigenous peoples and non-Tribal settlers conceptualize time; in settler discourse, a century is an enormous amount of time, whereas Tribal communities often conceptualize their relationship to the land using the phrase "time immemorial."

### ***History of Management at the National Bison Range***

Since 1994, the National Bison Range has been the subject of partnership efforts between the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), whose tribal reservation encompasses the

NBR, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) which administers the Range (Upton 2014:54). Fueled by the desire to continue their historical role as primary stewards to bison, the CSKT began their journey to obtain increased management responsibilities at the Range in 1994 after the Tribal Self Governance Act (TSGA) was passed by Congress (Upton 2014:55). The TSGA provides the legal foundation for management partnerships and collaborative efforts between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Tribes, authorizing Native American tribes to contract for the operation of Department of Interior (DOI) programs of specific significance to them (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:144, Upton 2014:55)

The TSGA was passed as an amendment to the already existing Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA) of 1975, which was enacted to “establish a meaningful role for federally recognized Indian tribes in the planning, design, and implementation of health, education, and other programs and services to meet the needs of Indian people and communities” (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:151). The goal of this law was to expand opportunities for tribal leadership and institutional capacity and reduce the influence of the Federal Government in order to encourage Indian self-determination (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:151). In 1988, the ISDEEA was amended to include the Self-Governance Demonstration Project, which “allowed ten tribes to conduct self-governance pilot projects” (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:152). The TSGA made the Tribal Self Governance program permanent, allowing eligible tribes to enter into negotiated agreements with agencies in the DOI that were not a part of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but could be shown to have “special geographic, historical, or cultural significance” to a tribe (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:152).

Under the TSGA, Annual Funding Agreements (AFAs) are the mechanism through which tribes may assume programs from DOI agencies (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:152). The Secretary of Interior has major discretion over federal agencies entering into partnerships with tribal governments; eligibility for a program’s inclusion in an AFA is up to the judgement of the person in this role (Upton 2014:55, Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:152). Despite the Secretary of Interior’s power, they may not negotiate an AFA for federal programs, services, functions, or activities that are deemed “inherently

federal,” a term that has frequently surfaced during negotiations of an AFA between the Tribes and the USFWS for programming at the National Bison Range (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:153). *Inherently Federal*, though slippery in its definition, signifies federal functions that are “so intimately related to the public interest as to mandate performance by government employees” (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:153). That is, inherently federal functions are acts that have been determined by the courts not to be “constitutionally delegable,” and are, instead, “discretionary functions vested in Federal officials” (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:153). In 1996, however, the DOI Solicitor concluded that “the U.S. Congress and the Executive Branch may delegate power to tribal governments that is not delegable to private, non-governmental entities; the limits placed on delegation are ‘relaxed’ where the delegation is to a tribe in an area where the tribe exercises sovereign authority” (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:153). In fact, the greater a tribe’s cultural, historical or territorial connection to the land or resource, the greater the likelihood of establishing an AFA agreement (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:153).

For ten years following the enactment of the 1994 Tribal Self Governance Act, the Tribes attempted to negotiate for increased management responsibilities at the National Bison Range, though an agreement was not reached (Upton 2014:63, Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:160). Nevertheless, the CSKT continued to seek ways to be involved with the USFWS programming at the National Bison Range (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:163). During this time, the Tribes continued cooperating with the USFWS on management of various programs at the Range, including wildlife population surveys, grizzly bear management, and reintroduction of the endangered trumpeter swan and peregrine falcon (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:163). Additionally, the Tribes and the USFWS signed multiple memorandums of understanding documents that included financial contracts through which the Tribes provided vegetation monitoring, weed control, and fire management services (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:163). While these agreements were reached outside of the Tribal Self-Governance Program, they fostered a sense of respect for the work the Tribes could accomplish at the National Bison Range. In 2004, the Tribes finally reached a formal Annual Funding Agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for 2005-2006 under which the CSKT “contracted portions of the NBR’s visitor services, biology,

maintenance, and fire control programs, and placed Tribal staff at the NBR to perform the work under a newly created Coordinator position” (Upton 2014:63).

Despite these positive strides for the Tribes, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service abruptly cancelled the agreement in the summer of 2006 “due to acrimony on the part of individual USFWS employees who had opposed the agreement even before it had been signed” (Upton 2014:63). Details of the Tribes & USFWS working relationship under the 2005-2006 AFA are, perhaps unsurprisingly, different depending on whom is asked. While the Tribes reported a lack of communication and cooperation among USFWS staff and excessive tension, USFWS staff alleged that work performed by the CSKT suffered from significant deficiencies, which were outlined in the agency’s 2005 *Report on Implementation of the Annual Funding Agreement at the National Bison Range Complex* (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:169). In response, the Tribes issued a thirty-eight page rebuttal and additionally, a 114-page response contesting the agency’s evaluation of their work, contending that the USFWS evaluations were inaccurate, biased, and unfair (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:170). The CSKT exemplified their claims in their report which outlined, for example, data showing that USFWS staff only completed 25 percent of their scheduled water fowl nest counts leading up to tribal involvement, and then switched to using 100 percent as the performance standard for tribal employees (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:170).

Discussion for a new AFA began in 2006; however, seven USFWS employees filed an informal grievance with the USFWS alleging that the agency created a hostile work environment by signing and implementing the AFA (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:171). Though the Tribes requested specific details of the allegation, they were denied any further information, so instead conducted their own investigation and issued a 153-page report documenting that USFWS employees actively undermined the ability of the Tribes’ employees to adequately perform their work (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:172). After high-level intervention from the DOI, negotiations for a new AFA began (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:173). The resulting AFA covered years 2009-2011 and gave the Tribes an explicit management role in addition to their previous programmatic responsibilities (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:173). It gave the

Tribes contractual control of the NBR's visitor services, biology, maintenance, and fire control programs; however, this agreement additionally allowed the CSKT to operate the entirety of these programs rather than portions of them (Upton 2014:64). During negotiations for this AFA, Tribal Council Chairman D. Fred Matt highlighted the CSKT's sufficiently demonstrated capabilities in addition to their historic, geographic, and cultural connection to the NBR lands, presumably in an effort to combat the accusation that NBR programming is inherently federal (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:164). While the Tribes had a more explicit management role in the 2009-2011 AFA, final authority was to remain vested in the USFWS refuge manager (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:174).

Despite a highly constructive partnership between the entities over the next several months, opponents to the CSKT's participation at the National Bison Range filed suit in federal court, alleging that the partnership violated provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, and TSGA by illegally delegating inherently federal functions to the Tribes (Upton 2014:65, Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:174). Opponents included several former USFWS employees and a D.C.-based alliance of local, state, and federal resource professionals, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), in addition to the Blue Goose Alliance and another set of former refuge employees, who filed a separate suit making similar claims but with the addition of a charge that the defendants had violated the Endangered Species Act (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:174). The suits were combined, and in September of 2010, a U.S. District Court held that the USFWS had violated the Administrative Procedures Act by entering into the 2009-2011 AFA without properly invoking a "categorical exclusion" under NEPA, which inappropriately circumvented a process for determining whether an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was needed (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:174). After the collapse of the second AFA and the Federal court rulings, the Inspector General of the DOI investigated PEER's allegations of the Tribes' mismanagement and in early 2011 released a report clearing the Tribes of any operational deficiencies (Department of the Interior 2011). In 2011, the Tribes submitted a request to the USFWS to negotiate a new AFA for years 2013-2016 and the USFWS

posted a Notice of Intent to conduct an EA for the first draft AFA in order to comply more rigorously with NEPA standards (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:175).

In 2016, the USFWS published a notice of intent to prepare a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the National Bison Range accompanied by an EIS which would evaluate management options, including the preferred option of restoring the National Bison Range to federal trust ownership for the Tribes. In response, the CSKT created the Bison Range Working Group as a forum for the public to submit comment on the proposed plan to create a CCP. In early 2017, however, United States President Donald Trump's newly appointed secretary for the Department of Interior, former Montana Republican congressman Ryan Zinke, reversed course on plans to transfer management of the NBR to the Tribes. USFWS employees continue to prepare the CCP, which is due to be completed July of 2019 and will dictate the plan for the next 15 years at the National Bison Range. Throughout the aforementioned years of negotiations, and interrupted efforts at co-management between the CSKT and the USFWS, local opposition to increased Tribal management was not only present, but highly effective; serious race-based opposition to the CSKT begins in the 1970s, but was almost certainly present well before this time.

### ***Characterizing Early Opposition to the CSKT***

Opposition to increased Tribal management of the National Bison Range began as opposition to the CSKT government and Tribal initiatives in general. Such opposition was based in a white supremacist belief system and has been documented by the Montana Human Rights Network (MHRN). An organization that monitors anti-Indian racism and white supremacist activity in Montana, the MHRN found that between 1970 and the late 1990s, opposition to increased Tribal management responsibilities at the National Bison Range was both white supremacist and anti-Indian racist, and was hugely successful in its anti-Indian efforts. In their report, anti-Indian sentiment often appears as discrimination against the CSKT government or Tribes as a governing body and force, as opposed to specific, individual Tribal members or even CSKT leadership. CSKT regulatory authority on the Flathead Reservation is a source of tension in general, as a majority of residents are non-

Indian settlers who cannot participate in the Tribal government (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:157).

Opponents to increased management for the Tribes have historically articulated their opposition through disdain for the negotiation process, by making racist claims about the Tribes and the CSKT government, and by claiming reverse racism directed towards settlers.

In order to document specific instances of racist language and behaviors, and structural racism in the area displayed by anti-Indian activists, in the year 2000 the Montana Human Rights Network released a report titled *Drumming Up Resentment*, which is an “organizational analysis of the anti-Indian movement in Montana covering the last 30 years,” from the early 1970s to the late 1990s (MHRN 2000:5). MHRN reported that “it was common for the anti-Indian movement to ‘portray the issue as one of whites being oppressed by Indians’ ” (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:162). Further, former program director Ken Toole writes that in Montana, “racism makes the anti-Indian movement distinct from most political movements....[it] is racist to its core” (MHRN 2000:3).

The Montana Human Rights Network notes that the anti-Indian movement in Montana “is as old as the arrival of the first Europeans,” as racism and genocide were institutionalized through virtually all social and political institutions throughout the country (MHRN 2000:5). Further, they write that “the modern anti-Indian movement advocates the continued elimination of Indian people,” noting that “elimination” goes beyond physical elimination, and includes “the termination of [Tribal peoples’] structures of self-governance, the taking of their resources, and by defining them as part of the ‘rest of the country’ through forced assimilation” (MHRN 2000:5).

According to *Drumming Up Resentment*, the anti-Indian movement over the years has been spearheaded by national groups such as the Interstate Congress for Equal Rights and Responsibilities (ICERR), Totally Equal Americans (TEA), and the Citizens Equal Rights Alliance (CERA) (MHRN 2000:7). Formed after the CSKT government began charging a \$5.00 fee for a tribal recreation permit, the leading anti-Indian movement group in Montana unified and named itself Flathead Residents Earning Equality (FREE) in the early 1970s (MHRN 2000:9). FREE, under chairman Del Palmer, opposed the recreation fee, advocated for termination of the Reservation, and provided its

own definition of Tribal members: “more than half Indian” (MHRN 2000:10). In a letter to the editor, one Dixon resident wrote, “In the interest of equality, perhaps taxation could be introduced in a ratio in direct proportion to a tribal member’s non-Indian blood. Certainly his non-Indian blood should feel the guilt and responsibility [felt by non-tribal members] enough to pay that share in taxes” (MHRN 2000:9). Recognizing that the group had been branded a radical right-wing organization, FREE’s leadership began to shift the focus of their organizational messaging to “civil rights,” and so held a large public meeting at Ronan high school on the Flathead Reservation (MHRN 2000:11).

Held on April 18th, 1974, the group’s first public meeting was widely attended, attracting over 2,500 people to the high school gymnasium to cover a variety of issues concerning non-Indians on the Reservation (MHRN 2000:12). In addition to individual community members and families, the meeting garnered institutional representation such as Lake County Commissioner Bill Burley; president of Ronan’s water company, Phil Maxwell; Everitt Foust of the Mission Valley Irrigation District; and John Cochrane of the Flathead Lakers, an association of people who owned property on the shores of Flathead Lake (MHRN 2000:12). By the end of the meeting, discussion that had generally been “predicated on the idea that the Tribal government posed a threat to non-Indian landowners,” evolved to organizing, which led to the formation of Montanans Opposing Discrimination (MOD), a group that opposed what they perceived to be discrimination against non-Tribal settlers (MHRN 2000:12). The newly formed group held another meeting just a month later which attracted over 700 attendees (MHRN 2000:12). During this meeting and in subsequent MOD meetings, Ronan City Attorney Lloyd Ingraham argued that Indian self-determination was inappropriate and flawed, and Del Palmer pushed for the termination of the Reservation (MHRN 2000:13).

Throughout the 1970s, MOD continued to expand its reach across Montana, and in 1977, the Montana and South Dakota Advisory Committees to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights recommended MOD for investigation, saying that “the commission may look into allegations that

there are groups with ties to right-wing or anti-democratic organizations that are trying to gain power over Indian people or trying to deny them their civil rights,” specifically MOD and ICERR (MHRN 2000:16). Although from 1978 to 1982 the organization experienced decline in regular supporters, MOD continued on as a highly influential group in the Flathead (MHRN 2000:19). It opposed, for example, Tribal law enforcement of air-quality standards and Indian education requirements for Montana teachers, despite the fact that such requirements are dictated by the Montana Constitution (MHRN 2000:19).

In the early 1980s, MOD hired a new executive director and the group renamed itself All Citizens Equal (ACE), in hopes to “create a more accurate image” and broaden their reach outside of Montana, a goal which never materialized (MHRN 2000:20). ACE’s first executive director eventually disclosed to the Montana Human Rights Network that he left the organization in the late 1990s because some of the leaders were overly extreme in their views; he said that “ ‘to some of them, the only good Indian was a dead Indian’ ” (MHRN 2000:20). By 1985, ACE’s annual meeting garnered only 70 people in attendance, mostly due to not wanting to be associated with the group’s public image as an overtly racist organization (MHRN 2012:21).

By the late 1980s, ACE supporters had dwindled to its smaller core of committed activists as ACE was still unable to shake its public image as a racist organization (MHRN 2000:22). Although the group was the only active anti-Indian group in 1989 (to be documented), several white supremacist individuals organized themselves, handing out literature branded with swastikas and promoting Christian Identity theology, a religion based on a racist interpretation of the Bible (MHRN 2000:27). In 1989, ACE reformed, yet again, into a group called Citizens Equal Rights Alliance (CERA). This iteration of the anti-Indian movement in Montana focused on narrowly defined national issues; instead of broadly proclaiming anti-Indian and anti-Tribal perspectives, CERA honed in on specific legislation and litigation, often in the context of property rights which enabled the group to downplay outwardly racist attitudes while still working on anti-Indian issues

(MHRN 2000:22). Over time, the various iterations of anti-Indian activity in Montana “demonstrated that no matter the issue, it [was] always opposed to tribal government (MHRN 2000:8).

In addition to institutionalized right-wing groups and individual community members, over the years several higher profile government officials have used their positions of power to energize communities in opposition to the Tribes. The possibility of increased Tribal management at the National Bison Range was met with strong opposition from some local settler community members and government officials in the 1990s and early 2000s when the Tribal Self Governance Act first gave the CSKT a legal mechanism through which they could request greater stewardship of the bison and the land. After the 1994 Tribal Self Governance Act was passed and the CSKT began seeking increased management responsibility of the National Bison Range, U.S. Senator Conrad Burns along with several individual activists wrote a press release accusing the USFWS and the Tribes of secret, closed-door negotiations (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:161). Montana governor at the time, Marc Racicot, supported Senator Burns’ call for public airing of opposition in an effort to energize those viewpoints which were in opposition to the Tribes and to support non-Tribal settlers (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:161). Additionally, Lake County officials convened a public meeting that was both heavily covered by local media and served to give voice to local opponents of increased Tribal management at the Range (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:161).

Emboldened by their local and state government officials and anti-Indian groups, some members of the public expressed opposition to increased tribal management through racist commentary and discriminatory stereotyping (Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:161). Further, “the Tribes’ initial requests for full or nearly full management of the NBR was perceived as a threat to agency authority, even though the USFWS’s statutory authority under the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (and subsequent amendments) was under no threat, particularly in light of the TSGA prohibition against delegation of ‘inherently federal functions’ ”(Saha, Hill-Hart 2015:162). In a letter to the editor, one opponent to increased Tribal management at the Bison Range directed his letter towards the CSKT, asking, “If you want to be separate from all others, why not

renounce all federal support and start your own Bison Range, since you think you can do the job better. Must you have everything just handed to you?” (MHRN 2000:35).

### ***Tribal Resistance***

Anti-Indian opposition has, in some ways, been hugely successful in western Montana, preventing the Tribes from gaining increased management responsibilities at the National Bison Range and working to limit their ability to achieve self-determination, but the Tribes have persisted onwards, both in their desire to manage the National Bison Range and in other successful programming efforts which have contributed to their self-determination. The CSKT is often described as “a People of Vision,” as they are widely known for being “progressive, forward-looking people, known for their cooperative efforts with numerous governments and organizations” (Upton 2014:57). The CSKT owns a number of businesses in the fields of information technology, electronics, environmental remediation, gaming, banking, and tourism, and gain revenue from hydropower and timber resources (Upton 2014:59). Further, the Tribes established a 90,000 acre Mission Mountain Tribal Wilderness in 1982 and currently protect the land as a tribally designated wilderness area, a visionary achievement in natural resources management (Upton 2014:60). Through this project, the CSKT became the first tribes in the United States to establish such a wilderness area and support it with significant policy and personnel (Upton 2014:60). In addition to their impressive resume of successful business and programmatic initiatives, the Tribes have cultivated support from many local and national environmental and conservation organizations including the Sierra Club’s Bitterroot-Mission Group, Hellgate Hunters and Anglers, Mission Mountain Audubon, Friends of the National Bison Range, and the National Wildlife Federation (Upton 2014:142). Despite the Tribes’ demonstrated success in management of a wide variety of environmental projects and business ventures, present-day opposition to the CSKT is still prevalent in discourse surrounding who should manage the National Bison Range. To assist with my objective to explore the nature of the claims made by present-day opponents, in the following section I provide a review of literature on settler colonialism, white fragility, and colorblind racism.

## Literature Review

Settler colonialism and Whiteness are useful frameworks through which opposition to Tribal management of the National Bison Range can be examined and discussed. Anthropologists, critical theorists, Native American studies scholars, geographers, historians, cultural studies scholars, and additional academics and activists have written about settler colonialism theory and the emerging field of critical whiteness studies in an effort to theorize issues of neocolonialism, Indigenous sovereignty, and how racist discourse plays out in post-Jim Crow United States. In this chapter, I expand upon settler colonialism and two concepts from whiteness studies, white fragility and colorblind racism, in order to situate white settler opposition to Tribal management at the National Bison Range.

### *Settler Colonialism*

Settler colonialism is a structure, not an event (Wolfe 1999, 2006). A framework through which claims to traditionally Indigenous land and sovereignty continue to play out, settler colonialism refuses the claim that North American nation-states are *postcolonial* in any sense; the concept instead offers a lens through which we may begin to understand historical and ongoing attempts at Indigenous erasure by non-Tribal settler society (Kauanui 2016, Sturm 2017, Wolfe 2006). While imperial colonialism is defined by “exogenous domination,” settler colonialism is specific type of colonialist project that seeks to displace Indigenous populations and replace them with settlers on the same land, eventually leading to a supreme and unchallenged settler state (Veracini 2011, Wolfe 2006).

Though intimately intertwined, imperial colonization and settler colonization have slightly different goals; imperial colonization seeks to exploit labor of the colonized, while settler colonization seeks to erase the colonized, specifically Indigenous people (Veracini 2011). Additionally, while colonization is conceptualized as a permanent operation, settler colonialism is instead “characterized by a persistent drive to ultimately supersede the conditions of its operation”

(Veracini 2011). That is, the end-goal of settler colonialism—through non-Tribal settlement on the land, making claim to it, and erasing the Indigenous—is to *extinguish* itself whereas that of colonization is to *reproduce* itself (Veracini 2011). The goal of settler colonialist projects, therefore, is to achieve a “post-colonial” condition, wherein the settler has fully erased and replaced the colonized Indigenous with themselves (Veracini 2011). Settler colonialism attempts to eliminate the Indigenous perspective as a challenge to settler society through the physical elimination of Indigenous peoples along with the conceptual elimination of Indigenous perspectives by asserting false narratives indicating settler belonging.

Though scholars of many disciplines produce work on settler colonialism, research using the concept has been more prolific in recent years particularly for scholars in Australia and Aotearoa (New Zealand), while a smaller amount of work using settler colonialism has emerged from places primarily colonized by post-Columbian European or Euro-American empires such as Canada, the United States, South Africa, and Israel (Barker 2012). Historians Tracy Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds write that while there has been prolific work on settler colonialism in settler colonies of the Pacific basin, in the US and US Pacific territories, there has not been the same national focus on the settler colonial past, but this is certainly not due to an absence of strong Indigenous assertions of presence and survival” (Banivanua Mar and Edmonds 2010:18).

As a result of such renewal of interest in colonization and particularly in settler colonialism in places other than the United States, though, there is a recent “reopening and reinvigorating of debates over self-determination and Indigenous resistance” among academics engaging with settler colonialism as a theory in their works (Barker 2012). Though “surprisingly few studies of settler colonisation have focused on the transformations of space that gave effect to dispossession,” my research discusses in depth the conditions through which the particular space of the National Bison Range has existed as a project of settler colonialism for centuries (Banivanua Mar and Edmonds 2010:4). This particular research contributes to the broader body of literature on settler colonialism by providing an example of an ongoing settler colonialist project involving federally designated public

lands in the United States. I also bring issues of Whiteness into the conversation on settler colonialism in an attempt to more deliberately display settler colonialism as a project of white supremacy, regardless of the intention of settler colonizers. The following sections describe settler colonialism in three parts: settler colonialism is land-based, requires settlers claiming Indigenous land as their own, and is predicated on erasure of both the Indigenous and the settler (Wolfe 1999, 2006).

#### LAND-BASED

In settler colonialism, “the most important concern is land/water/air/subterranean earth” (Tuck and Yang 2012:5). Settlers “come with the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain (Tuck and Yang 2012:5). While imperial colonialism is predicated on exploitation of labor, settler colonialism functions through the extraction of land as a resource, that is, through territorialism (Wolfe 2006). Historian Patrick Wolfe writes that “land is life—or at least land is necessary for life,” declaring that contests for land can be, and often are, contests for life (Wolfe 2006:387). Meanwhile, Indigenous peoples “are those who have creation stories, not colonization stories, about how [they] came to be in a particular place—indeed how [they] came to *be a place*. [Their] relationships to land comprise [their] epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies” (Tuck and Yang 2012:6). In the process of settler colonization, however, “land is remade into property and human relationships to land are restricted to the relationship of the owner to his property” (Tuck and Yang 2012:5). Wolfe argues that the primary motive for the elimination of Indigenous peoples by settlers is access to territory, concluding that “territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element” (Wolfe 2006:388).

#### CLAIMSMAKING

Another key difference between settler colonialism and imperial colonialism, as indicated by Wolfe (1999, 2006), involves settlers claiming Indigenous lands as their own. That settlers “come to stay” (Wolfe 2006) further highlights that settler colonialism “cannot be relegated to the past as something with only residual effects; rather, we need to understand it as an ongoing structure of oppression in which settlers actively maintain their rights to occupy Indigenous territories in the

present” (Sturm 2017:342, Rowe and Tuck 2016). Sturm (2017) and others argue that this oppressive relationship becomes justified through racialization “so that Indigenous individuals and their collective polities are made to seem inferior to Western European ones and thus to have less legitimate political claims” (Sturm 2017:342, Kauanui 2008). The phenomenon of justification of settlement via racialization can be explored in more depth with the addition of critical whiteness studies theory.

### INDIGENOUS ERASURE

The erasure of Indigenous peoples is central to the settler colonialist project. Erasure happens simultaneously both in the material and the ideological. As critical theorists Tuck and Yang write, “everything within a settler colonial society strains to destroy or assimilate the Native in order to disappear them from the land” and note that “this is how a society can have multiple simultaneous and conflicting messages about Indigenous peoples” such as “ ‘Indigenous peoples are located in faraway reservations’ ” or that “ ‘contemporary Indigenous people are less Indigenous than prior generations’ ” (Tuck and Yang 2012:9). Anthropologist Circe Sturm argues that erasure serves the goals of settler society; “to avoid [Indigenous peoples] making an alternative claim to the land and their own political authority over it, they must be made to disappear” (Sturm 2017:342). Settler colonialism is affirmed through Wolfe’s “logic of elimination” (Wolfe 1999, 2006). While Wolfe notes that the settler-colonial logic of elimination can manifest as genocide, he argues that settler colonialism and genocide must be distinguished: “settler colonialism is inherently eliminatory but not invariably genocidal” (Wolfe 2006:288). Thus, settler colonialism is a project of ongoing political erasure and refuses “the idea that North American nation-states are in any sense *post*colonial societies;” the colonialist project is ongoing (Sturm 2017:341). Though Wolfe’s logic of elimination can be understood in terms of actual genocide, it also extends to cultural erasure (Griffith 2017, Henderson 2017, Smith 2012).

Various scholars position their research within a settler colonialism framework that elaborates upon types of erasure resulting from ongoing processes of colonization. In social justice

education scholar Jane Griffith's (2017) research on ephemera produced during the construction of the Hoover Dam, for example, she offers the concept of "dam/ning" to consider "how tactics used to preserve White settler memory, history, and claims to land and water seemingly appear to affirm Black and Indigenous lives but in fact veil violence" (Griffith 2017:31). This violent erasure of Indigenous lives is played out through various forms of cultural production, one form of which being narrative (Griffith 2017). Narratives at the Hoover Dam, she argues, exist to romanticize Indigenous methods of working with the Colorado River, but do not describe ways in which Indigenous knowledge could have been beneficial to settlers (Griffith 2017). Additionally, Griffith describes another narrative which includes policing the memory of White laborers; specifically, she notes how any attempt to recognize the labor and skill of Indigenous people in the area are policed and diminished. Narratives such as these "exemplify how settlers determine what Indigenous histories they desire and which they mute or discard" (Griffith 2017:32). Griffith's research is a direct example of cultural erasure that is both historically rooted in the construction of the Hoover Dam, but continues as a "process of becoming," a formation of settler colonialism, and in this sense, a never-ending project of erasure.

It is necessary to address theories of indigeneity in the context of settler colonialism in order to resist further erasure of Indigenous peoples (Kauanui 2016). Indigeneity should not be seen as a distinct racial, social, or cultural identity; rather, it is an "explicitly political subjectivity tied to the experience of living in the shadow of settler colonialism with an everyday sense of ongoing territorial invasion and dispossession" (Sturm 2017:343). Kauanui elaborates that like race, indigeneity is a socially constructed category rather than one based on the notion of immutable biological characteristics (Kauanui 2016:4). Anthropologist Audra Simpson writes that the condition of indigeneity in North America is to have survived acquisitive and genocidal processes, and thus to have called up the failure of the project itself (Simpson 2011). Simpson further writes that "in terms of both cultural and political struggles, one of the tenets of any claim to indigeneity is that Indigenous sovereignty—framed as a responsibility more often than a right—is derived from original

occupancy, or at least prior occupancy” (Simpson 2011:211). This characterization of indigeneity begins to relate it to struggles for sovereignty.

Indigeneity and sovereignty must be examined together and in the context of settler colonialism. Though settler colonialism and sovereignty are “frequently expressed as entwined critical frameworks that center Indigenous perspectives,” when taken together they offer a greater theoretical insight about the nature of political authority (Sturm 2017:340). Sturm writes that, by overlaying lenses of indigeneity, settler colonialism, and sovereignty, “we see that policies intent on social and political death, such as assimilation, missionization, relocation, allotment, termination, and even political incorporation via citizenship, were all designed to eliminate Indigenous assertions of sovereignty over the land” (Sturm 2017:343). These types of structural elimination of Indigenous claims to sovereignty over the land furthers the logic of and provides and means for elimination.

Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s (1998, 2005) concept of “bare life” is also useful in the context of settler colonialism. He suggests that “modern state societies enact a particularly insidious form of sovereign violence by creating a state of exception, one that gives them the power to kill or make live and allows them to strip certain human beings of their political significance, reducing them to bare life and making them subject to state-sanctioned biological death” (Sturm 2017:342). Sturm asserts that Agamben’s ideas are helpful for scholars seeking to understand how forms of state violence become justified in the name of national sovereignty (Sturm 2017:342). At the same time, direct claims to Indigenous sovereignty are more politically difficult to achieve because such claims challenge the basis of the United States itself (Smith 2012). Thus, “different colonialisms have led to multiple and competing forms of sovereignty that are messy and incomplete” (Sturm 2017:343). More, these competing sovereignties “become obvious in the context of U.S. federalism, where the federal government, states, and tribes all assert different forms of sovereignty and vie for political authority over the same land base” (Sturm 2017: 343). In this sense, the settler state “must confront directly that which it has always sought to deny: the ongoing sovereign presence of Indigenous peoples throughout spaces claimed by settlers” (Henderson 2017:42). Here, it is

significant to acknowledge and reiterate Simpson: “Indian sovereignty is real; it is not a moral language game or a matter to be debated in ahistorical terms. It is what they have; it is what, in the case of the United States, they have left; and thus it should be upheld and understood robustly--especially as Indians work within, against, and beyond these existing frameworks” (Simpson 2011:211).

#### ERASURE OF THE SETTLER

Further, on erasure, political scientist Phil Henderson suggests that it also exists in the form of settlers’ erasure of their own identity as colonizer. Settler colonizers, he writes, operate under a double move: acting to disappear and erase both the settler and Indigenous peoples as politically articulable subjects (Henderson 2017:41), which flattens the diversity in settler and Indigenous groups’ experiences. Henderson employs the concept of “the imago,” described by feminists as “the psychic formation of the body that is constructed through a subject’s socialization and psychic development,” to argue that settlers—in their desire to produce a firm imago—are always in a psychically defensive posture (Henderson 2017:47,50). Henderson argues that amongst settler states’ most effective methods of erasure is through nationalism (Henderson 2017). Citing Mishuana Goeman, Henderson describes nationalism as a powerful tool of erasure which produces within settlers a strong attachment to the colonized territory (Henderson 2017). Deploying a chain of cultural, historical, political, and religious symbols that together offer meaning on both an individual and communal level, nationalism uses strong “affective resonances” (Henderson 2017). Specifically, “scenes of ‘honor’ and ‘glory’ on a battlefield, memories of tragedy, or awe-inspiring achievements are all common nationalistic tropes” (Henderson 2017:42). Thus, nationalism functions as a mechanism of erasure for the settler, which in turn furthers the settler colonialist project.

#### RESISTING THE SETTLER COLONIALIST PROJECT

Less prevalent in the literature on settler colonialism is discussion on resistance to the settler colonialist project, but it is addressed by some scholars. Cultural theorists Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, for example, write that decolonization involves “the repatriation of Indigenous land and life”

simultaneous to “the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted; that is, *all* of the land, and not just symbolically” (Tuck and Yang 2012:1,7). Because the goal of settler colonialism is for Indigenous people to disappear, “it is Indigenous persistence and survival that become crucial...it is resistance and survival that make certain that [both] colonialism and settler colonialism are never ultimately triumphant” (Veracini 2011:4). Colonized peoples may “decide to move on in order to deny labour (i.e., runaway slaves),” meanwhile settler colonized people, in an attempt to unsettle the landscape, may go so far as to “decide to engage in ostensibly unequal labor relations in order to stay put” (Veracini 2011:4). Because “settler colonialism is designed to produce a fundamental discontinuity...until it actually *extinguishes* the settler colonial relation,” decolonization of settler colonialist projects must strive for continual recognition of the Indigenous (Veracini 2011:7). If colonialism ends with the colonizer’s departure, settler colonialism ends with an established Indigenous permanence, in which Indigenous people are recognized as politically articulable subjects (Veracini 2011:7).

According to geographer Adam J. Barker, historians Mar and Edmonds pick up where Veracini left off in their edited volume *Making Settler Colonialism Space* (Barker 2012). As Barker notes, “Mar and Edmonds’ volume is an imagination of a variety of ways that settler colonial spaces can be countered, unmade or undermined,” leading to the final quarter of the volume in which contributors identify “thirdspaces,” or “middle grounds that defy settler colonial logics,” in an effort to explore the unfinished business of settler colonialism and imagine how settler colonial spaces might countered, unmade, or undermined (Barker 2012). Further, they address the constructed spaces that are “untethered from a simply geographic location, but which are no less made by settler colonial contests over historical grievances, belonging and survival” (Banivanua Mar and Edmonds 2010:15). Likewise, Veracini argues, if settler colonialism relies on a completed settlement status, a move towards decolonization “must emphasize open-endedness” (Veracini 2011:9).

Barker further states that Paulette Regan, in *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*, is concerned with “the ways settler colonizers think

about the past and how they serve to generate colonial dynamics in the present,” as settler colonialism also deeply affects the colonizer (Barker 2012). Barker, summarizing Regan’s work, writes that “it is impossible not to know about the history of colonial violence involved in making Canada, so settler colonizers choose instead to disavow their own complicity” in the making of Canada as a settler colonized state (Barker 2012). Using the example of Indian Residential Schools (IRS) in Canada, Regan argues in favor of settler truth-telling as a practice of decolonization and a foil to typical practices of ignoring the wounds we have inflicted on ourselves as settler colonizers (Regan 2010). The practice of sharing such truths requires that settlers “risk revealing ourselves as vulnerable ‘not-knowers’ who are willing to examine our dual positions as colonizer-perpetrators and colonizer-allies,” an uncomfortable position for most white people who can instead easily ignore the truth of history (Regan 2010:28). Telling the whole truth about the history and legacy of the IRS system, she argues, “means that settlers must consider the possibility that our relationship with Native people has never been predominantly peaceful or reconciliatory” (Regan 2010:5). For Regan, settler colonialism is disrupted by acknowledging settler histories that exist within the minds, hearts, and cultures of Canadians and other settler colonizers, and by working to retell the truthful historical narratives instead of perpetuating stories deeply entrenched in nationalist cultures (Regan 2010). Barker argues further that Mar and Edmonds’ and Regan’s works “create a new kind of space in the settler colonial literature: spaces of critical hope for settler decolonization now and in the future” (Barker 2012). In the sections that follow, I further characterize the innerworkings of settler colonialism in the European-settled United States by discussing two topics within the field of critical whiteness studies: white fragility and colorblind racism.

### ***Critical Whiteness Studies***

Cultural theorists Rowe and Tuck argue that “whiteness must be more fully interrogated as a settler project, especially within U.S. contexts” (Rowe and Tuck 2016:7). While some scholars have suggested that the emerging field of whiteness studies was born as a result of black people needing to understand white people in order to survive, particularly in societies built on slavery as an economic

model such as in the United States (hooks 1998:338), the foundation of whiteness studies is the fact that in European settler colonized society, the white experience is understood to be the baseline reality for all people. An interdisciplinary field made up of historians, social scientists, critical media theorists and others, those who write and think about whiteness focus on it as a *construction*, including how diverse groups in the United States came to identify and be characterized by others as white and what that has meant for the social order (Kolchin 2002:155). Whiteness studies scholars start from the now widely shared premise that race is an ideological or social construct as opposed to a fact of biology (Kolchin 2002:155), however, they additionally acknowledge that race conditions material lives and livelihoods. Further, whiteness studies asserts that race making applies to white people as well as nonwhites (Kolchin 2002:155).

Historically, white people in the United States have demanded and obtained the privilege to not be critiqued. Bell hooks writes,

In white supremacist society, white people can "safely" imagine that they are invisible to black people since the power they have historically asserted, and even now collectively assert over black people accorded them the right to control the black gaze. As fantastic as it may seem, racist white people find it easy to imagine that black people cannot see them if within their desire they do not want to be seen by the dark Other" (hooks 1998:340).

In this invisibility, white people move throughout the world in a way that is seemingly void of race; however, all other races are affected negatively by white supremacy, or the belief that white people are superior to those of all other races. We/they<sup>2</sup> "live in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress" (DiAngelo 2011:54). Additionally, anthropologist Jeff Maskovsky crafts the term "white nationalist postracialism" to describe the paradoxical politics of twenty-first-century white racial resentment: that these settler groups seek to reclaim the nation for white Americans while also denying an ideological investment in white supremacy (Maskovsky 2017: 434).

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<sup>2</sup> We/they and our/their is used in this paper to include the fact that the writer both identifies as white and studies white people.

## WHITENESS AND RACISM

Under the framework of settler colonialism, oppressed groups are racialized according to the needs of the settler society. Wolfe (2006) underscores this idea by highlighting the juxtaposition between the ways settler colonialism racializes Black people and Indigenous people in the United States. In the wake of slavery, Black people “became fully racialized in the ‘one-drop rule,’ whereby any amount of African ancestry, no matter how remote, and regardless of phenotypical appearance, makes a person Black” (Wolfe 2006:388). For Indigenous people, on the other hand, “non-Indian ancestry compromised their indigeneity, producing so-called ‘half-breeds,’ a regime that persists in the form of blood quantum regulations,” that is, Indigenous people were—and are—required to have a certain percentage of native blood to be considered Indigenous (Wolfe 2006:388). While enslaved peoples’ reproduction augmented their owners’ wealth, “Indigenous people obstructed settlers’ access to land, so their increase was counterproductive” (Wolfe 2006:388). The stark juxtaposition of the way race is formed among these two groups illuminates again Wolfe’s “logic of elimination.” In this sense, race is conceptualized as a “formation,” that is, “it is made in the targeting” (Wolfe 2006:388). Wolfe therefore argues that settler colonialism has not been targeted at particular races, since race cannot be taken as given, rather “it is made in the targeting” (Wolfe 2006:388). He continues, “Black people were racialized as slaves; slavery constituted their blackness. Correspondingly, Indigenous North Americans were not killed, driven away, romanticized, assimilated, fenced in, bred White, and otherwise eliminated as the original owners of the land but as Indians” (Wolfe 2006:388).

Indigenous studies scholar Andrea Smith argues that particularly in the United States, white supremacy and settler colonialism intersect, and in fact, a lack of attention to settler colonialism hinders the analysis of race and white supremacy developed by scholars who focus on race and racial formation (Smith 2012). She argues that there are three primary logics of white supremacy: slavability and anti-black racism, which anchors capitalism; genocide, which anchors colonialism; and orientalism, which anchors war (Smith 2012). Genocide, the second logic of white supremacy, holds that Indigenous peoples must both disappear, and be disappearing constantly (Smith 2012). This

argument dovetails with Wolfe's articulation of the "logic of elimination." Further, Smith notes that through this logic, non-Native peoples become the rightful inheritors of all that was Indigenous—land, resources, Indigenous spirituality, and culture, and that groups become trapped within a particular pillar of white supremacy because they become seduced with the prospect of participating in other pillars. For example, all non-native peoples are promised the ability to join in on the colonial project of settling on Indigenous lands (Smith 2012).

While mainstream definitions of racial discrimination typically involve individuals' racial prejudice, which can be experienced by people of any race, whiteness scholars identify racism as structural, and therefore "encompassing economic, political, social, and cultural structures, actions, and beliefs that systematize and perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources, and power between white people and people of color" (DiAngelo 2011:56). DiAngelo notes that racism is not fluid in the United States, that is, it does not one day benefit whites and another benefit people of color (DiAngelo 2011:56). Alternatively, racism in the United States is "historic, traditional, normalized, and deeply embedded in the fabric of U.S. society" (DiAngelo 2011:56). Because whiteness "refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed," it can be conceptualized as "a constellation of processes and practices rather than as a discrete entity" such as skin color alone (Frankenberg 1999:1, DiAngelo 2011:56). It is "dynamic," "relational," and operates at all times on many levels such as assertions of "basic rights, values, beliefs, perspectives, and experiences" which are supposedly commonly shared by all, but are actually only consistently enjoyed by white people (DiAngelo 2011:56). The purpose of whiteness studies is to reveal processes of racism and privilege in both traditional and modern forms (DiAngelo 2011:56). White fragility and colorblind racism are particularly useful for examining the racialized nature of the white experience and the hierarchy it creates and maintains.

#### WHITE FRAGILITY

White people have demanded and achieved the privilege of not needing to reckon with race to survive in a white supremacist society. This racialized experience has created an "insulated

environment of racial protection” which “builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate race-based stress” (DiAngelo 2011:54). A term coined by academic and author, Robin DiAngelo, white fragility seeks to name the state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress for white people becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves (DiAngelo 2011:54). These moves include emotive displays of anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation (DiAngelo 2011:54). The behaviors of white fragility function cyclically, reinstating the white supremacist racial equilibrium. When directly confronted about their whiteness, most white people experience withdrawal, emotional incapacitation, guilt, and cognitive dissonance (DiAngelo 2011:55). White people are “often at a loss for how to respond in constructive ways” about race privilege and racism because we/they<sup>31</sup> “have not had to build the cognitive or affective skills or develop the stamina that would allow for constructive engagement across racial divides” (DiAngelo 2011:57).

DiAngelo identifies seven factors that cultivate white fragility: segregation, universalism and individualism, entitlement to racial comfort, racial arrogance, racial belonging, psychic freedom, and constant representation (DiAngelo 2011:58-63). Because white people live mostly segregated lives in a white supremacist society, we/they “receive little or no authentic information about racism and thus are unprepared to think about it critically or with complexity” (DiAngelo 2011:58). Through universalism and individualism, whites are “taught to see [their/our] perspectives as objective and representative of reality;” because whites are positioned outside of culture, we/they experience daily life as universal humans who can represent all of human experience (DiAngelo 2011:59). While individualism requires whites to see everyone as different, universalism requires whites to see everyone as the same: “everyone is human” (DiAngelo 2011:59). This is often achieved through denying or downplaying the significance of race. At the same time, individualism “allows whites to distance themselves from the actions of their racial group and demand to be granted the benefit of the doubt, as individuals, in all cases” (DiAngelo 2011:59). Further, under the logic of individualism, whites often respond defensively when linked to other whites as a group, or if they are “accused” of

collectively benefiting from racism, “because as individuals, each white person is ‘different’ from any other white person and expects to be seen as such” (DiAngelo 2011:60).

According to DiAngelo, white people feel entitled to the privilege of racial comfort. As the dominant racial group in settler society, white people “have not had to build tolerance for racial discomfort,” therefore, when discomfort arises, whites typically respond by blaming the person or event that triggered the discomfort, often a person of color (DiAngelo 2011:60). Further, DiAngelo argues that white people trivialize our/their history of brutality towards people of color through confusing comfort with safety (DiAngelo 2011:61). White people develop racial arrogance through constantly viewing the white self positively and the racial other negatively; this racial ideology causes many whites to believe our/their financial and professional successes are due to their own efforts and not our/their race privilege (DiAngelo 2011:61). In a white dominant society, racial belonging for whites “becomes deeply internalized and taken for granted” (DiAngelo 2011:62). This is due to the fact that white people have the privilege to not need to engage with the feelings of being racially left out; indeed, “it is rare for most whites to experience a sense of not belonging, and such experiences are usually very temporary, easily avoidable situations” (DiAngelo 2011:62).

Because “race is constructed as residing in people of color,” most whites feel that we/they don’t bear the social burden of race; white people “move easily through our society without a sense of [themselves] as racialized subjects,” thus freeing ourselves/themselves psychically from having to think about race (DiAngelo 2011:62). The final pillar of white fragility is constant representation and messaging that white people are more valuable (DiAngelo 2011:63). White people living in a white dominant society constantly receive messages that we/they are superior, for example, through representation in history books, centrality in media and advertising, our/their teachers, role-models, heroes, everyday discourse on “good” and “bad” neighborhoods, religious iconography that depicts a white god, and more (DiAngelo 2011:63). These constant messages of superiority are difficult to block from being internalized, even if one explicitly rejects the notion that white people are inherently superior.

Through each of these seven tenets, white fragility becomes a more coherent theme of whiteness studies. White fragility plays out behaviorally when one calls attention to a white person's advantages, which often triggers patterned feelings of "confusion, defensiveness, and righteous indignation" (DiAngelo 2011:64). Whites, in turn, view themselves as the victim; instead of acknowledging and taking responsibility for their white privilege, we/they claim to have been treated unfairly through being challenged in position or expectation to be required to listen to people of color (DiAngelo 2011:64). Not only do white people come to view themselves as the victim in racialized conflict, but we/they experience cognitive dissonance when confronted by situations outside of what DiAngelo defines as the "good/bad binary" (DiAngelo 2018:143).

In her book, *White Fragility: Why it's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, DiAngelo notes that one of the most effective adaptations of contemporary racism is "the good/bad binary" (DiAngelo 2018:143). She writes that after the civil rights movement in the United States, "to be a good, moral person and to be complicit with racism became mutually exclusive. You could not be a good person and participate in racism; only bad people were racist" (DiAngelo 2018:144). Racism, therefore, needed to be "reduced to simple, isolated, and extreme acts of prejudice" that were "intentional, malicious, and based on conscious dislike of someone because of race" (DiAngelo 2018:144). She argues further that the good/bad binary created a social environment in which it was effectively impossible for the average white person to understand, much less interrupt racism (DiAngelo 2018:145). When confronted by their racism, white people often exhibit a defensiveness that is "rooted in the false but widespread belief that racial discrimination can only be intentional," which leads to aversive racism: a more subtle but insidious form of racism that allow people to maintain a positive self-image while enacting racism (DiAngelo 2018:100). Significantly, because of its various subconscious forms, racism can be unintentional while having discriminatory outcomes. The following section on colorblind racism further illuminates how racism is demonstrated through language and the discriminatory and structural effects of subconscious racism.

## COLORBLIND RACISM

In *Racism Without Racists*, sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva writes that “nowadays, except for members of white supremacist organizations, few whites in the United States claim to be ‘racist,’ ” saying that they “don’t see any color, just people” (Bonilla-Silva 2006:1). He contends that “whites have developed powerful explanations—which have ultimately become justifications—for contemporary racial inequality that exculpate them from any responsibility for the status of people of color” and labels this new racial ideology: *colorblind racism* (Bonilla-Silva 2006:2). In contrast to the Jim Crow era of America, wherein “racial inequality was enforced through overt means” like signs directly stating that certain raced people are not allowed to do certain things, presently, racial practices operate through more covert behaviors (Bonilla-Silva 2006:3). Instead of calling people racist names, colorblind racism “otherizes softly,” by relying upon elements of traditional liberalism such as work ethic, rewards by merit, equal opportunity, individualism, and more for racially illiberal goals (Bonilla-Silva 2006:2,7).

Bonilla-Silva contends that white supremacy looks different today than it has in the past; “‘new racism’ practices have emerged that are more sophisticated and subtle” (Bonilla-Silva 2006:25). These practices, however, are just as effective as ones from the Jim Crow era at maintaining the racial status quo (Bonilla-Silva 2006:25). Because “the normative climate in the post-civil rights era has made illegitimate the public expression of racially based feelings and viewpoints,” colorblind racism can be difficult to study with survey methods and interviews or mixed-methods are more appropriate (Bonilla-Silva 2006:11). In his book chapter, “The Style of Colorblindness: How to Talk Nasty About Minorities without Sounding Racist,” Bonilla-Silva outlines the five stylistic components of colorblind racist language: whites’ avoidance of direct racial language to express their racial views, using central “semantic moves” to avoid dangerous discussions, using projection as a rhetorical tool, using diminutives in colorblind race talk, and total incoherence.

The first stylistic component of colorblind racist discourse is the avoidance of directly using racial language. He writes that the civil rights era “shattered, among many things, the United States’

norms about public discussions on race”; using certain words and saying things that could be perceived as racist was deemed immoral and therefore socially unacceptable (Bonilla-Silva 2006:103). The space for race-talk was, however, never replaced with any socially accepted mechanism for working through race issues; “there is little space for socially sanctioned speech” about race-centered matters (Bonilla-Silva 2006:103). Whites, however, do still talk about people of color in public, though we/they use more subtle and coded language, and often will still use Jim Crow-era terminology for people of color in more private or comfortable situations (Bonilla-Silva 2006:104). Bonilla-Silva highlights an example of such subtle and coded language that includes using jokes as a mechanism to express discriminatory views instead of saying something negative about a person of color that could cause others to perceive the speaker as racist (Bonilla-Silva 2006:103).

The second stylistic component of colorblind racism is using certain “semantic moves” to avoid dangerous discussions. Whites will often use speech like “apparent denials (‘I don’t believe that, but...’), claims of ignorance (‘I don’t know’), or other moves in the process of stating their racial views,” rhetorically shielding ourselves/themselves to save face (Bonilla-Silva 2006:105). Some of the most common verbal strategies in post-civil rights racial speech include phrases such as: “I’m not prejudiced but...” and “some of my best friends are...” (Bonilla-Silva 2006:105). Whites will use one of these phrases, for example, and follow it with a racist remark (Bonilla-Silva 2006:105). Whites will also interject comments insisting the topic they are discussing is about anything but race, such as “it’s not a prejudice thing” in order to “dismiss the fact that race affects an aspect of the respondent’s life” and deny structures which enable racial privilege (Bonilla-Silva 2006:110).

Bonilla-Silva’s third stylistic component of colorblind racism is projection as a rhetorical tool; whites will use projection to both avoid responsibility and feel good about ourselves/themselves (Bonilla-Silva 2006:112). Included in this idea is the issue of minority self-segregation. For example, whites will say that minority groups have segregated themselves, saying they’re “off in their own world” (Bonilla-Silva 2006:112). Additionally, whites will use projection as a tool by saying things such as “minorities live too much in the past.” (Bonilla-Silva 2006:113). This

statement is “couched as a ‘concern’ ” for minority groups, when in fact it is a projection of whites’ own insecurities and desires (Bonilla-Silva 2006:113).

The fourth stylistic component of colorblind racism involves whites using diminutives in colorblind race talk. Bonilla-Silva writes that “because maintaining a nonracial, colorblind stance is key in the post-civil rights era, whites rely on diminutives to soften their racial blows;” we/they will use phrases like “I am just a little bit concerned about...” and “I am just a little bit against...” instead of directly stating what they agree or disagree with using direct language (Bonilla-Silva 2006:114). Such diminutives allow white people to say what they wish without claiming a direct point of view that may be understood to be racist.

Finally, the fifth stylistic component of colorblind racism is total incoherence. White people, when talking about racial issues, will make grammatical mistakes, take lengthy pauses, or repeat phrases multiple times (Bonilla-Silva 2006-116). Because “the new racial climate in America forbids the open expression of racially based feelings, views, and positions, when whites discuss issues that make them feel uncomfortable, they become almost incomprehensible” (Bonilla-Silva 2006:116). Because white people are not used to having the space to consider and interrogate issues of race, especially their own racism, we/they have a difficult time articulating perspectives. This is true especially if such perspectives may be perceived as racist, as in post-Jim Crow America racism is recognized as immoral.

Storytelling is an additional factor to colorblind racism, perhaps because it is central to communication (Bonilla-Silva 2006:123). Storytelling is significant and powerful in discourse because “the stories seem to lie in the realm of the given, in the matter-of-fact world” and therefore can act as a window through which researchers may be able to understand the ways people think (Bonilla-Silva 2006:123). Storytellings shows up as *storylines* and *testimony* (Bonilla-Silva 2006:124). While storylines are fabel-like, based on “impersonal, generic arguments with little narrative content” and show up as “ideological ‘of course’ racial narratives,” testimonies are “accounts by which the narrator is a central

participant in the story or is close to the characters in the story,” providing them the authenticity and emotionality that only “firsthand” narratives can display (Bonilla-Silva 2006:124).

Major storylines of colorblind racism include: “The past is the past,” which are stories that minimize the discrimination frame; “I wasn’t responsible” which signifies that present generations are not responsible for past colonialist brutalities; the “bootstrap” storyline, which asks why one minority group hasn’t become successful if another comparable “model minority” group has, flattening the experience of all voluntary and non-voluntary immigrant groups; and “I did not get a job or promotion because of a minority,” which allows whites the privilege to never have to consider the possibility that we/they are not qualified for a job, promotion, or college (Bonilla-Silva 2006:131). While almost all whites tend to use testimonial stories when talking about racial issues to preserve the self or to authoritatively describe negative and positive interactions with people of color, storylines “serve whites as legitimate conduits for expressing anger, animosity, and resentment toward racial minorities” (Bonilla-Silva 2006:146).

### ***Settler Colonialism and Whiteness at the National Bison Range***

Settler colonialism and critical whiteness studies provide a helpful framework through which to examine the ongoing conflict over who should manage the National Bison Range. This research answers the question: to what degree is settler colonialism perpetuated at the National Bison Range through opposition to Tribal management? Because the settler-colonialist framework looks at colonialism as an incomplete, ongoing, land-based project, it is necessary to not only interrogate historical claims to land but also to examine settler colonial projects as “processes of becoming,” as articulated by anthropologist Ann Stoler (2008) in her discussion of imperial formations. While settler colonialism literature is often used by those researching in Canada and Aotearoa (New Zealand), settler colonialism in the United States has been researched less frequently, yet is arguably one of the most appropriate lenses through which to examine issues of public-land management, ownership, and use. It is also important to integrate discussion of whiteness into research on settler colonialism in the United States, as white supremacy and settler colonialism are entangled and should

be addressed together to fully encompass the breadth of natural resource conflicts like management of the National Bison Range.

## Methodology

In preparation for this research, I analyzed 153 public comments made by both those who oppose and those who support Tribal management of the National Bison Range. Individuals submitted comments to the Bison Range Working Group, which was established by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) of the Flathead Indian Reservation to “provide a forum for public information and comment on the proposed legislation to restore the lands of the National Bison Range in federal trust ownership for the benefit of the CSKT” (Bison Range Working Group 2016). I found that comments from those who oppose Tribal management of the National Bison Range could be characterized as anti-Tribal racist, and became curious about the nature of the discourse among opponents. As such, the purpose of this study was to seek an understanding of the perspective of those who oppose Tribal management of the National Bison Range. I used qualitative research methods to answer my primary research questions: *How and to what degree is present-day opposition to Tribal Management of the National Bison Range part of a larger settler colonialist project?* and *What is the nature of the claims opponents make?*

### ***Approach***

A qualitative approach is the best-suited research strategy for this project as it focuses on “the social meaning people attribute to their experiences, circumstances, and situations, as well as the meanings people embed into texts, images, and objects” (Hesse-Biber 2017:4). The ways people discuss race-based issues must be researched using dynamic qualitative methods that include but go beyond surveys, as relying on surveys alone (or the public record, in this case) may “produce an artificial image of racial progress, or miss central components of the contemporary racial ideological constellation” (Bonilla-Silva 306). Accordingly, the data used for this research is made up of both comments submitted to the public record in addition to interviews.

A critical and interpretive approach informed the epistemological dimension of this research, as I aimed to pay “particular attention to how power is infused in the knowledge-building process”

while, at the same time, seeking to understand my research participants' lived experiences and perspectives (Hesse-Biber 2017:7). A critical approach "assumes knowledge is socially constructed and subjective," and is "focused on the power relationships and social, historical, and ideological forces that serve to constrain knowledge building" (Hesse-Biber 2017:17). Further, this approach to qualitative research "seeks to uncover dominant and conflicting points of view disguised as universal truths," which aligns with the goals of this project and acknowledges that race-based conflict has material outcomes for the group who is not in power, and the group that is in power (Hesse-Biber 2017:17). As a researcher, I aimed to listen deeply and to be aware of my own positionality, attitudes, and values I subconsciously bring to the study (Hesse-Biber 2017:8).

To answer my research questions, I conducted qualitative research using both public comments submitted to the Bison Range Working Group and semi-structured interviews. Over the summer of 2016, 153 comments were submitted to the Bison Range Working Group in response to proposed restoration of lands making up the National Bison Range to the CSKT. I found that 68 of the 153 comments directly expressed opposition to Tribal management of the Range, and used those 68 comments as data for this research. Because many of the public comments included fairly brief, inflammatory statements without context into their affective nature, I additionally conducted 17 in-depth, semi-structured interviews to gain a richer understanding about the nature of the claims opponents make. Interviews took place between July and October of 2018. Though I surely did not interview or read the comments written by every person who opposes tribal management of the National Bison Range, the combination of 17 interviews and 68 public comments provided the basis of a rich analysis of opponents' perspectives.

In this descriptive qualitative study, settler colonialism and critical whiteness studies informed my research questions and interview guide. To obtain clarification and "thick description," that is, information about the perceptions of my interview participants, I conducted qualitative research using in-depth, semi-structured interviews to build upon the 68 comments submitted to the public record (Hesse-Biber 2017:15). Using data collected over a period of two years enriched the

quality of my research as I was able to evaluate a broad range of ways that opponents have expressed their perspectives and the types of language interview subjects and commenters used over a that period of time. Additionally, I was able to ask interview participants about their comments if applicable and relevant, allowing participants the space to clarify or build upon their previous statements.

### ***Interview Subject Sampling***

I identified 15 of my 17 interview participants using a stratified purposive sampling procedure. While in purposive sampling, “interview participants are chosen based on the particular research question as well as consideration of the resources available to the researcher,” stratified purposive sampling ensures that certain characteristics are included in the research data (Hesse-Biber 2-17:55). Participants, therefore, represented a wide range of relationships with the Bison Range, described more in detail in the following section. Participants were purposively selected based upon having previously voiced opposition to tribal management of the National Bison Range in the public record, particularly through comments submitted to the Bison Range Working Group in 2016. To locate interview participants, I began with the 68 people who submitted comments to the Bison Range Working Group and attempted to reach each of them by phone. This process resulted in scheduling interviews with 15 of the 68 people who submitted comments to the public record. I either was unable to acquire contact information for the remainder of the commenters, or they were unable or unwilling to participate. I conducted 11 interviews with individuals, and six interviews were conducted in pairs of two people.

I located additional interview participants using a chain-referral sampling procedure, which involves relying upon the personal networks one “taps into” during the research process (Hesse-Biber 2017:59). I asked interview participants from my initial sample for the contact information of those who may share their views and be willing to be interviewed. Through this process I gained two additional interview participants. During interview conversations, I noticed that most of my participants do not speak with their family, friends, nor other community members about their

perspectives on a potential management transfer of the National Bison Range, and therefore did not have recommendations of additional participants to contact. Additionally, several participants told me that they knew people who would share their perspective, but said that they were not willing to give names or contact information of their friends due to the sensitive legal nature of the issue. After the 17th interview and a preliminary analysis of my data, I concluded that I had attained an adequate sample between the 17 interviews and 68 public comments.

All interview participants in my sample appeared to identify as white Euro-Americans and live in Montana. Twelve of 17 appeared to identify as male and all participants were age 45 or older. Despite the homogeneity in the sense of personal identity, my sample is quite diverse in its representation of the broad range of reasons for one saying they oppose increased Tribal management at the National Bison Range. Participants include residents of the Mission Valley, eight of who live on the Flathead Indian Reservation. Two participants were involved in a lawsuit through which Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), a national nonprofit organization, sued the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Three participants have worked on the Bison Range or for Lake County. At least five participants have volunteered on the Range, while three participants have never visited the Range.

### ***Interviews***

I conducted interviews in participants' homes, at the National Bison Range, in restaurants, and over the phone from my home. Twelve interviews were conducted in-person, whereas I conducted the other five over the phone due to prohibitively large distances from western Montana. Interview length ranged from just over twenty minutes to two hours and 33 minutes, with an average time of 78 minutes. Each interview conversation was informed by an interview guide that can be viewed in Appendix A.

I used a semi-structured, in-depth interview protocol with a mix of open-ended and closed-ended interview questions. This interview strategy allowed me to collect appropriate data as this type of interview protocol is "issue-oriented," and assume that "individuals have unique and important

knowledge about the social world that is ascertainable and able to be shared through verbal communication” (Hesse-Biber 2017: 106). I used an interview guide to conduct interviews to ensure comparability across the set of participants while allowing participants the flexibility to introduce topics they felt were significant to the conversation.

I asked questions that fell into five categories in my interview guide: background and rapport building questions, questions about the significance of the Range, questions about the conflict over who should manage the Range, questions about the future of the Range, and concluding questions that invited participants to say any last words or bring up specific topics that had not been introduced. To understand place-based affection for the Range, I asked questions like “Why is the Bison Range important to you?” To obtain subjective, “thick description” of the conflict over who should manage the National Bison Range, I asked questions like: “Do you think the Bison Range belongs to a certain group of people?” and “Why do you believe the Tribes wanted to manage the National Bison Range?”

I conducted interviews in a conversational manner. During the interviews, many participants diverged from the interview guide to tell personal stories about their experience with the CSKT, the Bison Range, or stories about their interaction with non-CSKT Tribal people. If conversation during a particular interview tended to stray from the interview guide, I made note of questions to come back to before the end of the interview so as to allow for unexpected data to come forth while ensuring comparability of data across the sample of interviews. Directly after each interview, I recorded notes on my feelings of the nature of the conversation and the person I had talked with to provide a balance on the objectifying nature of printing out transcribed conversations for analysis.

### ***Analysis***

I received approval from the Institutional Review Board prior to the start of my interviews, and again in October of 2018 when my university thesis chair changed<sup>3</sup>. Prior to the start of each in-

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<sup>3</sup> Institutional Review Board approval of this study can be found in Appendix B.

person interview, I obtained a signed copy of an informed consent form. In the case of interviews conducted by phone, I obtained informed consent on audio recording. All interview participants agreed to be audio recorded and anonymity was assured to all. In an effort to accurately analyze participants' views, I recorded and transcribed each interview, using Trint's artificial intelligence speech recognition software <sup>4</sup>for initial transcriptions. I then heavily interrogated each computer-generated transcription for error and to clarify crosstalk, that is, points during the conversation that multiple people were talking at the same time. Included in the transcript are tentative phrases like, "you know?" which were deliberately not discarded in order to document points throughout the interview at which a participant lacked language to describe their experience or philosophy (Hesse-Biber 2017:309).

Throughout the process of transcribing interviews, I made sure to remain engaged in actively listening, taking notes and writing memos about certain passages that seemed particularly insightful (Hesse-Biber 2017:309). At this point, I additionally began to "cross-label," making notes to myself about passages in context of other interviews and the public comments (Hesse-Biber 2017:309). Further, I employed memoing as a strategy as it "provides a way to reflect on one's data and to verbalize how categories are connected in the overall process, serving as an analytic bridge between theory and data collection" (Hesse-Biber 2017:313). I uncovered meaning from my data by reading over the interview transcripts and public comments as one data set and writing memos that compared and contrasted what people said, or about general ideas that come to mind (Hesse-Biber 2017:311). I wrote memos to myself in the form of notes expressing my initial thoughts on what meaning may be derived from the data, initial thoughts on patterns in the data and relationships between codes, and notes to myself about the interview and analysis processes.

After gaining familiarity with my data set as a whole by reading it several times and writing memos, I started the process of openly coding. Because in open-coding, the goal is to gain insight

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<sup>4</sup> TRINT. "How Trint's Automated Transcription Works." *Trint*, 2019.

and understanding, I did not start out with a predefined set of coding categories, which allowed novel patterns, themes, and concepts to arise from the data (Hesse-Biber 2017:319). To begin, I read over each interview transcript and public comment line by line, starting with one of my most content-rich interview transcriptions. I then identified meaningful segments in the textual data, and assigned each meaningful segment a summarizing code (Hesse-Biber 2017:317).

I balanced this inductive coding process by keeping in mind my research questions informed by settler colonialism and critical whiteness studies theory, and once patterns in the data began to emerge, I used focused-coding wherein one begins to rely more on their own insights as a researcher (Hesse-Biber 2017:320). Focused coding allows for the building and clarifying of concepts; a researcher “examines all the data in a category, compares each piece of data with every other piece, and finally builds a clear working definition of each concept, which is then named” (Hesse-Biber 2017:320). I additionally developed a set of analytical categories, which “require the researcher to move toward a broader interpretation of what is going on in his or her data, rather than just labeling it in a topical fashion” (Hesse-Biber 2017:320). I remained particularly attuned to language indicating Indigenous erasure, colorblind racism and white fragility, concepts which are described in depth in my literature review.

I repeated the first-pass coding process for three interviews, and then reflected on and lightly redefined categories based on additional patterns that had emerged. As patterns became apparent while coding, I allowed subthematic categories to become more specific and numerous, and catalogued them in a separate document. I then coded the remainder of the interviews and public record comments, which led to seven codes and 41 subthematic categories. In the following chapter, I discuss the results of my research and after each section, provide a brief interpretation of my findings. Results are followed by a Discussion chapter which summarizes and interprets the findings in more depth while attending to literature on settler colonialism, white fragility, and colorblind racism.

## Results

The results of this research indicate that opposition to increased Tribal management of the National Bison Range reinforces and perpetuates a settler colonialist project at the NBR. Further, opponents both exhibit white fragility and use colorblind racist language in their claims. The CSKT and their settler-allies, however, in their resistance to the settler colonialist project and advocacy for recognition of the Tribes, have ensured that the settler colonialist project remains incomplete. The presentation below outlines major themes that emerged from my data. At the end of each section, I provide a brief description of how that section's theme relates back to the literature. A richer analysis of the results is found in the Discussion chapter that follows this chapter.

Interview participants and public commenters who oppose Tribal management of the National Bison Range generally share concerns and perspectives, though some are more overt in their claims while others are subtler. Opponents establish place-based affection for the Range through discussing their pride for and personal and familial histories with the Range. They also discuss the iconic symbolism of bison for the American identity. Opponents make claim to the National Bison Range by: (re)asserting the purpose of the Range by claiming that it belongs to everyone and that if the Tribes secured management rights they would undermine the common ownership; declaring that the Bison Range is successful the way it is; and legitimizing their claims by preemptively denying that their perspective should be considered anti-Tribal racist.

Opponents attempt to discredit the Tribes' claims to being the most appropriate manager of the NBR by declaring that the Tribes are unfit wildlife managers, discrediting Tribal historical narrative of the Range, challenging the Tribes' cultural connection, and questioning the Tribes' culture. Finally, opponents speculated and exhibited worries and fears about the issue of management at the National Bison Range, specifically about what could happen to the Range if the Tribes received increased management responsibilities, the process of a potential transfer of management responsibilities, the Tribes' true goals and desires for management, the goals of various

political figures in their support of increased Tribal management at the Range, and the NBR as a precedent for the privatization of other public lands.

Finally, opponents discuss divergent paths that the National Bison Range could take. While some suggest that the Reservation should be abolished or that the Tribe should establish its own herd, others see a light at the end of the decades-long conflict tunnel in collaborative efforts at the Range. It is unclear, however, if opponents who support collaboration or even co-management for the future of the Range would truly advocate that the Tribes attain equal power in a management arrangement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

While there is nuance and diversity in opponents' views, I seek to point out the structural racism at play, particularly in light of Robin DiAngelo's notion that white peoples' intent does not always align with the potentially discriminatory outcomes of our thoughts, language, and actions (DiAngelo 2018:144). As such, in the following sections I focus on the less overtly racist language that emerged from my data, for example, expressions from such as, "the lazy Indian bastards will just screw it up," and am instead paying particular attention to the more insidious, subtle language and discourses indicative of racist attitudes and settler colonialist perspectives that are far more difficult to name but can be described as colorblind racist or white fragility.

### ***Establishing Place-Based Affection for the Range***

Though the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes often highlight their deep historical, cultural, and geographic connection to the Range and animals in their requests for increased management and stewardship of the National Bison Range, many non-Tribal settlers express affection for the Range as well. Both interview participants and public commenters describe their place-based, affective relationship with the NBR by expressing pride they feel for the Range, by outlining their fondness for their personal and familial history with the NBR, and in their discussion of how both the Range and the bison are iconic symbols of the way the West once was.

## ATTACHMENT TO PLACE

When interview participants and public commenters talked about their relationship to the National Bison Range, they referred to it in relationship to seeing others excited about the Range, particularly in terms of bringing their own guests to visit. Excited to talk at length about their relationship to the place, participants described the Range as a reliable destination in terms of their pride for having such an extraordinary place nearby; one can always expect their guests will see wildlife and generally have a good visit. As one man conveyed, “the neatest thing about volunteering down there was the experience of seeing the people coming back and they were so excited about what they’d seen.” Another described the Range as a place for “local folks” to take visitors; he says, “the Bison Range has always been a place where you take all your friends, all your relations.” One man said, “When friends come, it’s really just priceless to have in your backyard because people come and if they’re new to Montana [they say] ‘I wanna see some wildlife!’ Well, you can go out in the National Forests and spend a week without seeing this stuff, not very much anyway. And [at the Bison Range] you’re guaranteed you bring ‘em here and they’re gonna get to see some animals.” For most interview participants who are local to the area, the Bison Range is a place they can bring any of their visitors for a reliable, exciting day trip to see wildlife, which draws participants closer to idea of the Range. Attachment felt for the NBR is strengthened by the fact that it is a *local* attraction. Beyond understanding the Range as a place for locals to take their visitors, participants described pride for the National Bison Range in terms of the international visitors it naturally attracts, being that it is located between the city of Missoula and Glacier National Park. One participant said it was “neat to see people from all over the world...Japanese, French, Swiss, Germans” despite the fact that the NBR “isn’t advertised much.”

Though participants expressed their attachment for the National Bison Range as it relates to bringing visitors or marveling at international visitors attracted to a local refuge for its outstanding wildlife viewing opportunities, many participants compared the NBR to the National Parks System without prompting. Ten of 17 interview participants compared the National Bison Range to National

Parks or specifically Yellowstone National Park. One participant who had never been to the National Bison Range said, “The Bison Range is kinda like Yellowstone Park and Glacier Park. I would actually call it a national treasure. It’s on my bucket list to go out and see it.” Many participants echoed this comparison, saying that the National Bison Range “is like Yellowstone,” that it’s “our own local Yellowstone,” and that the NBR “needs to be taken care of like our National Parks.” Some participants indicated however, said that the National Bison Range is “better than Yellowstone or Glacier.” One participant said, “last time I went to Yellowstone, it was terrible to be honest. Too many people. And Glacier’s gotten that way too. The Bison Range isn’t too crowded.” Some indicated they liked the NBR better than National Parks like Yellowstone National Park because of the light traffic and “wild feeling” of the Range compared to attempting to view wildlife at Yellowstone.

#### PERSONAL AND FAMILIAL HISTORY

For many interview participants, personal and familial history connects them to the National Bison Range. As one participant said, “If you’re from Washington D.C. or Mississippi, or anywhere else, the Bison Range...it’s a blip. But if you grew up in Whitefish or you live here [on the Reservation], I think that makes a huge difference.” When asked why the National Bison Range is important to them, participants often drew on experiences of past visits or family memories. Excited to the point of near tears, one participant said, “The memories, the pictures, the feeling, the familiarity...the Bison Range became a part of our family.” She went on to share,

We would race home, and say ‘okay let’s go everybody, grab your coats!’ And we would grab our snacks and goodies and say ‘okay let’s go!’ and we would race to get through that gate [at the National Bison Range] so that we could go through the big loop, the Red Sleep Drive, before it closed...that was our big thing. All the kids knew exactly what to do, what to grab. Going there had such a huge impact on us as a family.

Many participants shared important family memories and favorite visits that developed their place-based affection for the National Bison Range.

Some participants and commenters talked about personal history that connects them to the National Bison Range, despite never having visited. One person, for example, talked about life as a

rancher; she said, “My family’s been farming and ranching all their life. It’s a way of life with us. And we really care for our livestock and I believe the bison deserve to be cared for too.” This person then asked me, “Would you be able to go out and look at a bison or a cow and tell if they’re sick or if they need something? That’s why I think it should be left to the people who know how to do it.” Her personal and familial history of ranching in Montana connected her to the National Bison Range both conceptually as a representation of a specific lifestyle or heritage, and materially as a specific practice or way of interacting with animals.

### BISON AND NBR AS ICONIC SYMBOL

While interview participants who had visited the National Bison Range spoke about their personal experiences and familial history with the Range, quite a few interview participants and public commenters had never visited the Bison Range, and instead spoke about feeling affection for bison and the National Bison Range in terms of the symbolism for “the way the American West once was.” Both interview participants and public commenters who have and have not visited the Range described it as “a national heritage,” and said that it “represents our history” while “providing a way to look and see what the past was like before settlers.” They said that the bison are “an iconic symbol of the west,” an “iconic species for America.” One participant said, “it’s part of our heritage for this country and I’d like to see it stay that way forever because the bison are pure-bred, they’re not crossed or anything like that.” Another said the buffalo represent the West, and added, “when my grandparents came here it was just miles of open range and the buffalo had already disappeared, but they’re a symbol of the old west. And I like the old west.”

This idea also shows up in the public record. Almost all of those who submitted anti-Tribal management comments to the public record spoke about bison and the land that makes up the National Bison Range as meaningful symbols for American identity. One commenter elaborates:

Theodore Roosevelt established the National Bison Range in 1908 with hopes of preserving an American icon from going extinct....This land is public land with this herd being a public herd, all owned by you and me....All Americans are best served by preserving our national heritage, the land and its respective herd of bison. It has been 108 years since President Roosevelt signed legislation establishing the NBR. What is the life expectancy of our heritage?

More than seeing the bison as an icon, the Range itself, including the landscape and its protected status are understood as iconic and representative of American heritage.

#### SUMMARY

Interview participants and public commenters become excited when talking about the National Bison Range. They speak with an authentic affection for the place, and their pride for the National Bison Range is clear. Participants who live near the Range express pride and affection for it as the rural community's local attraction; locals agree that the National Bison Range is the best inexpensive place to enjoy wildlife and experience a beautiful landscape without intense crowds garnered by national parks like Glacier and Yellowstone. People who aren't local to the area, however, express affection for the Range in terms of it as a symbol for American heritage. Many interview participants and public commenters are non-Tribal settlers who have lived on the Flathead Reservation or in western Montana for generations, yet in all their displays of affection, their stories largely ignore the centuries-long Tribal history with the land and animals in the area. Settler stories of the National Bison Range therefore reinforce the idea that the place has only ever belonged to the cultural heritage of America as a settler-state. Historical narrative begins at the inception of the National Bison Range and through ignoring Tribal history and stories that came long before, or picking and choosing parts of Tribal narrative to include, the land and animals that make up the National Bison Range become narrowed to an American nationalist legacy and more readily detached from Tribal heritage.

#### ***Claimsmaking***

The ongoing dispute between the Tribes and non-tribal settlers over who should manage the National Bison Range is situated within a long history of both sides making claim to the animals and land that make up the NBR. After establishing their affection for and deep connection to the National Bison Range, interview participants and commenters make claim to the NBR by (re)asserting the purpose of the Range, claiming that it belongs to everyone and that if the Tribes

secured management rights they would undermine the common ownership; declaring that the Bison Range is successful the way it is; and legitimizing their claims by preemptively denying that their perspective should be considered anti-Tribal racist.

(RE)ASSERTING PURPOSE OF THE RANGE

Most interview participants and public commenters make claim to the National Bison Range by attempting to reestablish what they determine to be the original and ongoing purpose of the Range. Many interview participants and commenters highlighted that the Range was set up in part by Theodore “Teddy” Roosevelt. For example, one public commenter stated that they do not support the transfer of public lands or “public historical landmarks” to the Tribes, because “Teddy created these lands for all Americans to enjoy.” This sentiment echoed throughout interview participant discourse as well. One interview participant said that the Tribes “insist that the Bison Range was set up basically to benefit them,” however, misinterpreting the Tribes’ claims, they say, “it was not. It was set up to benefit the bison.” A public commenter wrote, “Theodore Roosevelt established the National Bison Range in 1908 with hopes of preserving an American icon from going extinct.”

Another public comment stated:

After reading the draft legislative language I believe it would be wise to maintain the Bison Range in the manner that was set up by Congress in 1908 under the leadership of President Theodore Roosevelt....I do not believe President Roosevelt and the Congress intended for the bison to vanish from Federal responsibility.

In this case, the public commenter attempted to make claim to the Bison Range based on its “original intent” while denying Tribal claims.

Interview participants also highlighted the significance of wildlife preservation provided by the National Bison Range, saying that the Range “was created to preserve a piece of nature,” and that “its purpose is designed to protect wildlife and habitat....not for humans.” One participant said, “it’s pretty obvious it’s for wildlife because all we can do is drive around the circle and you can’t get out,” and another said that

....its primary function is a national refuge for bison. That’s number one and then when they manage the habitat, of course, all the other things benefit from it too. You’ve got the deer

and elk and antelope and birds and coyotes, the grasses and flowers and everything....but the primary mission is bison.

On the other hand, interview participants discussed the purpose of the Range in terms of human communities that benefit from it the most. One person asked, “We [settlers] enjoy it probably more than a lot of those people on the Reservation do. We’ve taken an interest in it. How many Indians visited it? That’d be a nice line to look into.”

Other interview participants made claim to the National Bison Range by simply expressing that the Federal Government established the Bison Range, and not the CSKT. One person says, “If [the Tribes] wanted [the NBR], they should have developed it. They didn’t do it; the Federal Government did....They sold the animals and stuff, but the Federal Government made it into a park.” Another said,

The Tribes did not want this area opened to homesteading but it was. And so the Fish and Wildlife Service took advantage and took a chunk of land and preserved it for over 100 years and put bison there and made that the National Bison Range. If the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife] Service hasn’t done that—I always want people to think about that—If the Service hadn’t done that, what would that place be? Who would be fighting over it? It might be a piece of land like that hill across the way.

In interviews, a focus on the purpose of establishing the Bison Range also becomes apparent through discussion of the purpose of the Tribal Self Governance Act. Many interview participants said that the “Tribes took advantage of negotiating under the Tribal Self Governance Act,” and that “removing” the National Bison Range from the National Refuge System “never was the intention of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Act.” Instead, as one interview participant explains, “it was meant as an opportunity for Indian tribes to provide their expertise and their love of the land and to enhance and participate and to cooperate,” however, “CSKT took it to a level that the law was not meant to be.”

Many interview participants also discussed the purpose of the National Bison Range in terms of its function for the public. While most participants declared that the “purpose is not to develop it,” or “make money off of it,” some interview participants highlighted the purpose of the National

Bison Range in terms of its potential contribution to the National Wildlife Refuge System. One person said that,

They're all owned by the Federal Government and managed by the Federal Government, through the Department of Interior. And the reason they call it the *National* Bison Range and the *United States* Fish and Wildlife Service because they manage all their wildlife as a unit. They're all supposed to receive the same amount of funding depending on acreage and visitor services. And, for example: bird surveys, duck surveys....they do them all at the same time so their data is correct. They turn all the data in at the same time so they can put it all into the National Data Bank.

Another interview participant highlighted the significance of the National Bison Range managed within the Wildlife Refuge System, saying that the bison at the National Bison Range

....are part of a metapopulation, because you have to have like, 1000 animals to make your genetics good. So since [the National Bison Range] can only have a couple hundred, [it's a part of] a big group with Flint Hills, the Rocky Mountain Arsenal outside of Denver, Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge out of Des Moines, and others.

Almost all interview participants and public record commenters make further claim to the National Bison Range by acknowledging that as it is, the NBR belongs to all citizens of the United States.

Interview participants and public commenters said that "it does not belong to the Indians; it belongs to the people of the United States. It belongs to everyone, not just the Tribes," and "as a *National* Bison Range, it belongs to everyone. Even though it's in the middle of the reservation, that doesn't mean it belongs to the Reservation." Others said "it belongs to the country, just like the national forests. That stuff belongs to everybody," and "it's everybody's land."

#### "IF IT'S NOT BROKE, DON'T FIX IT"

Almost all interview participants declared they would not like to see the Bison Range change or evolve in any way. One person said,

Don't mess with it. It's a jewel. It is really nice. I really don't want to see it turned into a cultural thing for the Tribes, or—I don't know—I could just see maybe they want to set up a teepee village or somethin' you know? Or run the bison over a cliff so we can all jump in there and skin 'em out or something, you know....recreate the past. It's just, there's a lot of scenarios you could think about. But, my gosh, if we could just hold on to what it is and not screw it up or something. That's my feeling on it.

When asked what they would like to see for the future of the Range, people could not or were not willing to conceptualize an alternate reality from the one in which the Bison Range is managed by the

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. One person said, “I can’t imagine them doing anything differently than what they’re doing.” Others simply stated, “I would like to see it maintained and continued the way it is” and “It’s run well the way it is” One participant said,

I don’t know much about the operation of it. But I have no complaints of how it’s managed now. The bison always seem to be alive and healthy so that’s good....I believe it’s managed very well right now and it should stay that way. Just make it like that....I haven’t really noticed any conflict. I know the tribes want it, but they want lots of other things too. And yeah, my opinion of that....is special....so anyway, I believe it’s just where it should be and it should stay that way. And I don’t see any conflict with it staying that way.

Another interview participant said, “I like it the way it is. The Government gives us a pass to get in, and we’ve worked hard enough to deserve it. You know, it’s been working all these years. Why do anything different? If it’s not broke, why fix it?”

When asked what management challenges the Bison Range currently faces, some people were either unwilling to imagine or genuinely could not imagine any. This is particularly true for interview participants who do not live on the Reservation or close to the Range. One participant who does not live near the Range said, “I don’t think the Bison Range faces any challenges. It’s been there forever and they do a good job of managing it.” Another said, “I think it should stay just the way it is. In terms of management, I don’t know that much about it. It should be managed the same.” Others, most of whom live on the Reservation or nearby, discussed issues with weed management and fence maintenance but still thought the USFWS has done a good job and that no change should be made.

#### PREEMPTIVE DENIAL OF RACIST ATTITUDES

Unlike those who commented to the public record, almost all interview participants, without prompting, made comments aimed at detaching themselves from anti-tribal racist discourse. Interview participants preface their responses to questions with, “don’t get me wrong, I’m not against Indians,” and “I’m not against CSKT. The CSKT paint the picture [that I am], because it sells newspapers.” They recognize the potential for others to consider them to be racist because of their comments, and preemptively deny that is the case. For example, interview participants preface

comments with “It almost sounds racist, and they would call me that if it were the case.” Another person said,

You’re gonna hear some very racist comments but it’s not meant to be racist. I’m tribal descent, but not from this Tribe, and so it has nothing to do with me hating natives. It has everything to do with me seeing how much is covered up and lied about. It’s gonna sound really bad. It sounds like we just hate the Tribe. Well, we hate what the Tribe does.... I don’t hate the Tribal members but I hate dishonesty and the lack of integrity. And if the wrong person hears that, I’m seen as a discriminating bigot. I’m not racist at all, but it’s hideous how much the Tribe has gotten away with.

Preemptive denial of racist attitudes also shows up in interview conversations. Many interview participants say they aren’t against the CSKT, rather, they would be against *any* theoretical group who might want to disrupt the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s management of the National Bison Range. One participant said, “It’s not about the CSKT. It could be any group, the Sierra Club. CSKT is just the party in this case.” Another said, “We aren’t against CSKT whatsoever. But they have been encouraged to do things that are illegal.” Similarly, one interview participant said they would “oppose any other than U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service management.” Participants’ reasoning behind wanting the USFWS continue managing the Bison Range, however, was varied, including both speculation that a transfer of management responsibilities would be a precedent for other transfers and that the USFWS deserves to be the manager because they have taken care of the Bison Range for such a long time. One participant, who had expressed affinity with the USFWS throughout the interview, said “I always tell people I would be upset if anyone but the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wanted to take over management because they are the ones that spent so many years working there, and they’ve done a good job.”

Preemptive denial of racist attitudes further shows up as the flattening of racial dynamics through passively denying the recognition of racialized issues. Interview participants described their relationship with Tribal people by saying, “I’ve worked alongside Tribal people and have never had an issue,” and “It’s not a good thing for Americans to be fractionalized like we are. We’re all Americans.” Others attempt to prevent the possibility of their comments being described as racist by acknowledging that their perspective has been considered anti-tribal racist in the past, while denying

that it is indeed racist. Interview participants said, “Basically if you disagree with the Tribes, you’re considered a racist. But a lot of what I’m saying has nothing to do with the race aspect,” while others simply said, “It’s not about race.” Multiple people compared the National Bison Range management issue to issues of racism towards people of color communities in the United States. For example one participant said, “Why did all of that even take place between cops and black people? I thought we had overcome that. I think we need to extinguish the segregation mindset.”

#### SUMMARY

Protection of wildlife, particularly advocacy for bison conservation in the United States, is a fairly recent interest for settlers. The CSKT coexisted with bison for centuries before the first settlers came to the American West and quickly decimated bison populations. Further, the settler narrative that the National Bison Range “belongs to everyone” flattens the cultural experience of CSKT members whose ancestors sustainably hunted bison and have lived in cultural and spiritual relationship with them for millennia prior to settlement, while also denying the truth of Tribes’ role in protecting the particular animals that formed the basis of the bison herd at the Range. As Blackfoot researcher and professor emeritus Leroy Little Bear has said of Indigenous peoples’ relationship with bison, “If you are Christian and you don’t see any crosses out there, or you don’t have your corner church ... there’s no external connection, [no] symbolic iconic notion that strengthens and nurtures those beliefs....So it goes with the buffalo” (Hance, *The Guardian* 2018). Settler narrative hardly skims the surface of the deep historical connection between bison and the CSKT, a narrative strategy that erases the Indigenous and establishes a settler indigeneity that would complete the settler colonialist project at the National Bison Range if not continuously challenged by the Tribes and their allies.

Likewise, suggesting that the National Bison Range is perfect as it is and that no change should take place becomes coded racist language; it allows settlers to indirectly state that they reject increased Tribal management responsibilities at the Range without outright saying so. This is an example of colorblind racist language that both represents the incoherence in colorblind racist

language and indicates post-Jim Crow discriminatory discourse in the United States. Additionally, preemptively stating that they are not racist before articulating a racist statement is a semantic move that allows settlers to avoid “dangerous discussion” on race issues; preemptively denying their racism as a semantic move allows settlers to state what they think while protecting themselves from being seen as morally incorrect.

### ***Discrediting the Tribes***

Discrediting the Tribes makes up a large portion of discourse in both comments submitted to the public record and in interviews. Though it can be understood as a strategy of claimsmaking; however such discourse employed to discredit the Tribes was so prevalent in the data that it deserves its own section in this chapter. Public commenters and interview participants further make claim to ongoing settler management of the National Bison Range through declaring the Tribes to be unfit to manage, discrediting Tribal historical narrative of the Range, challenging the Tribes’ cultural connection, and questioning the Tribes’ unAmerican culture.

#### TRIBES UNFIT TO MANAGE/USFWS IS THE BEST MANAGER

Interview participants and public commenters discuss the Tribes’ ability or lack thereof to carry out management responsibilities at the NBR. At the same time, they describe that the USFWS is the best manager for the National Bison Range. In the public record, commenters said, “My observation is that they let everything get run down with little or no maintenance or improvements,” and “In my opinion, the tribes have a most difficult time trying to take care of themselves. I have no faith in them to manage this land and these animals.” Other commenters seek to defend USFWS as the most competent manager. For example, one commenter states: “I believe the USFWS has done a great job managing the Range. These folks are experts.” Another notes, “the current managers are competent governmental employees.”

This perspective was also reflected in interviews. Participants say, the Tribes are “less prepared” to manage the National Bison Range, and that once things get into Tribal control “no one knows what’s going on, things don’t get done, and everyone’s blaming everyone.” People reflected

on specific management practices, saying the Tribes “claim they’re the best bison managers in the world or something. But they’ve starved them...wouldn’t feed them. So they’re not.” Others said the Tribes couldn’t fight the fires on their land, and wouldn’t fix the fences on a proper timeline. Many interview participants spoke about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s capabilities as manager of the Range. They said the “U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the best manager,” that “in this case, the Government does a better job than a private entity could do,” that so long as the Bison Range remains under settler management “we know things are going to be taken care of,” and that “dealing with the Feds is the only way you’re going to get a place like that supported.”

Some interview participants discussed what the material landscape that makes up the National Bison Range would be today if the Federal Government had not established the National Bison Range. One person said,

I’m not opposed to Tribal management. It’s just that I don’t see why the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service shouldn’t continue to manage it. If the service hadn’t preserved it, this place would be just like the random field over that hill. It wouldn’t be *The Bison Range*. I just wish the Service would get credit for this good thing they did.

Another interview participant said, “Let’s be honest. The land wouldn’t be the way it is now if not for the government setting it up.”

#### CONTESTING TRIBAL HISTORY OF THE RANGE

Both in interviews and in the public record, participants and commenters dispute Tribal accounts of how the National Bison Range was formed, while diminishing the significance of Tribal historical connection to the Range. Interview participants draw on ecological history of the landscape that makes up the National Bison Range. Many asked or alluded to the question, “Were there even any bison here?” while others question the Tribes historical connection further. One person said, “One of the big things about the Bison Range is that the Tribe likes to take ownership but bison weren’t Indigenous to the Mission Valley.” Another said, “The Tribes weren’t really here within the context of the bison in this area.”

Public commenters also situate the conflict historically, but from a colonial perspective. Rather than focusing on the Tribes' history of bison preservation, those who commented in the public record hardly alluded to the Tribal relationship to bison; they were instead interested in discussing that the National Bison Range had been managed successfully for over 100 years. For example, one commenter writes, "The NBR has been owned by the American public for over 100 years" Another says,

As a former manager of the NBR, I am fully aware of its successful 108 year history as a truly iconic unit of the NWRS, its importance to the national effort to preserve remnant populations of America's national mammal...the American Bison.... And its multiple wildlife, scientific, educational and recreational values to the American public.

Public commenters craft a short history of just 108 years. In addition to simply stating what they believe to be the beginning of the story, many draw on former President Theodore Roosevelt's involvement of establishing the National Bison Range as a part of these claims.

#### DISMISSING TRIBES' CULTURAL CONNECTION

In addition to discrediting the Tribes' historical relationship with bison and the land that makes up the National Bison Range, some interview participants questioned the Tribes' cultural connection with the land and animals. Some interview participants acknowledged the Tribes' cultural connection by stating that the Tribes have a historical relationship with Bison. Most participants, however, denied that the Tribes have the cultural connection they speak of in claims to the National Bison Range. For example, while one participant said, "Of course the Tribes have a cultural connection and historic relationship to bison," others said, "Every Tribe has a cultural tie to the bison, and they all use it as an excuse to get property, authority, et cetera. They've got to put a stop to the bullshit, making the public believe that's the way it happened and they deserve things when they have an ulterior motive." Another said, "they seem to think the buffalo are their heritage but they don't take good care of them."

Some interview participants said that, indeed the Tribes do have a cultural connection, however it is irrelevant in the context of a potential shift in management at the Range. Both acknowledging cultural significance and diminishing it at the same time, one participant said:

I completely understand the cultural connections that tribal members have to it, but non-tribal people have a cultural connection, too. So I think it needs to remain public land...It has nothing to do with culture. It's a part of my family's culture to visit, but we aren't going to claim it's ours."

Along the same line of thinking, another interview participant said, "They have a cultural connection but they don't own wildlife. I can appreciate the Bison Range even though I'm white. Bison and Indians go together, but I can appreciate it too." Another questioned the Tribes' cultural connection to the National Bison Range in terms of their relationship with casinos. This participant said, "I keep hearing that the bison is sacred to them and basically they have some attachment to it and can't live without it, but then you see them building and operating casinos. So where does that come from? What kind of heritage is that for Indian Tribes? It just don't add up to me."

#### TRIBES ARE UNAMERICAN

Many interview participants discredit the Tribes' requests for increased management responsibilities through characterizing the CSKT as a separate government whose values are incompatible with American values. Participants said that the CSKT is a "separate nation" that is "hierarchical" and does not "have the best interest of the people of the United States." Participants felt that the Tribes use nepotism as a hiring practice; one person said, "They believe in nepotism and cronyism. And they believe in 'you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours.'" Others said, "What's significant to you and I, isn't to the Tribes....A lot of their culture and how they do things is totally different than us" non-Tribal. Another person plainly stated, "Some of the stuff they do smacks up against American values."

#### SUMMARY

The settler narrative indicating that the CSKT is unable to properly manage wildlife is simply unfounded and is based on prejudiced ideas about the Tribes' capabilities or fear of loss of status

among whites. While the CSKT have proved that they historically managed bison sustainably, they also have contemporary wildlife programs that have matched or outperformed governmental programs, for example in terms of grizzly bear protection in the Mission Mountain Tribal Wilderness Area. Contesting the Tribes' cultural history by highlighting a 100-year-long settler history is indicative of attempts to erase Indigenous history, contributing to furthering the settler colonialist project of the Range. While some settlers recognize the Tribes' cultural connection, they still do not support Tribal management of the National Bison Range, for example as indicated by the person who said visiting the National Bison Range is a part of her family's culture. While some settlers may truly feel they have a connection, claiming that they have the same connection as the CSKT flattens the Tribal experience, and allows settlers to claim the land as their home. This claim is also contradictory because on one hand the settler narrative says that a cultural connection doesn't matter while on the other, settlers talk about their family's culture as significant enough to make claim to the Bison Range.

Additionally, suggesting that Tribal culture must be static to be Indigenous is contradictory. Conceptually, this perspective prevents the Tribes from moving into the future by participating in certain aspects of industry and capitalism. At the same time, this perspective still denies the Tribes' connection to their historical lands and relationship with bison. Finally, suggesting that the Tribes should not manage the National Bison Range because they do not have the best interest of the United States people, contradicts the settler narrative that "we're all Americans." The Tribes, then, are American *and* unAmerican. Though contradictory, these powerful settler narratives contribute to the settler colonialist project at the National Bison Range by denying Tribal recognition.

### ***Speculation, Fear, and Worry***

A large portion of interview conversations was dedicated to speculation and suspicion surrounding the National Bison Range. Without prompting, almost all interview participants speculated on and expressed fear or worry about what would happen to the Range if the Tribes received increased management responsibilities, the process of a potential transfer of management

responsibilities, the Tribes' true goals and desires for management, and the goals of various political figures in their support of increased Tribal management at the Range. They also expressed worry that the requested management transfer would set a precedent for the privatization of other public lands across the United States.

#### WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO THE RANGE?

Almost all interview participants and many public commenters speculated about what would happen to the National Bison Range if the Tribes acquired increased management responsibilities. Participants expressed fear that the Tribes may charge exorbitant fees to visit the NBR. Participants said that “unless [the Tribes] get a big federal grant, they’ll need to charge money” for visitors. One participant said, “I don’t have a lot of money and the Tribes would probably make everyone pay out the nose,” and another anxiously asked, “Who knows what would happen if they managed it. I mean, would they be allowed to increase fees for people going through?” Another worried, “If the Tribes managed it, rates and fees would go up and maintenance would go down.” This sentiment was echoed by many commenters in the public record as well; quite a few commenters displayed the same speculations and also worried that Tribal management would negate their senior discounts. For example, one worried that “[Their] Golden Age Passport will no longer be honored.” In the public record, one commenter wrote, the “Tribes could create roadblocks that could impact access for non-tribal members, such as exorbitant entrance fees.”

In addition to keeping the Bison Range from the public through raising the entrance fees, interview participants feared that “they could keep the public out” for various reasons. Some participants speculated that the Tribes would keep the public from visiting for “cultural reasons.” One person said, “If the Tribes get ahold of it we just don’t know what would happen. They wouldn’t be obligated to keep it open to the public.” Another participant echoed the idea of uncertainty surrounding public access. They said, “I’m not saying if the Tribes got ahold of it they would limit public access, but the option would be there. I don’t think they would take it but I just want to make sure it remains open to everyone.”

Interview participants also speculated that the Tribes would hunt and poach animals on the National Bison Range if they gained increased management. Participants said the Tribes “might decide to start hunting on the Range,” and noted that the Tribes already “poach animals on the reservation.” In thinking about Tribal relationships with animals, one participant said, “You know what they say, ain’t no big game on the Rez,” indicating a belief that the Tribes do not practice proper game management to encourage healthy wildlife populations. People also expressed concern through speculation about Tribal cultural relationship to the bison and the land; one participant said, “I wonder if the Tribes would restrict access or end up deciding they want to slaughter a bunch of bison for some ceremony or something, you know? I don’t know what’s going to happen.”

Many interview participants and commenters additionally speculated about the Tribes wanting to build structures on the National Bison Range that do not align with the NBR’s present values. Participants speculated that the Tribes “could set up an amusement park,” or “expand the race track that butts up against the Range.” That participant additionally noted, “[The Tribes] will deny it in public but they’ve discussed it.” One participant asked,

Wouldn’t the top of the ridge of the National Bison Range be a lovely place for a resort? I know you’re laughing but during meetings the CSKT leaders have said they want to expand the road system and have a cultural arts center, a casino, a resort complex. That’s not the purpose of the National Bison Range.”

Another asked, “Would the Tribes commercialize it? There are just so many what-ifs.” In public comments one person wrote that the NBR “could become a glorified petting zoo.” While many commenters and interview participants speculated that the Tribes would want to develop the National Bison Range to make a greater income off of the property, one interview participant noted, “I don’t think [the Tribes] could make much revenue off of [the Range]. I do actually think they want it for the bison.” The general consensus, however was that “the CSKT thinks of the Range in terms of economic development.”

Interview participants and commenters further speculated on the potential for general mismanagement of the Range if the Tribes achieved increased management. They said “fences

wouldn't get repaired," the Tribes "may not manage it properly" or wouldn't maintain it at all, and simply, stated that "If the Tribes managed it, it wouldn't work." One interview participant wondered, "I don't know if maybe the Tribes would necessarily take care of the property and animals the way it has been in the past." Another speculated that "the benefits would all change" if CSKT managed the Range. They went on to say, "We have federal laws that protect how you manage it. If you give it away, it's not federal." Additional speculation around what the Tribes would or would not do if they negotiated increased management responsibilities included that CSKT "would take it out of the System, rename it and use the land for whatever purpose they wish," and that they "wouldn't pay taxes." One participant said, "It's so good, I just feel like I want to protect it and keep it the way it is. And if it changes management, I just don't know how it would be run and I like it how it is" Another person asked, "If it's given to them, who's going to stop them?"

#### TRIBES' MOTIVES

While almost all interview participants speculated broadly about what the Tribes might do with the National Bison Range if they achieved increased management responsibilities, some participants expressed very specific fears about the Tribes' true motives for requesting increased management of the Range. Interview participants theorized that the Tribes were actually interested in funding they could receive as a result of managing the National Bison Range, that the Tribes wanted to provide fulfilling employment opportunities at the NBR to its own members, and that CSKT sees increased management at the Range as a step closer towards reclaiming ownership of all the land that makes up the Flathead Reservation.

Participants theorized that the Tribes "thought they'd get money" if they managed the Range. One person said, "I have no idea why they would want to take on the responsibility [of managing the National Bison Range] unless they think there's some way to make money off of it like they did with Kerr Dam<sup>5</sup>." Another said that the Tribes "want more federal money. They want to

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<sup>5</sup> Recently renamed in Salish Seli's Ksanka Qlispe' Dam.

claim sovereignty but they want federal money at the same time.” Participants also speculated that the Tribes wanted to increase gainful employment opportunities on the Reservation for Tribal citizens. Participants said that the Tribes are concerned with putting “their own people to work at the Range.”

Finally, some interview participants speculated that the Tribes’ true motive in requesting increased management at the NBR is related to CSKT possibly wanting to acquire more Tribally-owned land on the Reservation. One participant said that the Tribes are “using the cultural thing to cover for what they actually want to do, which is add the National Bison Range to their land base.” Another stated that while yes, “it was important to them to go over the Range to hunt bison and is still important to them,” the CSKT is “an affluent Tribe and want[s] to get the Reservation back in their ownership....to restore the Reservation to their ownership.”

#### THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS

Both public commenters and interview participants speculated on the process of negotiations between the CSKT and the Federal Government, including the manner in which public meetings on the issue have been held. One commenter wrote, “Even as you read this, there may be more closed-door ‘negotiations’ going on, as we have heard that the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes are the ones actually drafting legislation to remove the ‘National’ from the Bison Range.” Many interview participants said that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service “wants to give away the National Bison Range.” Some asserted that the USFWS wants to transfer management because “it’s an outlier in their system,” while others indicated that the USFWS conspires with the Tribes. These participants said things like, the USFWS “kept cutting jobs until there was no way they could do a good job [managing the Range],” causing them to have a good case for transferring management responsibilities to the Tribes. One participant echoed this claim, saying they are “afraid the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service pulling financial backing is intentional.” One participant said, “There are rumors that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is just going to keep underfunding it until the opposition [to Tribal management] goes away.”

Many interview participants expressed concern about private and “secret” negotiations between the Tribes and the USFWS and how the supposed secrecy made the participants feel. One person said, “lots of stuff was done in secret. Caused suspicion. Why were negotiations made behind closed doors? They’re trying to get it done fast.” Another said that CSKT and USFWS “did government-to-government negotiations to keep the public out. They were keeping it a secret about what they were doing with *our* wildlife refuge.” Others speculated, “There has been so much controversy on the reservation that you wonder if there’s some insider stuff,” noting that the USFWS “held secret meetings that no one could come to.” People felt uncomfortable by feeling that “there are a lot of things that go behind the scenes that [they’re] not aware of: meetings, negotiations, planning sessions....” Additionally, many interview participants thought that the Tribes are being pushed by outside forces—particularly the CSKT’s lawyer and the USFWS—to negotiate management of the Bison Range. Participants said that the Tribes’ lawyer “goes to meetings and he’s there pushing, pushing, pushing” the Tribes to negotiate for management of the Range. Others said that they thought the USFWS is the party conspiring to force the Tribes to negotiate for management. One participant, for example, said “I think the Fish and Wildlife Service made it sound like a good idea to the Tribes. They may have encouraged the Tribes to do this.”

Other speculation surrounding the process for negotiating a potential management transfer included the fact that public meetings were “held at strange times with little notice” and public meetings were scheduled that way purposely, so that it was “hard to make it to them.” Further, some interview participants said that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wanted its employees to “say things that weren’t true,” and that they were not to discuss the issue of a potential agreement with the Tribes. This criticism of and sense of exclusion throughout the process was also reflected in public comments. For example, one commenter asks, “Why is it that for 22 years, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes have been allowed to negotiate with the Democratic and Republican political appointees in secret for the control of the National Bison Range?”

## POLITICIANS' MOTIVES

Many interview participants additionally speculated about various political figures' true motives in showing support for the CSKT in their quest for increased management at the National Bison Range. Some interview participants said that Montana Senator Jon Tester "is a good ally for the Tribes because he wants the votes." Others mentioned feeling left out politically. One person said, "Nobody—" that is, no settlers, "on the Reservation counts. Politicians go right to the Tribes." This person went on to say, "Why do you think the Governor decided it was a good idea? All you have to do is take a stand on a tribal issue and you've got 6,000 votes. The Tribes love Tester because he's sticking up for them." Another participant said, "Tester was backing the transfer and I don't think he was really representing the majority of people."

## PRECEDENT FOR FUTURE TRANSFERS

Tribal critics in the public record argue that the proposed transfer of management "would set a terrible precedent for the future of the refuge system," "will create a precedent that threatens every public land holding," and "will set a precedent of giving federal wildlife refuge land to other non-governmental entities." This sentiment is also reflected by interview participants. Participants said that "the Bison Range should be important to everyone because basically, what happens at the NBR opens the floodgate for what can happen at other refuges." Some interview participants, particularly those who do not live near the Bison Range, indicated that for them it is less about the National Bison Range specifically, and more about other potential land transfers that could happen as a result of the CSKT achieving management of the National Bison Range. One person said, "This whole thing isn't about the National Bison Range, per se. It's the tipping point. If the National Bison Range is given away, all national refuges will suffer the same fate....this is a federal issue." Public comments also reflected the fear that transfer of management of the National Bison Range could set a precedent for other public lands transfers, as described by one commenter who said, "I am against the transfer of public land to a private entity (the tribe in question). This is public land that has

essentially been paid for twice with taxpayer dollars and put aside for the enjoyment of all. Giving this land to the tribes, or even selling it to them, would be an injustice to all.”

#### SUMMARY

The National Bison Range was created under colonial contexts that are often ignored by settler narratives, which erases Tribal history. Further, choosing to focus on the work of the USFWS while ignoring the Tribes’ claims contributes to Indigenous erasure which is a key characteristic of settler colonialist projects. Making hyperbolic claims about what would happen to the Range under Tribal leadership and management is a discursive strategy used by settlers to dismiss the CSKT as a valid leader of natural resources management at the National Bison Range. The settler narrative articulates that the CSKT has an alternate goal of adding land to their Tribal land base, failing to acknowledge or recognize the land as culturally meaningful, ancestral lands guaranteed to the Tribes under the Hellgate Treaty, and taken from the Tribes unconstitutionally. While the CSKT do have a goal of increasing Tribal ownership of Reservation lands, this could be seen as a strategy to resist the settler colonialist project, which the settler narrative would seek to suppress. The general consensus among settlers was that the Tribes’ motives are purely economic and for power. Settlers said that the Tribes thought they would get federal money if they managed the Range. In saying that the Tribes use their culture for ulterior motives at the NBR again flattens the Tribes’ historical connection to the land and attempts to delegitimize Tribal claims in order to work towards their cultural erasure. Further, when talking about this topic, people often became angry, louder, or seemingly stressed, indicative of an intolerable amount of race-based stress, or white fragility.

Settlers further express discomfort in terms of the negotiation process and politicians’ motives in their support of the CSKT, which is an attempt to combat resistance to the settler colonialist project. The idea that Tribal management of the National Bison Range would lead to public lands across the country being privatized is contradictory and without merit; the CSKT has indicated that they would not decrease public access if granted Tribal trust ownership of the Range. Additionally, CSKT lands have been open to the public in general both historically and presently.

### *A Future Opponents Seek*

When explicitly discussing potential futures for the National Bison Range, many interview participants suggested either that the Flathead Reservation should be abolished, or that they wish to see a situation wherein the Federal Government and the Tribes could work collaboratively to manage the National Bison Range.

#### ABOLISH THE RESERVATION

When asked about what they envision for the future of the Bison Range, many interview participants became angry or upset, and shared that they thought the Reservation system was unsatisfactory or even that the Flathead Reservation should be abolished. Some participants claimed that reservations should be abolished because they were meant to be temporary and have run their course. Participants said, “Dispose of the reservations. They were supposed to be gone by 1955,” and “Everyone was supposed to intermingle and [the Federal Government was] going to abolish the Reservation.” Others stated that reservations should be abolished because they are bad for Tribal citizens. One person said, “closed Indian reservations were a piss-poor idea because no one could come in and make jobs for them, so they’re in poverty.” Another person said, “seeing what goes on, just to put it real quick and dirty, the reservation system stinks: corruption, favoritism, no accountability....the Reservation is bleak. It’s not helping them. They’ve got resources to no end but their government is corrupt.” Some participants also talked about the reservation system causing “segregation.” Interview participants said, “[CSKT members] need to become American citizens in our society without this segregation,” and “this issue is causing more division.”

#### COLLABORATION

Many interview participants suggested collaboration between the Federal Government and the Tribes as a way forward through the decades-long conflict over who should manage the Bison Range. One participant said,

I would love to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Tribes manage it together. There’s plenty of work to go around. They just have to decide who’s the boss. Tribes and non-tribal people have worked together for years....If the Tribes and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

could get together and make it the most wonderful thing you can imagine, that would be great. They just gotta quit fightin' over which government is the boss.”

Another participant said that while they are “in favor of joint, shared management,” they “would like to see the funding remain stable and the only way to keep it stable is through the United States. The Tribes have great institutional knowledge to incorporate.”

Participants suggested that the Tribes should establish a separate herd that they would exclusively manage. Some participants said that the tribes should “build their own herd,” and thought that “maybe the Tribes could have help with getting their own herd to manage.” One person suggested that the Tribes “should establish their own herd and they can co-manage by exchanging genetics of bison with the National Bison Range.” Other interview participants alluded to collaboration or even co-management, however they were quick to mention that this management style had been attempted and was not successful in the past. Participants said, “the last time [the Tribes and the Federal Government] tried to work together, it didn’t go well,” and asked: “Could it go both ways, like splitting management? They tried it before, though. I think it would be hard to split management.” One participant, however, noted that in past management partnerships between the Tribes and USFWS, the USFWS “still always had the final say.” This person went on to ask, “How do you co-manage with a sovereign nation?” Finally, they said, “I really wish [the USFWS] could go back and do everything differently. There are fears left over from back then about if the CSKT would take over and not allow people to go there. It was very scary in the valley during that time....They had trouble figuring out what was ‘inherently federal,’ and got off on the wrong foot. And it’s difficult to now just say, ‘Okay, let’s work together.’ Both people want the same thing and it shouldn’t be that hard to compromise.”

#### SUMMARY

When asked about what type of future they envision for the National Bison Range, many interview participants said that they want the Reservation to be abolished, that it just creates divisions among people and that they are bad for tribal citizens. On the other hand, many people expressed a desire for collaborative management between the U.S. Government and the Tribes, however many of

these claims were expressed after they had already articulated very anti-Tribal claims throughout the interview. It may be that people *would* actually support some type of comanagement, but it is unclear if opponents would support “true” comanagement, which would involve both parties having equitable power, not the USFWS having ultimate governing power. The notion that the abolition of the Flathead Reservation would create an equitable landscape for the Tribes and non-Tribal settlers is a narrative of settler colonialism and also indicates projection as a rhetorical tool used among settlers to suggest both that minority groups like the CSKT seek to segregate themselves and the expectation that CSKT members fully assimilate. Abolishing the Reservation is ultimately connected to a political and cultural erasure of Indigenous presence.

## Discussion

While some settlers feel genuine affection for the NBR, the nature of claims opponents make indicates both colorblind racist language and white fragility while erasing the Indigenous experience. Present-day opposition to Tribal management of the National Bison Range, as a continuation of historical white supremacy and anti-Indian attitudes in the area, energizes the settler colonialist project and affirms what scholars have said about the ways that settler colonialism functions, with the addition of white fragility and colorblind racism as discursive strategies to claimsmaking. Analyzing the perspectives of those who oppose Tribal management of the National Bison Range in the context of settler colonialism theory and whiteness studies provides a race-based understanding of the claims white settler colonialists make in their struggles for land and continuity of historical power structures. While some anti-Tribal racist comments were overtly expressed, perhaps due to the conversational nature of the interviews or the mediation of writing a comment online, many interview participants and public commenters’ claims can be categorized as subtly anti-Tribal racist through their display of white fragility and colorblind racist language. Though subtle, however, these comments are just as, if not more effective in furthering the settler colonialist project and maintaining the traditional racial hierarchy that favors whiteness in the United States.

Additionally, non-tribal settlers who oppose Tribal management of the National Bison Range operate with a discourse that reflects the four key tenets of all settler colonialist projects: it acknowledges itself as a land-based project and makes settler claim to the land, simultaneously seeking to erase both the CSKT as Indigenous and the identity of the colonizer as settler.

Also significant, though, is that the settler colonialist project at the National Bison Range remains incomplete due to the CSKT and their allies demanding Tribal recognition and a larger management role for the Tribes. Resistance to the settler colonialist project at the Bison Range originates from CSKT and their allies insisting upon telling true stories about the history of the land and animals that make up the Range, for example, the 2018 film “In the Spirit of ?Ataticé?” that tells the CSKT’s story about the creation of the National Bison Range and their historical and ongoing relationship with bison (Glick, film 2018). Further, each time the Tribes have renegotiated for an Annual Funding Agreement with the USFWS, or have advocated for tribal trust ownership, they have required that settlers recognize them as a political force. Settler colonialism at the Bison Range, therefore is an ongoing project.

### ***Significance of the Land***

Non-Tribal settlers who oppose Tribal management of the National Bison Range establish their attachment to the land in part, because they truly do have an affective attachment to the place, but discourse surrounding place-based attachment to and pride for the land additionally signifies claimsmaking while somewhat conveniently ignoring true historical narratives about the violence and illegal actions through which settlers obtained land ownership on the Flathead Reservation and eventually created the National Bison Range. Establishing a place-based affinity for the National Bison Range through sharing feelings of pride for the Range, telling stories about personal and familial history at the Range, and discussing the symbolic nature of bison serves the narrative of non-Tribal settlers who oppose Tribal management of the Bison Range. Because in settler colonialism, “the most important concern is land/water/air/subterranean earth” (Tuck and Yang 2012:5), anti-

Tribal settler discourse hinges on settlers' affinity for and connection to the land. Through their pride for the National Bison Range, displayed through taking visitors to the Range, and comparing it to National Parks throughout Montana and the United States, settlers establish that the conflict is land-based and set up the opportunity to make claim to it. The National Bison Range, as a result of this discourse, becomes a settler colonialist structure itself.

Because settler colonialism is a specific type of colonialism that is focused on a particular territory or land, settler colonialist discourse around the National Bison Range seeks to establish first and foremost that settlers have made a "home" at the Bison Range. The idea that settlers have made the National Bison Range *theirs* is reflected in comments like, "The memories, the pictures, the feeling, the familiarity....the Bison Range became a part of our family," and "My family's been farming and ranching all their life. It's a way of life with us. And we really care for our livestock and I believe the bison deserve to be cared for too." These stories additionally reflect Bonilla-Silva's concepts of testimonials and story lines. The personal nature of a testimony of a family visiting the National Bison Range gives the audience a sense of the settler having both authenticity and emotionality that only a firsthand experience can provide, thus strengthening their claims.

Opposition to increased Tribal management of the Bison Range is further served by settler discourse reflecting that the National Bison Range represents American heritage for "everybody," because in settler colonialism, "land is remade into property and human relationships to land are restricted to the relationship of the owner to his property" (Tuck and Yang 2012:5). As a publicly-owned territory, settler discourse draws on the fact that because they, as Americans, *own* the land, they have ultimate authority on what happens to it. While some settlers who oppose Tribal management of the National Bison Range *do* feel a genuine connection to the land through wildlife interactions and decades of family visits, settlers claim the National Bison Range as part of their heritage, flattening the Tribal experience and thus working towards Tribal cultural erasure.

## *Claimsmaking*

In this study, non-Tribal settlers seek to make claim to the National Bison Range as their own, which reflects the second key tenet of settler colonialism: claimsmaking. Because “settlers come to stay” (Wolfe 2006), they make claim to the land until the Indigenous is fully replaced by the colonizer, either physically or culturally. In this case specifically, the settler colonizer seeks to “become Indigenous” to the land that makes up the NBR through erasure of their own identity as colonizer. This is apparent in the short historical narrative that opponents operate on when describing the National Bison Range. For them, history of the Range begins when the NBR was formed in 1908, however, for the Tribes, it begins at the dawn of time as they have existed in western Montana for “time immemorial.” In the case of opposition to Tribal management at the National Bison Range, non-Tribal settlers make claim to the NBR by (re)asserting the purpose of the Range, declaring that the Bison Range is successful the way it is, and legitimizing their claims by preemptively denying that their perspective should be considered anti-Tribal racist.

By (re)asserting the purpose of the National Bison Range, non-Tribal settlers maintain that the Range was set up to provide refuge for the bison and to provide the public with a place to interact with wildlife. This discourse supersedes and replaces the Tribal narrative of how the Indigenous were in relationship with bison and the land for time immemorial for material and spiritual subsistence, therefore allowing an opening for non-Tribal settlers to make claim to the land. Another common and related discursive theme among opponents’ claimsmaking is their desire for the National Bison Range to “stay the same.” According to the concept of white fragility, white people have not developed the ability to discuss and be reflexive about race inequality and instead, when confronted with race issues, get into a “state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable” (DiAngelo 2011:54). Shutting down discussion of the racialized conflict at the National Bison Range reflects responses described as white fragility, particularly “silence” and “leaving the stress-inducing situation.” Rather than engage in discussion about race, opponents shut down and say the National Bison Range should stay the same as a way to end conversation. The

National Bison Range “staying the same,” thus becomes coded language for it “remaining in settler control.” Opponents additionally “otherize” the CSKT by saying that the Tribes are unAmerican and that the Tribal government is ineffective and even detrimental to the Tribes’ well-being. This claim aligns with Bonilla-Silva’s concept of projection as a tool for colorblind racism. By suggesting that the Tribes self-segregate and that the Tribal government does not take care of its citizens, non-Tribal settlers position claiming the Bison Range for themselves as the moral thing to do. Further, that opponents support the USFWS so fervently while simultaneously denying support for the Tribal Government indicates an affinity to settler institutions, which furthers the status quo of racial hierarchy.

It is significant to note that almost all non-Tribal settlers in this study preemptively clarified that they are not racist. In settler colonialism, the relationship between colonizer and Indigenous becomes racialized “so that Indigenous individuals and their collective polities are made to seem inferior to Western European ones and thus to have less legitimate political claims” (Sturm 2017:342, Kauanui 2008). This is the case at the National Bison Range. In their claims, non-Tribal settlers flatten the racialized experiences of themselves and Indigenous people; they deny that Tribal members should even have a Reservation, let alone management of the National Bison Range, using phrases such as, “It’s not a good thing for Americans to be fractionalized like we are. We’re all Americans.” Phrases like this exemplify colorblind racist language as a rhetorical tool; settlers are able to say what they think without seeming morally incorrect. They additionally use specific semantic moves of colorblind racism to avoid dangerous discussions, such as “I’m not racist, but....” This language will often be followed by a racist remark, as is the case in discussions on the National Bison Range. These semantic moves, however, become a strategy for non-Tribal settlers to use when they want to be seen as credible but still express their racist perspectives. Indeed, instead of saying explicitly racist remarks, colorblind racism functions to “otherize softly” (Bonilla-Silva 2006:2).

### ***Erasure of the Indigenous***

The erasure of Indigenous peoples is central to the settler colonialist project; in settler colonialism, the Indigenous are made to disappear, not only physically but culturally, so as not to disrupt the replacement of Indigenous people with settler-as-Indigenous colonizers (Sturm 2017:342). In their claimsmaking, opponents additionally attempt to discredit the Tribes as a way to erase Indigenous experience and their identity as they relate to the land and animals encompassed by the National Bison Range. Non-Tribal settlers do this through claiming that the Tribes are unfit to manage the National Bison Range, or by saying that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the only appropriate manager. They also attempt to discredit the Tribes through insinuating that the Tribes' cultural practices and historical narratives are made up, invalid, or insignificant. While some non-tribal settlers acknowledge that the Tribes have a unique cultural and historical relationship with the land and animals that make up the National Bison Range, they raise their own personal experience up to meet that of the Tribes, saying things like "our family has a cultural connection with the Range, too." This type of discourse seeks to flatten and therefore erase the Indigenous experience, while also serving as a *testimony* that strengthens their claim by providing context that only someone with firsthand experience could have. Non-Tribal settlers additionally seek to erase the Indigenous through speaking speculatively about what could happen at the Bison Range if the Tribes were to gain increased management responsibilities. Speculation, expressed as fears and worries, functions to develop an alternate reality in which the Tribes are fully discredited (erased) and the National Bison Range goes on to exist in a way that benefits the settler colonialist project.

### ***Erasure of the Settler***

A completed settler colonialist project requires the settler physically replacing the Indigenous, the erasure of the Indigenous, and the erasure of settler's own identity as colonizer. On the issue of management at the National Bison Range, non-Tribal settlers erase their own identity as colonizer by resituating themselves as Indigenous to the land that makes up the Bison Range.

Completely replacing Indigenous narratives about the land and animals that make up the National Bison Range, non-Tribal settlers highlight former president Theodore Roosevelt's foresight in collaboration with the American Bison Society to start the National Bison Range. Opponents talk about their love for their land, which may be a true affective response that is valid, yet they omit important truth-telling with regards to white settlers' complicated and contradictory relationship with bison; white settlers in the United States now seek to conserve bison when our/their ancestors are who caused the bison's initial brush with extinction. Conservation of bison led by non-tribal settlers therefore is a projection that protects white supremacy. While non-white people have historically been protectors of wildlife, especially bison in the American west, in settler narrative about the Bison Range, Indigenous are seen as *threats* to wildlife. In not acknowledging Indigenous historical narratives alongside settler histories, non-Tribal settlers replace the Indigenous with themselves, erasing their identity as colonizers and refusing to recognize the Tribes' legitimacy, furthering the settler colonialist project at the National Bison Range.

### ***Future Research***

This research provides an analysis of a settler colonialist project in the United States that is racialized and involves federal public lands. The results of this study suggest that opposition to Tribal management of the National Bison Range furthers the settler colonialist project at the National Bison Range, which is predicated on racist attitudes against the Tribes. I did not interview any Tribal members who oppose CSKT management of the Bison Range, though I have heard that there are Tribal members who have made claims in opposition to the Tribal Government. While there is often nuance of perspective within any governing body's constituents, identifying and researching that very nuanced perspective goes beyond the scope of this paper but with future research might provide another layer of understanding the dynamic nature of settler colonialism and structural racism specific to the National Bison Range.

During interviews, and in some public comments, participants' comments pointed to the intersection of class and race. The National Bison Range, for example, is *one* enjoyable, inexpensive

thing to do for retired people who live on the Reservation. From that perspective alone, I understand feeling uncomfortable about a potential change to that amenity. Future research on public lands projects of settler colonialism in the United States might expand on the intersection of class and race in rural communities. This work additionally has implications outside of academia, as Indigenous activists and their non-Tribal accomplices work towards decolonizing Indigenous lands and resisting settler colonialism.

Broadly, the issue of who should manage the National Bison Range is not totally unique; Indigenous groups in many settler-colonized nation states continue to seek increased roles in natural resource management. Though settler-Indigenous natural resource management conflicts have been frequently documented in international contexts, research using settler colonialism theory to describe public lands issues in the United States is surprisingly sparse. With the resurgence of activism focused towards Indigenous rights in the United States, for example the 2016 Dakota Access Pipeline protests, we can expect more lands-based claimsmaking by Tribes, Alaskan Natives, and Native Hawaiians. Future research on natural resources management and Indigenous rights in the United States, therefore, might continue to employ settler colonialism theory that integrates concepts like white fragility and colorblind racism to better describe settler colonialism as a project of white supremacy.

## Conclusion

Scholars researching in Canada and Aotearoa (New Zealand) have often used settler colonialism as a framework through which issues related to public-lands management and ownership can be understood and articulated. This approach, however, is less prevalent in research on such issues in the United States, despite that settler colonialism is arguably one of the most appropriate lenses through which to examine issues of public-land management, ownership, and use. Because white supremacy and settler colonialism are deeply intertwined in the United States, integrating discussion of whiteness into research on settler colonialism is necessary in order to fully encompass the breadth of natural resource conflicts like management of the National Bison Range.

This work, therefore, detects and names specific structures and discursive strategies that allow racism to continue to play out in settler colonialist projects in the United States, particularly at the National Bison Range. In the context of settler colonialism and whiteness, one can imagine a multitude of possible futures for the National Bison Range along the spectrum of settled to decolonized. Continuing to deny the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes increased management or even trust ownership of the National Bison Range keeps the NBR on the trajectory towards a finished project of settler colonization; settlers continue to devalue, delegitimize, and erase the Indigenous experience and existence in an effort to replace them entirely. Additionally, flattening Indigenous and non-Tribal settler experiences with the land and animals that make up the National Bison Range through colorblind racist language such as “we’re all human” ensures the erasure of both settler-as-colonizer and Indigenous, thus fully replacing the Indigenous with the settler, at which point the land that makes up the National Bison Range can be understood as a completed settler colonial project. Significantly, discourse employed to sustain the settler colonialist project is subtle and insidious, as opposed to overtly racist, which solidifies that structural racism lends itself to settler colonialism; it legitimates the settlers’ ahistorical perspectives and while delegitimizing tribal historical claims and connection to the land and wildlife that make up the Range.

That the Tribes continue to reject their own erasure, however, prevents the completion of the settler colonization of lands comprising the National Bison Range. Decolonization of the National Bison Range involves the repatriation of Indigenous land and life simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have been both symbolically and materially misunderstood (Tuck and Yang 2012:1,7). As such, resisting a settler colonialist project at the National Bison Range involves acknowledging and respecting the CSKT's historic, cultural, geographic, and spiritual relationship to the land and wildlife in addition to fully restoring the land and wildlife that are encompassed by the NBR back to the Tribes. Resistance to completion of the settler colonialist project at the National Bison Range may be accomplished as the Tribes continue to resist their own erasure, but also as non-Tribal settler-accomplices support Indigenous sovereignty and work to reveal the non-Tribal (often white) settler colonizer. Acknowledging and scrutinizing whiteness, as opposed to behaving as though the white experience is baseline reality for all people, creates the possibility for becoming better attuned to the colorblind racism and white fragility discourse that often remain subliminal, yet are highly effective in anti-Tribal efforts.

While in post Jim-Crow America, overtly racist behavior and discourse are seen as immoral, it is not the case that such tendencies have become obsolete. In part, they have morphed into microaggressive, subliminal messages and behaviors that allow white settlers to go undetected as racists in their claims and beliefs. Through acknowledging whiteness and the forms through which it assumes its position in the racial hierarchy, conversations about race and forms of racism may be more prevalent, despite inevitably uncomfortable for some. As Angela Davis has pointed out, "In a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist; we must be anti-racist." As "non-racist" white people begin to interrogate white supremacy and racism in all its forms, and think of themselves as what Paulette Regan calls vulnerable "not-knowers," we may see a shift towards the more productive and ethical position of anti-racism and truth-telling that is freeing for everyone involved despite historical traumas. It is these reckonings, in addition to continued Tribal resistance and ally support that may

contribute to ending the settler colonialist project at the National Bison Range, restoring the Range to its original stewards: the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.

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# Appendices

## *Appendix A: Interview Guide*

**Before interview:** *Apply informed consent statement and obtain verbal or written consent before proceeding.*

### **Background/Building Rapport**

First, I'd like to learn a little bit about you. Let's begin with some introduction to who you are and your connection to the Mission Valley and the National Bison Range.

1. Could you tell me a little about yourself?
2. How would you describe the National Bison Range to someone who knows nothing about it?

### **Significance of the Range**

1. Can you tell me about your history with the National Bison Range?
2. Why is the Bison Range important to you?
3. In your opinion, what challenges does the National Bison Range face?

### **Identity Claims**

1. What is important about this being a *National* Bison Range?
2. Do you feel that the Bison Range belongs to a specific group of people?
  1. Probe: Who do you feel the Bison Range belongs to?
  2. Probe: How so? In what ways?
3. Why do you believe the Tribes sought to manage the Bison Range?
4. Why do you oppose Tribal management of the National Bison Range?
5. Why do you think there is conflict over management rights of the National Bison Range?

### **Futures of the Bison Range**

1. In a perfect world, what would the National Bison Range look like in the future?
  1. Probe: What about in terms of management?
2. In a perfect world, how would the public be involved with the National Bison Range?
3. If you had to be more realistic, what would you say you expect for the future of the Bison Range?

### **Conclusion**

1. Is there anything else about you or your relationship to the National Bison Range that we haven't talked about that you'd like to share or emphasize?
2. Do you know of anyone else I should talk with?
  1. Probe: Would you say this person (these people) oppose Tribal management?
  2. *Get contact information.*
3. Are you okay with me contacting you in the future if follow-up or clarification is needed?
4. *Thank participant for their time.*

## ***Appendix B: Informed Consent Form***

### SUBJECT INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT

**Study Title:** Examining Perspectives of Tribal Management of the National Bison Range in the Mission Valley, Montana

**Investigator:** Brittany Lee Palmer  
M.S. Student; University of Montana  
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**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Robin Saha  
University of Montana  
robin.saha@mso.umt.edu  
Rankin Hall 018; Tel. 406-243-6285

**Special Instructions:** This consent form may contain words that are new to you. If you read any words that are not clear to you, please ask the person who gave you this form to explain them to you.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research study is to learn why the National Bison Range is so important to various groups of people. The results may inform the way the National Bison Range and other natural resources are dealt with in the future. You have been asked to take part in this research because you have voiced opposition to the National Bison Range being transferred to Tribal management.

**Procedures:** Our conversation will last for about an hour. You will be asked about your personal relationship with the National Bison Range and your personal opinions on the present and future of the Range.

**Risks/Discomforts:** There is no anticipated discomfort for those contributing to this study, so risk to participants is minimal. If at any time you feel uncomfortable answering a question you may simply say so and that question will be left blank.

**Benefits:** There is no promise that you will directly benefit from taking part in this study, however, the results may contribute to conflict resolution at the National Bison Range or for other natural resources issues.

**Confidentiality:** Your identity will be kept private if you so choose. Records of our conversation will be kept confidential and will not be released without your consent except as required by law. If the results of this research are written in a scientific journal or presented publicly, your name and any identifying details will not be used. Your initials \_\_\_\_\_ indicate your permission to be identified by name in publications or presentations. If you do not wish to be acknowledged by name in publications or presentations, please initial here: \_\_\_\_\_. Research data will be stored on a password-protected computer that will be with me or in my (locked) home. All voice data files, interview transcriptions, and notes will be destroyed at the conclusion of this project.

**Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:** Your decision to take part in this research study is entirely voluntary. If you wish to stop participating in the interview at any time during our conversation, you may simply say so.

**Questions:** If you have any questions about the research now or during the study, please contact:

Dr. Robin Saha; Faculty Supervisor  
Professor of Environmental Studies  
University of Montana  
robin.saha@mso.umt.edu | 406-243-6285

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the UM Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 406-243-6672.

**Statement of Your Consent:** I have read the above description of this research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions I may have will also be answered by a member of the research team. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I understand I will receive a copy of this consent form.

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Printed Name of Subject

---

Signature

---

Date

**Statement of Consent to be Audiotaped:** I understand that audio recordings may be taken during the study. I consent to being audio recorded. I understand that if information from our conversation is used for presentations or publications of any kind, names and other identifying information will be omitted. I understand that audio recordings will be destroyed following transcription, and that no identifying information will be included in the transcription.

---

Printed Name of Subject

---

Signature

---

Date