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Honorable Lyle Laverty
Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Assistant Secretary Laverty:

I had the privilege of serving as Assistant Secretary from May 1971 through January 1977 under President Nixon and President Ford.

These were years when a vast amount of the nation's environmental legislation was written, coordinated with the Council on Environmental Quality, signed off on by the Domestic Counsel, the Office of Management and Budget and successfully navigated through the committees and finally the full House and Senate.

I testified more than any other member of the administration in 1971, 1972 and 1973.

The Endangered Species Act was written in our corridor with vast assistance from CEQ and the USFWS.

We established an incredible number of refuges and WPA's throughout the country. A number of major national parks in the lower '48 were created and the descriptions and the accompanying Environmental Impact Statements were prepared for the Alaska land preservation effort. President Ford admitted to me a couple of years before his death that he wished he had withdrawn the Alaskan lands as President Carter did. I had them ready, on a desk in the Oval Office.

We had our share of major problems: grizzly bear reductions in Yellowstone, the creation of a biological arm for the USFWS, significant differences with the USFS over both clear-cutting and streamside tree protection, the accelerating losses of pacific anadromous fish due to the construction of the and completing of a series of dams on major western rivers systems. I could mention lead-steel shot, wolves, waterfowl seasons; the list would go on and on. The point is that you have the best job in government.

We shared budgetary problems, as the Viet Nam War bled domestic funding.

Throughout this era, I maintained a high level concern for the operation of the National Wildlife Refuge system. I am devoted to the women and men who serve us in protecting these unique areas. I have had the pleasure with my family of creating a unique refuge on Florida's east coast.

I want you to know that I am deeply concerned over your support of an Annual Funding Agreement with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes concerning management of the National Bison Range. Rather than consider your objective as assisting the Native Americans to become managers of the Range, I think there are serious ramifications that have either been overlooked or you may not have considered. I was involved with Congressman John Dingell, a champion of the refuge system, to craft the legal basis that binds the USFWS to be the 'managers of the refuge system'.

I do not know what pressures you must be facing with the BIA and Members of Congress, but your fall back position is clearly legally defensible: management responsibility legally rests with the FWS. It may well be timely to work with the tribes to delineate areas where they can cooperatively share some management and be involved in many facets of management planning. A Cooperative Agreement is legal and could be pursued.

The precedent of ceding management authority to the tribes may produce future misunderstandings that are limitless, as they may pertain to a great number of national wildlife refuges and even national parks.

The controversies that would emanate from such decisions would reverberate throughout the country and would be a hindrance on your efforts to restore a sense of stability in the office that you hold.

I hope that the Secretary and you will carefully review your options and alternatives before making a final judgment on how you wish to proceed. Your decisions are being watched by every member of the refuge system, coast to coast.

I wish you as much satisfaction and a real sense of accomplishment that was the highlight of my years as Assistant Secretary.

Sincerely,



Nathaniel P. Reed