



NEWS RELEASE

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE WORKS TO EXPAND RELATIONSHIPS WITH SOVEREIGN INDIAN NATIONS

As part of the Department of the Interior's ongoing efforts to carry out the Tribal Self-Governance Act of 1994, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has worked with self-governance Tribes during the last year to inform them of opportunities for expanded cooperation.

The Tribal Self-Governance Act of 1994 enables Indian Tribes to negotiate annual funding agreements that allow them to conduct certain functions ordinarily conducted by Federal personnel.

Although the Service has received various inquiries from self-governance Tribes concerning the Self-Governance Act, only one Tribe has begun formal negotiations for an annual funding agreement. Discussions with the Confederated Salish-Kootenai Tribes about the National Bison Range in Montana are continuing.

To further the Department's goals for carrying out the Self-Governance Act, the Service has identified a range of opportunities for increased Indian Tribal participation, including everything from fish hatchery operation to endangered species recovery programs. A list of programs with elements available for annual funding agreement negotiations will be published in the Federal Register within the next few weeks.

Annual funding agreements are similar to contracts but allow a greater involvement in program management and operation than a contract negotiated for services only. Under such agreements, a Tribe might assume elements of biological, visitor, or research services currently performed by Service personnel. Funds normally associated with the activity would be transferred to the Tribe for administration. The extent of Tribal involvement depends on whether the activity is an "inherently Federal" function or is otherwise appropriate.

Funding agreements require Tribes to follow all Federal rules and regulations. Ultimate control of Federal programs, facilities, and property remains with the Service. Other laws, such as the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, do not allow the Service to delegate many of its management authorities to cities, counties, states, or Indian Tribes. On-the-ground management at national wildlife refuges would not change in any major ways under an annual funding agreement.

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Service-Tribal negotiations may be open to public participation and comment by mutual consent. All Service-Tribal agreements must be sent to Congress for review at least 90 days before they take effect.

For more information about Service involvement in the Tribal Self-Governance programs, write to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of the Native American Liaison, 1849 C Street, NW., MS 3012 MIB, Washington, DC 20240.

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