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Links to proposed Badger-Two Medicine Protection Act and photo follows.



Blackfeet Nation calls for permanent protection of Badger-Two Medicine

Tribe proposes legislation for sacred wildlands to be designated Cultural Heritage Area

Browning, MT—Following decades of threat to our cultural homeland, the Blackfeet Nation on Thursday released a legislative proposal to permanently protect the Badger-Two Medicine as a “Cultural Heritage Area.”

“We’ve been working on this for many years, with partners from all across the state,” said John Murray, Blackfeet Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. “The future of our traditional homeland has been uncertain for too long. It’s time to protect the Badger-Two Medicine once and for all.”

The Badger-Two Medicine is bordered by Glacier National Park, the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex and the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. The 130,000-acre wildland was originally part of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, and is considered sacred to the Blackfeet Nation. Today, it is managed by the U.S. Forest Service as part of the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest. The area is home to many Blackfeet origin stories, and Tribal members still practice traditional ceremony there.

In the early 1980s, the federal government illegally issued oil and gas leases in the Badger-Two Medicine over the objections of the Blackfeet Nation. Ever since, the Blackfeet and our allies have fought to prevent industrialization of the area. Last week, a panel of judges in the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals canceled the last of those illegal leases. That decision has opened an opportunity to plan a better future for the Badger-Two Medicine, for Blackfeet, and for all Montanans.

The proposed Badger-Two Medicine Protection Act was drafted in partnership with Blackfeet leaders, non-tribal neighbors, hunters, anglers, conservationists, ranchers, local landowners and many others. In most ways, the proposal simply “keeps things the way they are.” It builds on existing protections, such as the area’s Traditional Cultural District designation, and is modeled on legislation already enacted in other places. The proposal guarantees continued public access for hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, horse packing and other traditional uses. It also keeps grazing rights intact on the land.

Because the Badger-Two Medicine already is off-limits to oil/gas leasing and to motorized access, it has no impact on current status of those uses. Non-commercial timber harvest would continue under the proposal, for forest health, wildfire response and private property protection. And the plan would add protections for headwater streams that are an important source of clean water for agricultural operations and communities both on and off the reservation.

In addition to protecting traditional uses, the “Cultural Heritage Area” designation guarantees existing Treaty Rights will be honored, and establishes formal Tribal consultation with the U.S. Forest Service to contribute to future management decisions. The bill also provides the Blackfeet Nation an opportunity to conduct trail maintenance and other contracted forest work.

“There are important voices that for too long have not been heard,” Murray said, noting that during the recent legal proceedings there were no Blackfeet judges or attorneys in the courtroom. “We have been refused a seat at our own table, and people across the country have been making decisions about our most sacred ancestral lands. This proposal provides us a voice in the discussion.”

In addition, the proposal establishes a diverse citizen advisory group made up of both tribal and non-tribal stakeholders, to help the U.S. Forest Service draft long-term management guidelines for the Badger-Two Medicine.

This is not the first plan advanced to protect the area; multiple proposals for wilderness designation date back to the 1970s, and a Trump Administration review recommended creating a National Monument there in 2017.

“But this is the first time in 40 years that we have been out from under the threat of industrial leases,” said Terry Tatsey, a member of the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council. “This is a real opportunity to get it right, once and for all. The Cultural Heritage Area plan is the first proposal to be written with Blackfeet involvement, and with Blackfeet values included.”

According to Tatsey, Blackfeet owe our cultural survival to the Badger-Two Medicine. “For all those decades, when the federal government outlawed our ceremonies, those mountains are where we went to practice our culture and our ways,” he said. “It’s our last refuge.”

Murray noted that “Our traditional Blackfeet knowledge system is intact, but it is in a fragile condition. It cannot stand many more assaults. If we don’t protect it now, we may lose those parts of Blackfeet knowledge and culture forever.”

But the Badger-Two Medicine is not just home to the spiritual Medicine Grizzly; it also is home to flesh-and-bone grizzly bears, wolverines, elk, mule deer and many other iconic wildlife species that migrate between the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex and Glacier National Park.

“The Badger-Two Medicine represents some of the best wild habitat on the planet,” said Tyson Running Wolf, a state legislator and former Blackfeet Councilman. “This is where the prairie meets the mountains, and it’s some of the finest hunting heritage Montana has left.”

That is one reason the proposal has the support of so many sportsmen, Running Wolf said. In addition to hunters and anglers, the Cultural Heritage Area plan is backed by a former oil lease holder, ranchers, business owners, conservation interests, large private landowners, outfitters and guides, and many others. Within Indian Country, it has been endorsed by Blackfeet Tribal Business Council, the Blackfoot Confederacy, the National Congress of American Indians, and the Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council, which represents all the Tribes of Montana, Wyoming and Idaho.

“We’ve been talking to our neighbors for a long time about this,” Running Wolf said, “making sure we’re getting it right. Lots of people have provided advice, making it a better proposal for everyone.”

Recently, the Blackfeet Nation shared the proposal with Montana’s Congressional Delegation, with a request that they work together in a bipartisan manner to pass the measure as swiftly as possible.

“A moment like this doesn’t present itself very often,” Murray said. “With the leases canceled and the Forest Service seeking to manage the area in accordance with the existing Traditional Cultural District designation, we’re looking at a tremendous window of opportunity for everyone.”

“This land heals, and I think all of us could use some healing in the world right now,” Murray said.

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[Link](#) to download Badger-Two Medicine photo (Photo Credit: Bear Star Photography)

[Link](#) to download proposed Badger-Two Medicine Protection Act (same text as below)