

Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) – Office of Trust Services Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) Ecosystem Restoration (ER) Bison Project Funding, Criteria, and Application Process

Summary

The Bison Project will serve a variety of purposes that are designed to uphold the best of Tribal bison herd expansion interests, including a focus on ecosystem restoration through bison conservation. The Bison Project will foster practices that are traditional and culturally attentive to the historical coevolved relationship with bison to support the Tribe's own self-determined well-being. Furthermore, the projects will work to foster the intent of the Department of the Interior Secretary's Order 3410, the purpose of which is to restore wild and healthy populations of American bison and the prairie grassland ecosystem through collaboration among the Department's Bureaus and partners such as other Federal agencies, states, Tribes, and landowners using the best available science and Indigenous Knowledge.

Applicant Eligibility

Eligibility is limited to Federally recognized Indian Tribal Governments and authorized Tribal organizations. Federally recognized Tribes are eligible as listed in the current Federal Register, Notice of Indian Entities Recognized and Eligible to Receive Services from the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs, which is the official listing of all Federally recognized Tribes in the U.S. pursuant to Section 104 under the Federally Recognized Indian Tribe List Act of 1994 (Pub. L. 103-454; 108 Stat. 4791-4792). The most recent Notice was published in the Federal Register, 88, FR 54654 (August 11, 2023). Authorized Tribal organizations, as defined at 25 U.S.C. 5304(l) are also eligible to apply.

Proposal Eligibility

- Proposals must provide the contact information for the Tribal project manager overseeing the proposed Bison Project.
- The proposal budget cannot include Tribal indirect rate. Tribal indirect costs (contract support cost) come from a separate account and should be requested at the time you develop the budget with BIA Awarding Officials (if selected for funding).
- Awarded projects will require biannual reporting to share and demonstrate success on project implementation. Rangeland vegetation monitoring data with photo points to report level of utilization, rangeland health, condition/trend, and forage productivity will be included in the fall annual reporting process to demonstrate ecosystem restoration and project success.

Project Eligibility

Successful applications will focus on ecosystem restoration through bison conservation and expansion and improved management of existing herds on Tribal trust lands, individual Indian allotment lands, or in areas managed by Tribes through treaties or agreements.

The Bison Project will focus on bison conservation and expansion and improved management of existing herds on Tribal trust resources and describe the role of Tribal bison on ecosystem restoration on Tribal landscapes and altered Tribal environmental conditions. This funding can cover bison as indicator keystone species on agricultural pasture, grassland, and rangeland settings.

Funding is available for the implementation of bison specific management practices and would assist recipients in the following, or similar, areas:

- Implementing management or other established protocols
- Purchase and installation of fencing, equipment, or other infrastructure
- Transportation of bison
- Bison management activities, rangeland vegetation monitoring to assess level of grazing utilization and/or rangeland condition/trend/production to monitor ecosystem restoration.
- Personnel that provide for the administration and function of Tribal bison program and project commitment
- Genetic considerations to achieve healthy and plentiful large populations of bison on Indian Lands to reduce adverse herd fluctuations for ecological and cultural renewal.
- Bison health and disease prevention and control
- Ecosystem restoration adaptive management – How the Bison project implementation will help meet environmental, social, and economic goals, increases scientific and indigenous knowledges, and recognizes the importance of natural variability in contributing to ecological restoration, resilience, and productivity.
- Participating in local/regional/national forums related to ecosystem restoration and/or bison conservation.
- Educational efforts related to ecosystem and/or bison conservation management for project staff members implementing the Bison project.
- Fostering co-management or co-stewardship partnerships for land and animal conservation and wildlife management protocols

To maximize impact, awards will be funded at a maximum of \$500,000 each.

Ranking Criteria

All projects should focus on ecosystem restoration enabled through bison herd expansion on Tribal rangelands, pastures and grassland conservation management scales that address productive collective impacts on Tribal ecological, cultural, and historic use within Tribal natural resources.

Eligible projects will be ranked according to the following criteria **(100 Points Total)**:

- 1) How the project will help increase herd size – towards an ideal herd size of 1,000 or more for optimal genetic diversity. **25 points**
- 2) The scale of the bison presence's benefits on ecosystem restoration, including native species and other Tribal natural resources. **20 points**
- 3) The scope of a proposal's support for the conservation and improvement of the management of Tribal bison. **15 points**

- 4) The extent to which the herd management is treating bison as wildlife, not livestock, including minimal handling. **10 points**
- 5) How the project enhances the spiritual and cultural beliefs and practices of the Tribal community. **10 points**
- 6) The integration of Indigenous Knowledge, also known as Traditional Ecological Knowledge, into project implementation. **10 points**
- 7) The extent to which the applicant is leveraging funding through volunteers, matched funds, Tribal contributions, in-kind contributions, non-government organizations (NGOs), consortiums, Tribal policies, climate adaption plans, economic development plans, agricultural plans, land management plans, etc. **5 points**
- 8) The extent to which the proposal demonstrates an awareness and ability to achieve compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and policies, including Tribal and federal permitting requirements (e.g., Tribal environmental code, NEPA, ESA). **5 points**

This funding source is non-recurring 1 year funding. Thus, the goals of any proposed project should not rely on future funding. Awarded projects will require biannual reporting to share and demonstrate success on project implementation. Should additional funding become available we will publish notice for additional applications, however applicants to this RFP will not need to resubmit their application.

How to Apply

Submit your proposal to the regional office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs that services your area. **Email proposals to your regional office (contact info below) within 30 calendar days of the announcement date.**

The proposal should clearly address the ranking criteria listed above and be limited to six pages maximum (not including letters of support/contributions, as applicable).

Please submit a proposal in the following format:

- I. **Introduction/Background** – Name of applicant, project name, project location, Tribal project manager contact information, and a brief background and description of the issue to be addressed with the proposal. This section should conclude with a brief statement summarizing your request. Email proposals to your BIA Regional Office (contact information below) within 30 calendar days of the announcement date.
- II. **Criteria** – How your request meets the ranking criteria.
- III. **Budget** – Provide a detailed line-item expenditure budget, with narrative breakdown. Do not include contract support cost (indirect cost). Awards are planned at \$500,000 for each project awarded and should be written to add up to or near the specified amount (excluding any matching, NGO, or other funding).