

HORSE BUTTE BISON HABITAT



Buffalo at sun rise, Horse Butte peninsula

Information on the ecological and cultural importance of Horse Butte can be found online: <http://www.buffalofieldcampaign.org/science/horsebutte.html>

On March 3, 2008 local Montana residents, Buffalo Field Campaign, and Earthjustice sent a letter to the people in charge of bison management requesting that Horse Butte, a 9,600 acre peninsula in the upper Madison Valley, be designated bison habitat, and that the government no longer harm bison migrating to this critical habitat. The letter along with a legal complaint over the dispute on Horse Butte and bison in the upper Madison valley is online: <http://www.buffalofieldcampaign.org/legal/horsebutte.html>

The letter formally requested that the government cease all bison hazing, harassment and slaughter until a supplemental environmental impact statement is prepared analyzing the changed circumstances that favor allowing bison to roam on Horse Butte.

Elimination of cattle grazing on Horse Butte and local neighborhood support for wild bison creates an opportunity to allow wild bison to migrate to and occupy critical winter range and spring calving habitat on Horse Butte Peninsula.

Over 20,300 people signed on to Earthjustice's plea to let bison roam on public lands and in support of 69 local Montana residents who welcome bison on Horse Butte.

On May 14, 2008, John R. Clifford APHIS' Deputy Administrator for Veterinary Services responded to the local plea "to allow buffalo that have strayed from the Yellowstone National Park to remain on the Horse Butte Peninsula in Montana."

Clifford wrote: "Any initiative to discontinue removing park bison from the Horse Butte Peninsula would require the approval of the Montana State Veterinarian. Further, the owners of the private property on Horse Butte Peninsula and the Montana Department of Livestock would need to agree on establishing a workable plan to allow the presence of bison on Horse Butte and for the permanent removal of cattle from the property."

Additionally, Clifford wrote that APHIS and its partner agencies will discuss changes on Horse Butte in "operational meetings" in 2008. "Using sound science, including the fact that the area has not been recognized as traditional bison calving ground over the years, the IBMP partners will evaluate whether changes involving the management of bison in the area are appropriate."

On August 13, 2008 Earthjustice lawyers representing Horse Butte residents filed to

intervene in the Montana Stockgrower's suit against the Montana Dept. of Livestock and State Veterinarian Marty Zaluski.

The Stockgrowers filed suit in Madison County May 2008 claiming the Montana Dept. of Livestock and State Veterinarian Marty Zaluski threaten rancher's cattle that graze in the Hebgen Basin by not removing or killing wild buffalo that remain on Horse Butte after May 15.

The Earthjustice filing states long time local residents of Horse Butte joined the lawsuit to protect their "distinct interests in private property, wildlife conservation, and preservation of habitat outside Yellowstone National Park for bison."

The locals say a long running dispute with the Montana Dept. of Livestock and its' operations targeting wild buffalo for removal from Horse Butte - a peninsula where cattle no longer graze - "are highly disruptive, noisy, and negatively impacts the ability of these property owners and residents to maintain a safe and quiet neighborhood."

The Stockgrowers complaint states the "failure" of the livestock agency to "timely" remove buffalo and to allow buffalo to calve and occupy land in the Hebgen Lake basin places the ranching families cattle at "greater risk" of contracting brucellosis and "interferes" with the use and enjoyment of grazing, and the social and economic stability of local ranching families depends on brucellosis free cattle and Montana retaining its status.

The Stockgrowers are seeking a court order forcing the Montana Dept. of Livestock to remove all wild buffalo in a "timely manner" by May 15 from the "Western Boundary area" which includes Horse Butte.

The suit was moved to Bozeman, Montana and a hearing was held August 2009 before Montana District Court Judge John Brown.