

## ROYAL TETON RANCH LAND DEALS

In 1999, the US Department of Interior and the US Forest Service used \$13,056,503.83 in taxpayer funds appropriated by the U.S. Congress to acquire and conserve land for native wildlife owned by the Church Universal and Triumphant west of the Yellowstone River in the Gardiner basin.



*Wintering habitat conserved for wildlife on Devil's Slide along the Yellowstone River as part of the \$13 million dollar Royal Teton Ranch land deal. Darrell Geist photo*

The land deal included the purchase of 5,262 acres of Church lands in Cutler Meadows, North Dry Creek, Bassett Creek and Royal Teton Ranch lands between Yankee Jim Canyon and Cinnabar Mountain, near Yellowstone National Park, and a conservation easement for wildlife habitat on 1,508 acres near Devil's Slide (USFS Gallatin National Forest Briefing Paper, Royal Teton Ranch Land Conservation Project, Current 2003; RTR Purchase Summary with Funding Breakdown January 20 2000 Updated March 6, 2000 to include Phase II closing costs).

Buffalo Field Campaign has long advocated that wild bison migrating along the Yellowstone River in the Gardiner Basin be allowed to range on public lands under U.S. Forest Service authority, and lands acquired and conserved under the taxpayer funded \$13,000,000 Royal Teton Ranch land deal.

As part of the 1999 land deal, the Church Universal and Triumphant and the U.S. Forest Service promised to produce a Bison Management Plan and provide a "safe haven for the bison" on lands the public purchased and conserved:

"Whereas, the Grantor finds itself in a unique position to aid and assist in the preservation of the Yellowstone National Park bison and other wildlife by setting aside a portion of its lands, in perpetuity, thereby providing in the natural world, a safe haven for the bison; and Whereas, the Grantor's lands provide significant winter range and crucial habitat for many indigenous species including elk, bighorn sheep, mule deer, pronghorns, grizzly and black bears, mountain lions, other indigenous wildlife, and, upon completion of the Bison Management Plan, significant winter range and crucial habitat for bison;" (Deed of Conservation Easement, Royal Teton Ranch, Devil's Slide Area August 30, 1999, Section VII).

The “safe haven for the bison” on the Royal Teton Ranch never materialized. As a consequence, bison migrating into Gardiner Basin have been forced into a trap at Stephens Creek inside Yellowstone National Park with over 2,600 wild bison shipped to slaughterhouses.

In December 2008 several nonprofit and government parties negotiated a \$3,300,000 deal to lease private Church lands and remove cattle under the terms of a 30-year contract. (As of February 2010, the agreement has yet to be put in effect).

Yellowstone National Park has pledged \$1,500,000 for the 30-year lease, the State of Montana \$300,000 with additional funding to be raised by Greater Yellowstone Coalition, National Wildlife Federation, and National Parks Conservation Association.

There is a valid concern that what the public has already paid for with taxpayer money in 1999 - with no benefit to wild bison despite its promise - will be paid for again by the public through a 30-year lease to remove cattle from Church Universal and Triumphant lands west of the Yellowstone River in the Gardiner Basin to Yankee Jim Canyon.

The terms of the 30-year lease would permit 25 bison through a fenced corridor seasonally from December 1 to April 15 to U.S. Forest Service lands adjacent to and north of the Royal Teton Ranch along the west side of the Yellowstone River. Bison permitted through the Church corridor would first be hazed and trapped at Yellowstone National Park’s Stephens Creek trap. Bison tested who showed no immune response indicating exposure to brucellosis will be collared or marked and females implanted with telemetry devices. Bison migrating onto U.S. Forest Service lands downriver to Yankee Jim Canyon will likely be hunted on a limited basis. Another bison trap on U.S. Forest Service lands may be permitted to enforce the April 15 dead line. If Step 3 in the interagency bison plan is reached, no more than 100 bison are allowed to roam on these lands as outlined in the 30-year lease agreement.

Maps and fact sheets on the Royal Teton Ranch land deal, and a 30-year lease to remove cattle from Church Universal and Triumphant lands is online:  
<http://www.buffalofieldcampaign.org/legal/rtr.html>