



Buffalo Field Campaign Newsletter 2021-2022



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P.O. Box 957, West Yellowstone, MT 59758 • (406) 646-0070 • info@buffalofieldcampaign.org • BuffaloFieldCampaign.org

Yellowstone's Buffalo Struggle to Survive: The Issue in Brief

Every year millions of people visit Yellowstone National Park and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem hoping to see wild buffalo. Just over a century ago, this remnant population barely escaped extinction by seeking refuge in remote areas of what is now Yellowstone National Park. America's "greatest conservation success story" has failed the few buffalo remaining in the wild. They are still threatened with extinction by Yellowstone National Park in service to Montana's cattle lobby. While there are many hybrid buffalo-cattle livestock in North America, there are only 5,100 migratory buffalo in Yellowstone, the last true descendants of North America's once great herds.

Wild bison are currently mismanaged under a joint government plan crafted by livestock interests: the Interagency Bison Management Plan. This plan is driven by state law, MCA 81-2-120, which gives the Montana Department of Livestock control over wild buffalo, a clear conflict of interest. Buffalo are classified as "an animal in need of disease control" managed by the State Veterinarian for control and removal. They claim wild buffalo threaten to expose cattle to brucellosis, a bacteria introduced via imported cattle. But there never has been a documented case of wild buffalo transmitting brucellosis to cattle. Yet elk have been implicated many times and are still free to roam in Montana.

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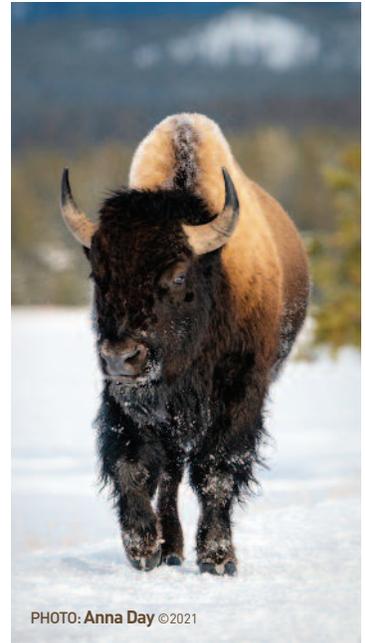


PHOTO: Anna Day ©2021

In the Field: Yellowstone Herds Adapt to Government Mismanagement

BFC's 2020-2021 field season was unlike any other in our history.

Due to the Covid pandemic, we maintained field patrols with reduced staff, and two volunteers watching along the western and northern boundaries of Yellowstone. During a winter when most people stayed home, wild buffalo continued their seasonal migration to National Forest habitat outside Yellowstone, as they have done for millennia.

These ancient herds are unique as their moves distinguish them as our last continuously wild, migratory population. They are the keepers of ancestral knowledge, inherited from the great herds of 30-60 million buffalo that once inhabited North America. BFC field patrols bear witness to this sacred migration, serving as watchdogs and advocates for these magnificent beings.



PHOTO: BFC Archives ©2021

Yellowstone bison gather and mate in two distinct groups: the Central Herd and the Northern Herd. The Central herd are direct descendants of the 23 buffalo that survived extinction in the late 19th century. They migrate along the Madison River to the Hebgen Basin on National Forest habitat west of Yellowstone, and to the Gardiner Basin. The Northern Herd also migrates to the Gardiner Basin, habitat on the National Forest north of

Yellowstone. To reach this habitat, buffalo must first run the gauntlet at Yellowstone's Stephens Creek, where the Park traps hundreds of buffalo and sends them to slaughter or quarantine.

The annual trapping and slaughter teaches wise matriarch leaders of the Central and Northern Herds to avoid capture, slaughter, and harassment. Government

actions are changing migration patterns and severely reducing the buffalo's range and habitat.

This year the Central Herd first appeared in Hebgen Basin in late November, in small family groups of 30 or less.

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Struggle to Survive: *Continued ...*

The centuries-old range war over grass and who gets to graze is still imposed on buffalo. Wild buffalo face government threats including trapping-for-slaughter, migration and range restrictions, and domestication through quarantine and adverse livestock management tactics. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature has “red listed” wild buffalo as “threatened with near extinction.” Montana classifies wild buffalo as “at risk” and “vulnerable to global extinction or extirpation in the state.” Despite their biological status, wild buffalo aren’t protected. Yellowstone’s trap has sent over 10,000 bison to slaughter. With Montana law failing to protect wild buffalo, BFC petitions for the listing of these gentle giants as legally threatened. **We welcome you to join our efforts defending this sacred species!** 🗣️

In the Field: *Continued ...*

For months, the Yellowstone boundary area was quiet, where buffalo sightings were miles inside the Park, a marked shift from years ago, when they spent all winter in the Basin. The Central Herd was vigilant, and carefully remained within the Park’s boundary, knowing it was safe.

Northern Herd buffalo didn’t appear in the Gardiner basin until late February, an unusually late start to their migration. We opened our field camp in Gardiner hoping that last winter’s loss of 900 wild buffalo would not repeat. A mild winter, and a growing awareness of Yellowstone’s trap prompted the herds to stay at higher elevations miles within the Park. No more than 200 buffalo migrated into Gardiner Basin. There, several tribes with treaty hunting rights waited for the buffalo

to migrate onto National Forest lands outside Yellowstone.

The tribal hunt and the United States’ obligation to honor the historical treaties forced Yellowstone National Park to shut down the Stephens Creek trap and abandon the slaughter quota of 500-700 buffalo. A year when none of the last wild buffalo were captured is cause for celebration, as the Central herd remains dangerously low from government slaughter.

In late April, the Central Herd migrated into the Hebgen Basin, returning to their birth place for calving season on the Horse Butte Peninsula. The area remains a permanent year-round habitat secured by local residents, BFC and our dedicated supporters for this unbroken lineage of wildness. New calves appeared on Horse Butte throughout May. Red calves frolicking in green meadows among human homes is a joyful sight—proof that coexistence is possible. These new calves are just one reason why we stand with the buffalo.

In June, the Central Herd migrated from their National Forest habitat on Horse Butte to summer rutting territories inside Yellowstone. Buffalo trace well-worn paths back to the interior of Yellowstone, carrying with them the wild spirit of their ancestors and hope for a better future. 🗣️



From the Executive Director:

This past year has been one of intense action, deep reflection, and exceptional resilience for Buffalo Field Campaign. Our capable Board of Directors has guided us with skill and fortitude. The Campaign continues to plan and adapt to the changing policy and management processes that govern wild bison in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. We refine our programming to reflect the changing conditions impacting wild bison and the advocacy they must have to survive.

Engaging with federal and tribal governments is vitally important given the policy outcomes of the 2021 Montana legislature. Consequently, the Campaign has been involved with planning legislative hearings on Capitol Hill and drafting legislation that would protect imperiled Yellowstone bison. Our presence in the field has also proven highly effective. Monitoring outcomes of the government’s plan and vocalizing our practical, science-based alternatives are crucial for change to happen. Fostering allies and leading our wonderful supporters has been the driving force behind our success. We have the benefit of long-term continuity while increasing our organizational capacity with fresh perspectives. **With your support, BFC will continue our vital work to protect wild Yellowstone bison and accomplish our mission.**

– James Holt, Sr., BFC Executive Director



BFC: Looking Back on 25 Years

It's hard to believe its been 25 years since Rosalie Little Thunder and I began the Campaign. I would like to thank all the (over 6,000!) staff and volunteers that helped make Buffalo

Field Campaign what it is. Also, a very special thank you to 40,000+ supporters that are our backbone and support system. We could not be here without you.

It has been a long and bumpy road, but it's been the honor of my life to be here for the Buffalo. When we began, the Montana Department of Livestock was doing the slaughter and we focused on stopping it. Protest, direct action and documentation were our tactics, and we made a difference, showing the world what was being done to wild buffalo.

In 2000, Montana and Yellowstone National Park signed the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) with Yellowstone agreeing to capture thousands of buffalo inside the Park, and Montana drawing a boundary line beyond which buffalo are not tolerated, including on National Forest lands.

We continued to protest and document Montana's and Yellowstone National Park's insane plan, always fighting for change. In 2005, Montana issued hunting permits. The government tells Tribal and state hunters to kill any buffalo that makes it past the Park's trap into Montana. BFC has and always will oppose the government's plan to slaughter buffalo, and severely restrict their migrations to public lands that are their birth right.

BFC has always honored and supported indigenous people, Native American tribes, their treaty rights and sacred relationship with the buffalo. These treaties specify the relationship tribes have with the US government as sovereign nations. They are agreements that allow tribal members to engage in their indigenous culture. We also work with treaty tribes to try and restore buffalo back to habitat outside the Park, so they may once again roam the land.

The best part is to spend time with and learn from the Buffalo, and watching how they cooperate to take care of each other. Being a Buffalo means taking care of the whole herd. Every member is important, and the leaders' job is to make sure every buffalo in the herd is protected.

Buffalo are caretakers of the earth. They gently walk the land, restoring the grasses. They eat the grass, spill the seeds, their hoofs till the soil, and they fertilize it with their droppings. This keeps the land vital and contributes to easing the climate crisis—helping restore the earth through beneficial carbon cycling.

During these hard times, we could learn much from the Buffalo. We need to remember that we are all together on this planet and need to take care of us all. When we treat each other as equal, like a herd of Buffalo, we can start to heal the people, the planet and our future.

– Mike Mease, BFC Co-Founder

Endangered Species Protection

BFC, Friends of Animals, and Western Watersheds Project are back in court to defend our Endangered Species Act Petition to list as threatened or endangered the Distinct Population Segment of buffalo in and around Yellowstone. The advocacy groups filed a Complaint in Federal Court in March 2020 to reverse another U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Finding that our Petition evidence did not support listing migratory bison as threatened or endangered in the wild. The government's second Finding is as legally flawed as their first, which was struck down by U.S. District Court Judge Christopher R. Cooper in January 2018.

The government is unnecessarily delaying a Species Status Review, the next step in the listing process. Delaying the Status Review prevents a factual evaluation of the factors driving the risk of extinction for our bison herds. We expect the court to hear our case in 2021. Please support our Endangered Species campaign. Share our ads created to raise public awareness: buffalofieldcampaign.org/endangered-bison-endangered-migration, or make a contribution at <https://bit.ly/esa-petition>

Which wildlife species is not under the protection of the Endangered Species Act?

- Polar Bear African Elephant
 Plains American bison

Numbering fewer than threatened African Savanna and Forest elephants (415,428) and threatened polar bears (26,000), plains American bison in the wild (18,748) are not listed or protected under the Endangered Species Act.

Which wildlife species has lost the most habitat and range?

- Grizzly Bear Plains American bison
 Gunnison Sage-grouse

While the threatened Gunnison sage-grouse has lost 92%, and the threatened grizzly bear in the lower 48 states has lost 98%, the plains American bison has lost 99% of their habitat and range.

Here are actions you can take to raise public awareness that wild American bison deserve Endangered Species Act protection:

- Sign our [Change.org](https://change.org) petition to protect and recover Yellowstone's wild bison herds.
- Help spread our Endangered Species Day message around the world.
- Check out Buffalo Field Campaign's Endangered Bison, Endangered Migration web page.
- Share /post our Endangered Species ads for American bison.



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Protecting Yellowstone's Wild Bison Since 1997

PHOTO: Elke Duerr ©2021

Support: Buffalo Field Campaign Needs You!

There are many ways to help the buffalo: distributing newsletters in your community; engaging with us on social media; writing letters to the editor and members of Congress or the Montana Legislature; and helping protect the buffalo under the Endangered Species Act.

Individuals like you contribute the majority of the Campaign's grassroots-funded budget. Visit BuffaloFieldCampaign.org/merch to find our canvas tote bag, our 2022 Wild Bison Calendar, t-shirts, stickers, and other BFC merchandise to show your support for wild buffalo!

You can donate using the enclosed envelope or online at BuffaloFieldCampaign.org. Your donations help keep our patrols in the field and the needs of buffalo in the forefront of the policy, legal and legislative arenas. With your help we will continue to defend the last wild, migratory buffalo!

BFC is a 501c(3) nonprofit and all donations are tax deductible.

Get Involved & Volunteer!

BFC has a number of volunteer opportunities seasonally to support our mission. We thrive by embracing each person's unique offering of talent, time, volunteering in the field, taking action online, and connecting with our team. Our volunteers are crucial and give us

power to create needed positive change. Contact BFC to learn about volunteering on the front lines, hosting video showings, distributing newsletters, and other ways you can help to spread the word to save the herd!

Email volunteer@buffalofieldcampaign.org or call (406) 646-0070. See all the details at BuffaloFieldCampaign.org/volunteer-with-us.

Stay Engaged!

Visit our website for our "Take Action" page and to sign up for weekly *Updates from the Field*. Visit our social media sites and plug in:

- youtube.com/buffalofieldcampaign
- facebook.com/buffalofieldcampaign
- instagram.com/buffalofieldcampaign
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The original
BFC crew in
fall of 1997

