



PRESS RELEASE:

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For Immediate Release

Buffalo Field Campaign Partners With Montana Department of Transportation to Safeguard Spring Migration



New Buffalo snow corridor dug by hand

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With nearly five feet of snow already having fallen this winter in West Yellowstone, resulting in giant berms created by snowplows along Highway 191, concern has been growing for the 300-500 bison from Yellowstone's imperiled central herd who are expected to begin migrating to their calving grounds when the Park Service plows Yellowstone's roads this month.

This winter has been hard on Yellowstone's wild bison. Their overall population is expected to be reduced by 25-30%. That has already included 19 bison struck and killed on area highways, with 13 having been wiped out by one semi-truck on the deadly stretch of 191 near the Madison River crossing. And so Mike Mease, the co-founder and long-time coordinator for Buffalo Field Campaign, decided to take action on behalf of the buffalo he has dedicated his life to.

"I couldn't stand the idea of any more pregnant mama bison being killed on the road this year as they attempt to reach their calving grounds to replenish their depleted herd," Mease said.

Mease reached out to Montana's Department of Transportation, who agreed to work with the Campaign to create corridors along the Madison that will allow bison to cross the highway quickly - rather than being forced to migrate down the walled highway in search of roads that would take them to Horse Butte.



BFC's Mike Mease and Joey Morin celebrate completion of bison snow corridor on the Madison River Sunday.

According to a wildlife biologist with BFC, Jackson Doyel, Yellowstone's central herd prefers to migrate along the river corridor, and the strategically placed snow tunnels will make it easier for them.

"If you build it, they will come," Doyel said. "If you don't, they'll use the roads as trails," he concluded.

Once MDOT punched holes through the berms, Mease led a mostly volunteer shovel brigade last weekend to finish creating the corridors - the hard way. "It took a crew of six most of the weekend to complete," Mease said. "Everyone was quite sore afterward - but satisfied."

BFC works hard to keep bison off the road in the Spring, when the danger of vehicle collisions is highest, adding night patrols to their winter day patrols that monitor bison movement. They're asking for help this season from local media, police, and locals to "spread the word to protect the herd," as Mease put it. "We're grateful to MDOT for reducing the speed limit to 55 at night on our roads," Mease added, "and we're asking everyone to please slow down and enjoy the beauty we're so lucky to live in."

After the tragedy this winter that resulted in 13 pregnant bison and yearlings being wiped out in a single collision, BFC started a [change.org](https://www.change.org) petition to earmark transportation funding for a 'Buffalo Wildlife Bridge' across U.S. Highway 191 at the Madison River. The petition, addressed to Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, Custer-Gallatin Forest Supervisor Mary Erickson, and Park Superintendent Cam Sholly, has garnered over 70,000 signatures. The local Chamber of Commerce approved a resolution in support of the bridge after BFC and retired Yellowstone biologist Bob Lindstrom met with them last month.

Yellowstone's Park Superintendent Cam Sholly also reached out to BFC in response to the petition, inviting them to his office in order to discuss the proposal, and they'll be sitting down this week to explore options for going forward.

"It's great that so much momentum is building in support of the bridge idea," Mease says. "But we know that it'll be tied up in red tape for years, and meanwhile the central herd needs all the help we can give them in order to recover," he continued. "This effort, thanks to the hard work of our staff and volunteers, is a short-term fix to a long-time problem," Mease concluded.

BFC is still accepting applications for people who would like to come down in the Spring and help them save buffalo lives by monitoring the migration out to Horse Butte. "In addition to feeding and housing," Doyel, who serves as BFC's Volunteer Coordinator, "we'll get to see baby bison brought into the world." Anyone interested can apply through BFC's web site: buffalofieldcampaign.org.



New Bison tunnel along Madison River