



BUFFALO
FIELD CAMPAIGN



TRIBAL BUFFALO SUMMIT

June 14, 2023

Memorandum of Authorities: Restoring Yellowstone's Buffalo

From: James Holt, Buffalo Field Campaign

To: Yellowstone Tribes

Re: Tribal Summit - Coming Together for Yellowstone Buffalo

Save the Date: November 4th and 5th
Fort Hall Shoshone-Bannock Casino Hotel

It is our collective intention to recognize BUFFALO as a wild free-ranging animal and as an important part of the ecological system; to provide a safe space and environment across our historic homelands, on both sides of the United States and the Canadian border, so together WE can have our brother, the BUFFALO, lead us in nurturing our land, plants and other animals to once again realize THE BUFFALO WAYS for our future generations.

~ Buffalo Treaty

Dear Tribal Leaders & Relatives:

My name is James Holt Sr., I am the Executive Director of Buffalo Field Campaign based in West Yellowstone, Montana. It is with the utmost respect that I write to

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you today, to honor your people's important place on the Yellowstone landscape. The time has come for Tribal Nations to come together, to share our hearts and unite on behalf of Yellowstone Buffalo. Over the past few years, we've witnessed significant happenings for the Buffalo Nation including on-reservation re-introductions, the celebration in Wind River last summer, the leadership being exhibited by Secretary Haaland and the Biden Administration, and the many Tribes and First Nations continuing to sign the Inter-Tribal Buffalo Treaty. With this advancement there is significant opportunity to elevate tribal sovereignty, and protect the future of Yellowstone buffalo with more certainty.

While native peoples continue to revitalize sacred connections to buffalo lifeways that were forcibly severed from many of us generations ago, there is much to be done. It is Buffalo Field Campaign's mission to replace the existing failed bison management plan with a historic agreement that appropriately honors the fiduciary responsibility of the United States to Tribes. As you may know, federal agencies are considering Yellowstone buffalo science, existing management priorities, and potential policy changes. The Campaign believes the best possible future for wild Yellowstone buffalo is a management framework that is founded on science-based co-stewardship between Tribes and the United States. A holistic co-stewardship model would be ecosystem-wide, population-based, honor treaty-reserved rights, continue to facilitate on-reservation restoration via the Ft. Peck Program, be co-created among tribal sovereigns, and respect the participation of all 28 Yellowstone-affiliated tribes.

The future viability of Yellowstone buffalo hangs in the balance. Politically, Montana continues to reject wild buffalo throughout the state, and actively strives to suppress tribal sovereignty. Further, federal agencies continue to politicize the science of brucellosis, the role of federal lands surrounding the Yellowstone National Park for buffalo habitat, and fail to manage buffalo as other wildlife. Lastly, climate change and extreme weather events continue to pressure buffalo and the viability of other wildlife in the region.

The distinct populations of buffalo in the Yellowstone Ecosystem must be appropriately protected and managed. Tribal co-stewardship coupled with federal recognition of buffalo as a wildlife species provides the required nexus to achieve our vision for Yellowstone buffalo.

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Tribes must not settle for 6,000 wild buffalo when management should target populations of 50,000 or more. Tribes must not settle for a few thousand barren acres outside Yellowstone National Park, when buffalo should have access to 8 million adjacent acres of suitable habitat on open and unclaimed federal lands. Tribes must not allow a repeat of this last winter's over-harvest of Yellowstone buffalo. The lack of coordination among tribal sovereigns is harming our buffalo relatives.

There exists at this unique time a grand opportunity to holistically provide for wild buffalo, the Yellowstone Ecosystem, and act for our unborn future generations. The invitation represented by the Department of Interior's Bison Conservation Strategy and Secretarial Order 3410 awaits our collective response. Tribes must capitalize on this opportunity now.

It is time to exercise the full extent of our treaty rights and honor our cultural responsibilities in the furtherance of the Buffalo Treaty so many of us have signed. There will never be a better time for Tribal Nations to assert our inherent jurisdiction over Buffalo ecology, indigenous food sources, and cultural lifeways.

To facilitate a Tribal Summit on November 4th and 5th, where we can come together to share our stories and "perpetuate all aspects of our respective cultures related to BUFFALO including customs, practices, harvesting, beliefs, songs, and ceremonies," I am respectfully inviting all tribal cultural, spiritual, historical and scientific leaders and representatives to attend and share each Nations cultural lifeways and their sacred relationship to buffalo. Yellowstone Tribal Nations are uniquely positioned to assert inherent buffalo jurisdiction expressed by Intertribal recognition of cultural related buffalo lifeways.

I am sharing this memorandum of legal authorities and science-based reasoning that our lawyers and paralegals have put together for this purpose. As you will come to appreciate from a careful reading of this legal narrative, there is nothing stopping us from re-establishing our traditional relationship with Yellowstone's Buffalo in furtherance of the Buffalo Treaty. In fact, based on discussions we have had with federal officials, including the Solicitor's Office for the Department of Interior, we are being encouraged to do so.

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Once you have read this and shared it with your fellow Tribal leaders, please contact our Summit Planner Dallas Gudgell at dallasgudgell@gmail.com, and let us know who will be attending the Tribal Summit to represent your Tribe. Agenda to follow as we confirm spiritual leaders and presenters. On behalf of the dedicated Board of Directors and Staff at the Buffalo Field Campaign, I send my sincere regards.

Qeciyewyew (thank you) for your time and consideration regarding this important gathering.

For The Buffalo,



James L. Holt, Sr.
Executive Director

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