



BUFFALO
FIELD CAMPAIGN

February 13, 2021

Chairman Joshua Kassmier, Members of the House Agriculture Committee
Montana House of Representatives
P.O. Box 200400
Helena, MT 59620-0400

Buffalo Field Campaign comments on HB 302: Do Not Pass

Chairman Joshua Kassmier, and members of the House Agriculture Committee,

On behalf of Buffalo Field Campaign, I am submitting testimony on HB 302. Mr. Chairman, I request my testimony be entered into the hearing record. Thank you.

HB 302 suffers from the same defects as previous bills voted down or vetoed in 2019 (HB 332) and 2015 (SB 284).

HB 302 interferes with all Montanan's interest and right to participate in decisions to reintroduce wild buffalo in the state. Mont. Const. art. II, part II, § 8 Right of Participation.

HB 302 mandates the approval of a board of county commissioners before wild buffalo may be reintroduced in Montana.

HB 302 disregards the public trust responsibility for a valued migratory wildlife species, American bison, our National Mammal, and arbitrarily gives a board of county commissioners veto authority over the state's decision.

The state of Montana is a trustee for wildlife species, a duty that should not be assailed by voting to pass HB 302.

"Protecting the Last Wild Bison"

The Montana Legislature has already imposed costly, unfunded mandates in MCA § 87-1-216 to drive the nails in the coffin to any proposal for reintroducing wild buffalo in Montana. HB 302 is the chain to wrap around the casket before wild buffalo restoration is buried by the Legislature.

Under MCA § 87-1-216, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is relegated to considering proposals from any party willing to pay for the costs of fencing and containment, animal identification and tracking, disease testing and monitoring, a range survey and management plan, reduce the area available if buffalo "escape" containment, depopulation if reintroduction is "unacceptable" or the costs "impractical" or there is a disease outbreak, secure short and long term funding and a budget, assume liability for property and public safety, and comply with a 29-point list of mandates. Bison Conservation and Management in Montana, Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, Ch. 7 pages 206–209 (December 2019).

HB 302 is not amenable. Thank you for acting to prevent the erosion of Montanan's ability to recover American bison as a wildlife species, and defending Montanan's right to participate in such decisions by voting against HB 302.



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About Buffalo Field Campaign

Buffalo Field Campaign was founded in 1997 to stop government harassment and slaughter of Yellowstone's wild buffalo herds, to protect the natural habitat of free-roaming buffalo and native wildlife, and to work with all people—especially Indigenous Nations—to honor and protect the sacredness of the buffalo.

Buffalo Field Campaign's Hebgen Lake office is located near West Yellowstone, in Gallatin County, Montana. Buffalo Field Campaign is supported by people from Montana and around the world who come to visit the region, advocate for native wildlife and the ecosystems upon which they depend, and enjoy the natural wonders of our irreplaceable public trust lands and waters.

As an organization and on behalf of our members, Buffalo Field Campaign is deeply committed and actively involved in protecting the only remaining descendants of indigenous American bison to continuously occupy their territory in the United States.

Buffalo Field Campaign publicizes the plight of American bison, our National Mammal, works to end their slaughter by government agencies, advocates for the enduring protection of viable populations of migratory buffalo and their freedom to roam.

Buffalo Field Campaign actively engages the American people to honor our natural heritage by allowing buffalo to exist as an indigenous wildlife species in their homelands.

Buffalo Field Campaign volunteers patrol habitat where buffalo migrate in the Yellowstone, Gallatin, and Madison river valleys, including the region's National Parks and National Forests. These direct experiences with buffalo in their territory inform our actions and strengthen our commitment for gaining permanent protections for the migratory species in the wild.