February 10, 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 informational comments on HB 311 & HB 312

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

On behalf of Buffalo Field Campaign, I am submitting testimony on HB 311 and HB 312. Mr. Chairman, I request my testimony be entered into the hearing record. Thank you.

HB 311 clarifies wild buffalo taken from the Yellowstone population for quarantine can be transferred to a tribal entity with the approval of the Montana Dept. of Livestock under MCA § 81-2-120.

Unless clear and convincing evidence shows there is a significant danger to public health, HB 311 would not require state certification for federal to tribal or tribal to tribal transfers of wild buffalo on tribe’s reservations.

HB 312 would not require state certification for federal to tribal transfers of wild buffalo for quarantine on tribe’s reservations.

Montana has only one wild population of buffalo seasonally migrating in the state, the unique and distinct Yellowstone herds which are at “risk because of very limited and/or potentially declining populations numbers, range and/or habitat, making it vulnerable to global extinction or extirpation in the state.” Montana Natural Heritage, SOC Report Animal Species of Concern (last updated April 16, 2020).
As part of quarantine, wild buffalo testing positive for an immune response to *brucella abortus* are slaughtered.

Freedom of Information Act records of Yellowstone’s wild buffalo going through U.S. Dept. of Agriculture APHIS quarantine record fatal goring, calf abandonment, buffalo being crushed in corrals, and suffering broken necks and horns in capture chutes. The experience of what it is like for buffalo to be taken from the wild and reduced to quarantine should not go unrecognized.

State law should not permit the Montana Dept. of Livestock to infringe on sovereign decisions belonging to American Indian Nations.

Whether MCA § 81-2-120 is amended under HB 311 or HB 312, or repealed as it should be, MCA § 81-2-120 represents the failure of the state of Montana to uphold its’ trust responsibility for American bison, our National Mammal, for future generations of Montanans and American Indian Nations with homelands in the state.

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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.