



BUFFALO
FIELD CAMPAIGN

March 21, 2023

Chairman Steve Hinebauch
Members of the Senate Fish and Game Committee
State Capitol
PO Box 201706
Helena, MT 59620

Buffalo Field Campaign comments on HB 522: Do Not Pass

Chairman Steve Hinebauch and Members of the Senate Fish and Game Committee,

Mr. Chairman, I request my testimony be entered into the hearing record. Thank you.

Buffalo Field Campaign opposes HB 522.

HB 522 amends Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks authority to hunt buffalo for disease control — when authorized by the State veterinarian and Dept. of Livestock — by preferentially allocating an additional 15% of state-issued tags to private landowners and corporations to hunt buffalo on private lands.

Montana has no claim for hunting buffalo because the State manages for their elimination and not for self-sustaining populations like we do for elk, deer, and antelope.

Montana gave up its' claim for hunting buffalo when it created Mont. Code Ann. § 81-2-120 in 1996 and placed the State veterinarian and the Dept. of Livestock in charge of eliminating migratory buffalo from Montana.

Montana takes buffalo; there is no habitat or conservation provision in Montana law providing for the persistence of a wild population.

HB 522 creates an exclusive privilege for a class of private landowners to be preferentially allocated a tag to hunt buffalo.

"Protecting the Last Wild Bison"

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HB 522 creates an unheard-of and exclusive privilege for corporations — via an owner-shareholder — to be preferentially allocated a tag to hunt buffalo. To our knowledge, there is no law in Montana permitting a corporation to apply for a tag to hunt wild game.

Preferentially providing hunting privileges for a particular class of people is a feature of a monarchy.

For those who are not among the chosen ones in HB 522: get in line. And it is a long line.

In 2022, 11,698 Montanans and 1,297 non-residents applied for a tag to hunt buffalo; 77 Montanans and 8 non-residents drew tags.

Wildlife in Montana do not belong to the State or a landowner or a corporation but to future generations who are the beneficiaries of the public trust we must look after, protect, and defend together.

HB 522 turns the public trust into an exclusive private market by mandating a particular class of people and corporations be preferentially allocated tags to hunt and eliminate buffalo migrating into Montana on behalf of the Dept. of Livestock.

HB 522 is not amendable. Do not pass HB 522.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Darrell Geist".

Darrell Geist, habitat coordinator
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About Buffalo Field Campaign

Buffalo Field Campaign was founded in 1997 to stop the government from harassing and slaughtering 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 respect 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 Yellowstone, advocate for native wildlife and the ecosystems on 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 American bison to continuously inhabit their indigenous range in the United States.

Buffalo Field Campaign publicizes the plight of American bison, our National Mammal, and advocates for buffalo's freedom to roam.

Buffalo Field Campaign actively engages the American people to honor our natural heritage by allowing buffalo to persist and adapt as a migratory wildlife species in their indigenous range and habitat.

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 in the field inform our actions and strengthen our commitment for gaining permanent protections for buffalo remaining in the wild.