



BUFFALO

FIELD CAMPAIGN

Protecting Wild Bison Since 1997

2024 ANNUAL REPORT





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Protecting Wild Bison Since 1997

To stop the harassment and slaughter of Yellowstone’s wild Buffalo herds; protect the natural habitat of wild, free-roaming Buffalo and other native wildlife; and work with all people—especially Indigenous Nations—to honor and protect the sacredness of the wild Buffalo.



Inaugural Tribal Buffalo Summit

Buffalo Field Campaign's 2024 End of Year Report begins by looking back to National Bison Day, November 4, 2023. The reason will soon make itself known. On this day in 2023, your contributions made the first ever Tribal Buffalo Summit into a reality. With the additional support of the Shoshone Bannock Hotel & Casino event staff, the Summit was a huge success.

Eleven tribes were in attendance with almost all of the regional tribes with reservations adjacent to the Yellowstone National Park being present. Day One of the Summit corresponded with National Bison Day and was opened by Chief Arvol Looking Horse, 19th Generation Keeper of the Sacred White Buffalo Calf Pipe and a spiritual leader for the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota Oyate.

The Summit was a gathering of spiritual leaders, tribal council members, historians, and experts, coming together to honor and celebrate a living relationship with Buffalo.

A Prophecy Fulfilled: BFC Board Vice President,

Dallas Gudgell shares that the seeds planted at TBS 2023 are in direct relation to Wakan Gli, or Comes Holy, being born. Exactly nine months later on June 4, 2024, a white Buffalo calf was born to the last wild herds of Buffalo and inside Yellowstone National Park. The gestation period for a female bison is nine months. BFC Board Vice President and Yankton Dakota, enrolled Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes, shares that the seeds planted at TBS 2023 are in direct relation to Wakan Gli, or Comes Holy, being born. This is the way of Indigenous People; relational not transactional. Their lifeways involve a sacred connection to the Buffalo and BFC prioritizes their guidance for protection of Buffalo in our programming, outreach, and in sustainable co-stewardship within wild bison management.

Buffalo Field Campaign hosted the Naming Ceremony for the white Buffalo calf that summer. But let's go back to the beginning of 2024 to share more about BFC's work advocating for wild migratory Buffalo.



Winter Operations: Collaboration for the Northern Herd

From January to March 2024 BFC was knee deep in snow and our Winter Operations in Gardiner, Montana. While our 12 acre headquarters is located in West Yellowstone where the Central Herd's migration occurs, your generous support maintains BFC's winter ops at the northern boundary of the Park in Gardiner.

We partner with BFC Advisory Board Member and Wolf Tracker Founder, Nathan Varley, who provides BFC with a reduced rate rental so that our volunteers and coordinators can drive the 2 hours from basecamp and arrive at a warm and safe field outpost.

The Northern Herd begins their winter migration around December and Buffalo attempt to access public lands outside of the Park and into the Paradise Valley through early March. When they leave the Park, they are met by the agencies operating under the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP); the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, the Montana Department of Livestock, and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Not able to vote, the InterTribal Buffalo Council, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Nez Perce Tribe are all co-signers to each year's plan.

These tribes wish to hunt wild bison and are asserting their treaty reserved rights and cultural lifeways. We also see non-native hunters.

Buffalo Field Campaign's volunteers are there to document all aspects of the IBMP and its focus on managing for a reduced herd size. The IBMP also asserts a zero-tolerance policy for wild Buffalo in the state of Montana and on our federal public lands within the state and that border Yellowstone. BFC continues to build relationships with tribal hunters as well as Gardiner locals by speaking

with all involved on the importance of local restoration of wild migratory herds alongside current management practices to increase herd sizes versus status quo or reduction. Your contributions allow us to host potlucks for tribal hunters and local residents to work towards collaboration instead of finger pointing and hostilities.

On the policy front, BFC’s Tribal Buffalo Summit team was able to complete our TBS White Paper. The Summit’s purpose, outcomes and policy guidance outlined in this paper will help to craft our 2025 summit’s focus and agenda as well as serve as vital communication to share with

invited tribes, both past and future.

Using the Freedom of Information Act, or FOIA, a powerful tool for shedding light on what our government is up to, BFC’s Habitat Coordinator and Policy Advisor recently filed an appeal challenging the U.S. Department of the Interior’s failure to adequately search for records and justify why the agency withheld information on what it’s doing for our country’s last wild Buffalo. With your support, we filed 4 additional FOIA requests by the end of 2024. BFC fights for public disclosure to help you stay informed as a critical voice in holding our government accountable for decisions affecting wild Buffalo.

“OUR LITTLE PLACE IN THE WORLD HERE...WHERE WE ARE TRYING TO RESTORE INDIGENOUS Voices into Buffalo management of a wild herd...that is our contribution as Buffalo Field Campaign to creating this new paradigm shift of our relationship with the Natural World.”

– Dallas Gudgell, *Yankton Dakota/Assiniboine, BFC Board Vice President*



The Lodge

Our home is a place to gather and a historic lodge that requires regular maintenance. The good news is that 2025 is our final year to pay our mortgage!

2024 saw the need to completely overhaul our electric infrastructure in our main lodge, our two office structures, and all 6 log cabins that house coordinators. This was a huge capital investment for our Campaign costing a little over \$40,000.

We couldn't have done the work without your ongoing support. And more investment is needed. As we look to summer 2025, we will need to replace the roof on the main lodge. We hope we can count on our Buffalo Family to keep YOUR home where the Buffalo roam warm and dry!

“RESTORING WILD BISON HERDS IN NORTH AMERICA MUST HAPPEN UNDER the premise of tribal co-stewardship, so that this is not merely a conservation initiative serving the desires of white men, but also an act of decolonization on multiple levels: of Indigenous voices and values, of tribal life, of Native land, of ecosystems, and of all our hearts and minds, both Native and non-Native. Only then will it be truly healing. It is an arduous path, but one we are committed to walking.”

– Heidrun Kubiessa, *BFC Board Treasurer*





Bison haze
down the
bluff.

“WATCHING THE BUFFALO TEACHES US TO understand that everyone is important, every individual has worth, and that united we can all work together for our survival.”

– Mike Mease, BFC Co-founder, along with Rosalie Little Thunder, Sicangu Lakota - Board Member and Campaign Coordinator



Spring Migration Roadside At Headquarters



The Spring Migration begins mid-March through the beginning of June. BFC is back at headquarters on Lake Hebgen and in the middle of the habitat where wild bison wish to roam.

Spring in Yellowstone is a marvel. As former BFC Executive Director and current BFC Board Member, James Holt, often says, “Every wild Buffalo calf born in the Yellowstone Ecosystem is a victory for the Campaign.” And you are a vital part of our Campaign.

BFC’s patrols and road side presence from morning to night help guide pregnant females and other members

of the matriarch-led herds to safety. Working with the Montana Department of Transportation for years, we deploy ‘Buffalo on Road’ signs to warn traffic so migrating Buffalo can safely cross the highways. It is a worthwhile, heart-warming experience for everyone who has set up signs to aid the safe passage of newborn calves and their mothers.

Sadly, two Buffalo were killed in the 2024 spring migration by vehicles. Many more would have been hit but for BFC’s field presence. We continue to work on providing safe passage solutions for Buffalo, and all wildlife. Thank you for ensuring we are roadside.

“Every wild Buffalo calf born in the Yellowstone Ecosystem is a victory for the Campaign.”

–James Holt, *Nimiipuu or Nez Perce*, BFC Board Member

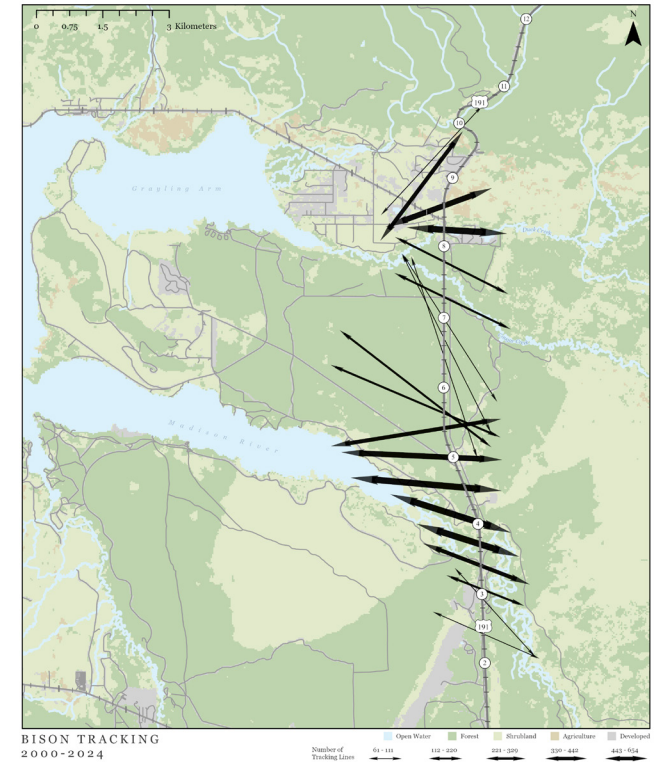
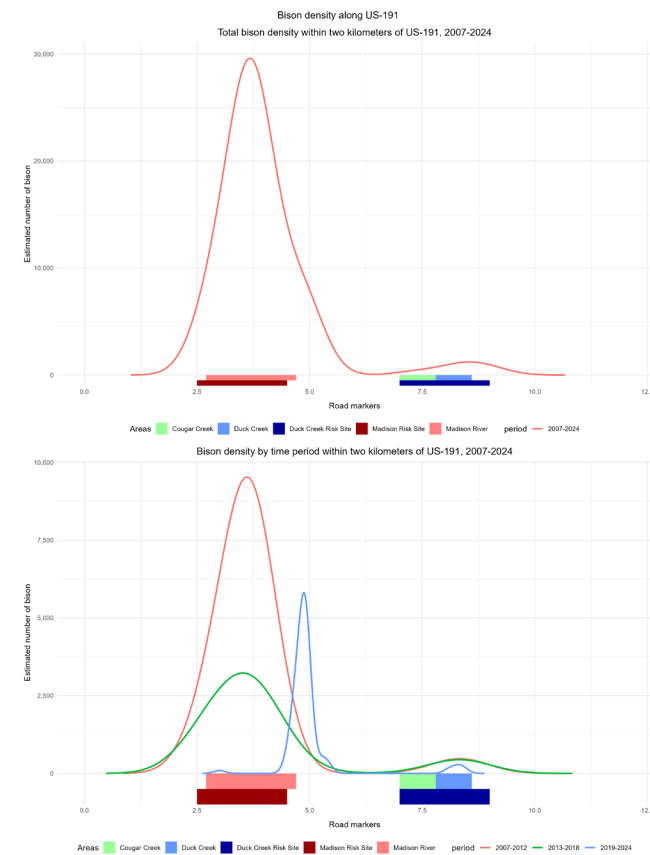




Protecting the Herd: Bison Data in Action

“IN PURSUIT, AND IN SUPPORT, OF THIS RIGHT, all scholars are responsible for helping their respective cultural communities dispense traditional and academic knowledge in accessible, equitable ways.”

– Sunny Murphy, *BFC Board Member*



Acknowledgements: We thank the Buffalo Field Campaign (BFC) for their decades of field presence in the GYE collecting wildlife activity data that were incremental for this study; their unique dataset is the only reason we were able to conduct this research to guide mitigation projects in the Hebgen Lake Basin area of US-191. Appreciation is extended to Rutgers University for supporting the analytical techniques and providing invaluable guidance on this research. We are particularly grateful to Dr. Jenny Isaacs for connecting Rutgers and BFC together for this project, and Dr. Richard Lathrop for his expertise and guidance.

Bison-vehicle collision risk sites were incorporated and identified in prior research (Dupree & DiMambro, 2010) to compare the location of these risk sites with our peaks in bison activity along the highway. All notable

bison activity peaks had a visible spatial relationship with the risk sites.

Bison typically crossed the road perpendicularly rather than parallel. Far more bison preferred to immediately cross the highway in certain locations (one-to-three-mile areas) rather than walk along it. Our results also show a spatial relationship between the frequency of wildlife activity near roads and wildlife moving across those same roads, supporting the value in wildlife observational roadway data for road safety and ecological projects.

These findings highlight the spatial variability in species distribution and the importance of considering both animal density and species-specific patterns in ecological assessments for highway safety projects.

Both our Winter and Spring Field Operations collect huge amounts of wildlife data that have fed our database for decades now. In partnership with BFC Advisory Board Member, Jenny Isaacs, PhD professor, Rutgers University, and BFC Wildlife Biologist and graduate student, Jackson Doyel, we are now disseminating huge amounts of data into maps, research analysis, and papers that help to support need for more protections for wild Buffalo populations.

The Buffalo Field Campaign database contains

data for species including coyote, wolf, bison, grizzly bear, and porcupine, to name a few. This allowed the authors of an upcoming publication—two of which are BFC members—to build a more comprehensive picture of wildlife activity along highway US-191. Their study aimed to identify hotspots of wildlife activity along US-191 to guide BFC’s West Yellowstone Wildlife Crossing Coalition collision mitigation and ecological connectivity restoration efforts and using conservation organization data from the Buffalo Field Campaign.

Wild Bison Internship Program



“BUFFALO ARE SOMETHING THAT WE MUST DEFEND IN ORDER TO PRESERVE NOT ONLY OUR connection with nature, but our integrity and sense of responsibility. Because it’s not just about Buffalo, or stopping people from killing these animals. It extends far further than that. Fighting for the Buffalo is about fighting for a Native people who’ve been oppressed by a colonizer that believes it can take and do whatever it wants to its surroundings without consequence. Fighting for the Buffalo is about reconnecting with nature and understanding it as a living organism we depend on, rather than an inanimate resource that’s ours for the taking. This fight is about standing up for the oppressed, and in doing so, standing up for ourselves. It’s about reconnecting with reality and truth, and disconnecting from separation and selfishness.”

– Jacob Faye, Kitchen Coordinator, ‘24-’25 field season,
Summer Campaign Coordinator and former Rutgers BFC Intern

12

INTERNS SERVED AT BFC
FIELD SEASON 2023-24

6

INTERNS SERVED AT BFC
FIELD SUMMER 2024

300+

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES
PARTICIPATED IN OUR RECRUITMENT
NETWORK.





Summer Campaign Educating, Empowering, and Preserving

Our 2024 Summer Campaign continued on with our annual outreach inside Yellowstone National Park and led by interns from colleges and universities across the country. This ongoing tabling campaign is funded by you and the story of the Buffalo reaches hundreds of visitors to Yellowstone who saw over 4 million tourists in 2024.



Top College &
University Interest

Rutgers University
ALL CAMPUSES

**Unity Environmental
University**
UNITY, ME

**Bowling Green State
University**
BOWLING GREEN, OH

UC Berkeley
BERKELEY, CA

University of Vermont
BURLINGTON, VT

**SUNY, University at
Buffalo**
GETZVILLE, NY

Partnerships With
Colleges & Universities

**Rutgers University –
Jenny Isaacs**
ALL CAMPUSES

**Unity Environmental
University**
UNITY, ME



The Birth of Wakan Gli

On National Bison Day 2023, the inaugural Tribal Buffalo Summit united spiritual leaders, tribal representatives, and experts to honor the sacred bond with Buffalo, planting the spiritual seeds that culminated nine months later with the birth of Wakan Gli, a white Buffalo calf.

As mentioned in the introduction, Summer 2024 began with a huge blessing; the birth of a white Buffalo calf – black eyes, black nose, black hooves – was born to the wild herds and we felt hope and a strong commitment to collective action at Buffalo Field Campaign.

As part of our family, you maintain BFC headquarters so that we can host events like Wakan Gli’s Naming Ceremony and offer a safe space for Native and

non-Native communities to gather. Over 500 people travelled to BFC, including national and international media, to commemorate this historic event.

Our headquarters is a place where our respect for the Buffalo can be voiced and acted upon. As we enter our 28th Field Season (1997-2025), we open with a Healing Circle. Gathering around a fire, our native friends shared stories imbued with tradition and wisdom to connect with the Buffalo and each other.

“FOR THE FIRST PEOPLE, WAKAN GLI REPRESENTS THOUSANDS OF YEARS OF reciprocal relations with the Buffalo. Wakan Gli’s birth is a blessing and a warning. The sacred white Buffalo calf signals to us two-leggeds that it is time to come together to heal the world we share.”

–Chief Arvol Lookinghorse, 19th Generation Keeper of the Sacred White Buffalo Calf Pipe and Bundle named the white Buffalo calf Wakan Gli, Returns Sacred or Comes Holy

Fall Reflections From Recovery to Renewal

Fall 2024 opened with the Nez Perce Welbriety group coming to BFC ‘s place to gather to help bring in wood for the season. Working hard and reconnecting with the Buffalo has a huge healing effect on those in recovery. Your involvement in BFC means you are part of this larger healing effect.

We also launched our Time of Renewal Vision Focused Fund Drive. Here we laid out our vision for 2025 that included a refinement of our 27 years of work into a powerful trifecta; A Place to Gather, Tribal Sovereignty & Indigenous Lifeways, and Research & Education.

BFC Board Member and Buffalo Backbone Herd Bull Subscribers chipped in and contributed a \$15,000 Matching Grant which we were able to meet with your help.

Fall also saw Buffalo Field Campaign Board Vice President and International Wildlife Coexistence Network Policy & Tribal Outreach Coordinator, Dallas Gudgell, Yankton Dakota/Assiniboine, travelling to Washington

D.C.to advocate for the Tribal Heritage and American Bison, Grizzly Bear, and Wolf Restoration and Coexistence Act aka The Trinity Act.

By continuing to build coalitions with native and non-native allies, BFC is ensuring that your contributions will build on the humbling and inspiring lessons learned from the Buffalo and from teaching over 7000 volunteers that have come to help.

Buffalo Field Campaign Launches 28th Field Season

November 15, 2024 marked the beginning of our 28th Field Season and we began the cycle again of bringing folks into relationship with the Buffalo. BFC’s work as a voice for the Buffalo continues on with your support keeping us on the Buffalo Trace.

The lifeblood of Buffalo Field Campaign is the new energy and insights that come in each time we begin a new season, each time a new volunteer steps into the field and each time a new Board Member

joins our ranks. In 2024 we were blessed to have Heidrun Kubiessa and Jazmin ‘Sunny’ Murphy join us on our Board.

Heidrun’s outstanding organizational skills, not to mention her focus on elevating Indigenous voices, helped to make our Tribal Buffalo Summit 2023 a success. Sunny’s passion on the intersections of culture, ideology, legislation, economics, and land use with canid ecology and with special emphasis on African diasporic and Indigenous communities within the United States, have been invaluable in refining our communications.

Buffalo Field Campaign has the great honor and privilege of standing in defense of and living in community with our last wild migratory Buffalo. We are grateful everyday for this opportunity. Without your support we would not be here. Without your support, thousands of people from all walks of life and all over the world would not be here. Without your Buffalove, our last wild bison would not have our passionate group of coordinators and volunteers as watchful eyes and storytellers...witnesses to their beauty, their struggles, their power, their importance and their need for our help to survive and thrive!



2024 GRANTS

UNRESTRICTED

\$20,000	\$5,000
High Stakes Foundation	Vitalogy Foundation
\$2,050	
IRI Chacruna	

2024-25
FIELD SEASON

\$15,000	\$2,000
Horne Family Foundation	Cinnabar Foundation

PATAGONIA

\$10,000

HOLDFAST
COLLECTIVE

\$10,000

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- Whitni Nelson
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