

AMERICAN TAXPAYER SUBSIDIES TO MONTANA FOR IMPLEMENTING STATE LAW GOVERNING MIGRATORY BISON

There has been no documented case of migratory bison infecting cattle with brucellosis in Montana, Idaho or Wyoming since brucellosis was first detected in bison in 1917.

Brucellosis was introduced to Yellowstone's migratory bison and elk populations by cattle. Bison calves captured from the wild were "mothered with domestic bovine cows" and pastured with cattle that were brought into Yellowstone to feed Park workers and tourists. Elk were likely infected with brucellosis by cattle on state and federal "feed grounds" that unnaturally congregate wildlife.

In 1995, the Montana legislature adopted MCA 81-2-120 in response to political pressure by cattle ranchers to stop wild bison from migrating into Montana from Yellowstone National Park.

MCA 81-2-120 gives the Montana Department of Livestock jurisdiction over migratory bison and requires a governor approved plan that severely restricts available habitat for bison and subjects them to livestock management techniques. Migratory elk populations freely range Montana under Fish, Wildlife & Parks jurisdiction.

Part of the legislative justification for MCA 81-2-120 was the threat of sanctions against Montana cattle ranchers for violating federal brucellosis regulations.

MCA 81-2-120 guides Montana's participation in a governor approved bison management plan adopted after a complaint was filed and legal settlement was reached by the state with several federal agencies.

Adopted in 2000, the Interagency Bison Management Plan is estimated to cost American taxpayers over \$3,000,000 annually based on U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) estimates.

The GAO reports the bison management plan is nearly completely paid for by American taxpayers with total U.S. Treasury expenditures of \$3,304,817 in 2006. To date, the plan has cost American taxpayers over \$30,000,000.

No current estimate of taxpayer costs is available from the agencies involved to operationally fund the Interagency Bison Management Plan through 2015, the time period studied for environmental impacts.

Montana's participation in the bison plan is nearly all paid for by American taxpayers through funding agreements that have been in place since before 2000 with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

In 2010, APHIS granted \$525,000 to the Montana Department of Livestock to fund its role in the Interagency Bison Management Plan. From 2001 to 2010, nearly \$6,000,000 in American taxpayer funding was given to the livestock agency to enforce MCA 81-2-120.

Additionally, APHIS provides funding to the Montana Department of Livestock to implement new federal brucellosis regulations in Designated Surveillance Areas in portions of Beaverhead, Gallatin, Madison and Park counties in southwestern Montana. The new rules remove the threat of whole herd cattle slaughter, loss of the state's brucellosis free status, and threat of state sanctions against Montana cattle that contract brucellosis.

The rules cost local cattle ranchers about \$430,000 annually with half the costs of vaccinating cattle paid for by Montana taxpayers. Montana calculated the new regulations provide an annual net benefit to cattle ranchers statewide of \$5.5 million to \$11.5 million.

All recent outbreaks of brucellosis in cattle in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming have been DNA traced to migratory elk, not bison.

Compiled by Darrell Geist, habitat coordinator, Buffalo Field Campaign, March 2012.

Sources: <http://www.buffalofieldcampaign.org/legislative/taxpayerfunding.html>
<http://www.buffalofieldcampaign.org/habitat/bisonconservation.html>

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