

**AN OVERVIEW OF INTERAGENCY BISON MANAGEMENT PLAN ACTIONS
TARGETING YELLOWSTONE BISON AND THE PUBLIC'S RESPONSE TO THE ON-
GOING BISON SLAUGHTER**

Darrell Geist photo



Yellowstone bison, Hebgen Lake, West Yellowstone, Montana, March 2008. These bison were hazed to a trap on private lands operated by the Montana Dept. of Livestock, loaded onto trailers and shipped to slaughterhouses.

Since its inception in 2000, the multimillion dollar taxpayer funded Interagency Bison Management Plan has eliminated over 3,200 wild buffalo from the Yellowstone ecosystem, mainly on public lands in America's flagship Yellowstone National Park and the Gallatin National Forest.

Records of decision, environmental analysis, and public comments on the governing Interagency Bison Management Plan are online:

<http://www.buffalofieldcampaign.org/aboutbuffalo/bisonmanagementplan.html>

The extent and severity of the on-going bison slaughter is indicated in the figures below. The National Park Service and Montana Dept. of Livestock are responsible for the brunt of the bison slaughter:

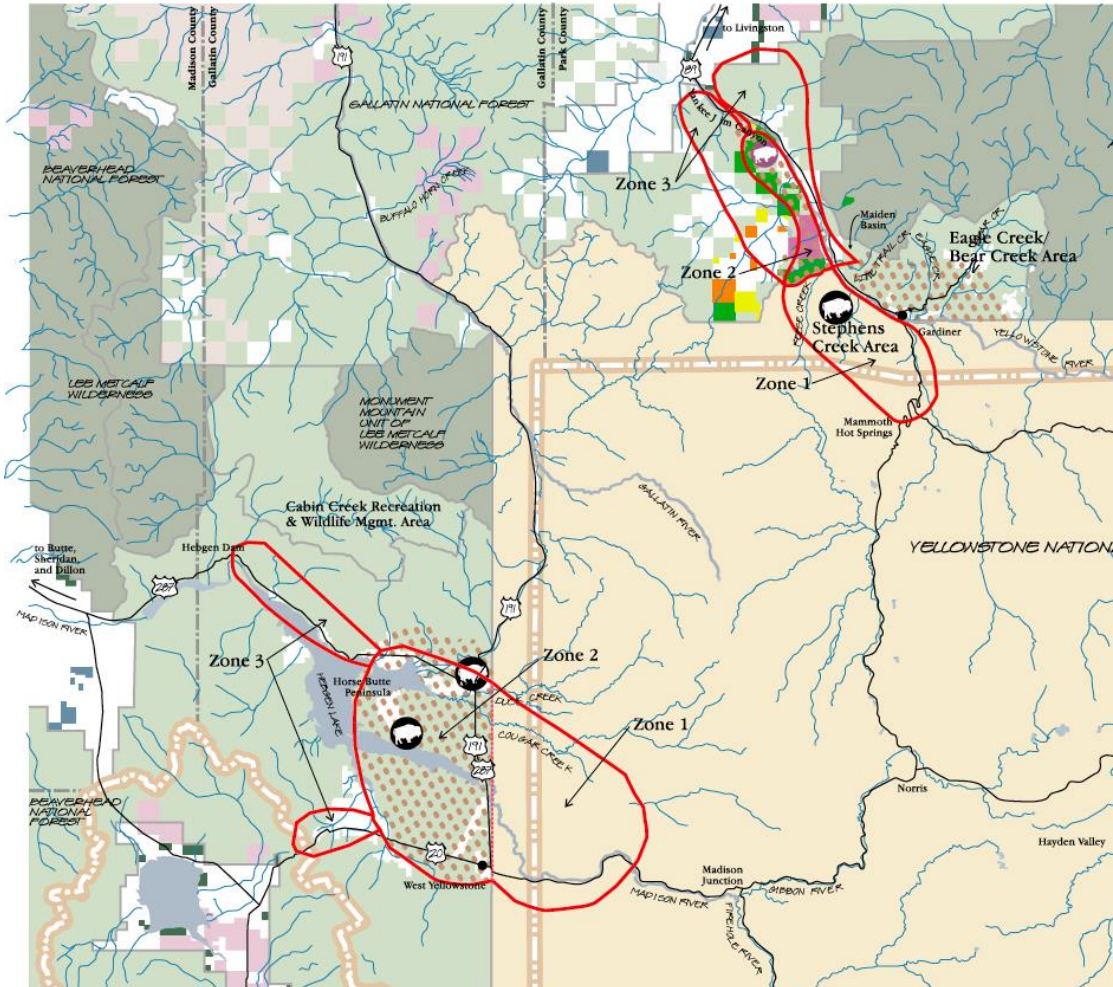
Bison captured and shipped to slaughterhouses by National Park Service: 2,642

Bison shot by National Park Service agents: 3 known

Bison captured and shipped to slaughterhouses by Montana Dept. of Livestock: 568

Bison shot by Montana Dept. of Livestock agents: 19 known

Bison calves sent to quarantine: 112
 Bison killed in quarantine (USDA APHIS, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks): 59
 Bison killed in hunt total: 270
 Bison hunted illegally in Yellowstone National Park: 6
 Bison killed under Montana's hunt: 135
 Bison killed under Treaty rights
 Nez Perce: 97
 Confederated Salish and Kootenai: 39
 Bison killed in Idaho (US Dept. of Agriculture APHIS, Idaho Fish & Game): 2
 Bison killed in vehicle collisions on Highway 287/191: 38 known



Yellowstone bison "zone" boundaries, Interagency Bison Management Plan, 2000. "Tolerance" for bison migrating into the zones decreases in each zone with Zone 3 as a lethal management zone. Elk freely traverse the ecosystem.

IBMP TALLIES LARGEST BISON SLAUGHTER SINCE 19TH CENTURY

The winter of 2007-2008 will be remembered as the largest scale wild buffalo slaughter since the 19th century with over 1,725 wild buffalo removed from the population, surpassing that of 1996-1997 when 1,084 buffalo were killed.

One-third of the entire Yellowstone herd was wiped out with 1,276 buffalo trapped and shipped to slaughterhouses on order from officials in the National Park Service under

Superintendent Suzanne Lewis. A total of 1,645 wild buffalo were captured at Stephens Creek inside the Park.



Under a multimillion-dollar taxpayer funded plan, wild bison are intercepted by Park Service rangers and MT Dept. of Livestock agents and forcibly removed from National Forest lands. Here, a bison calf was injured in one such sweep. Without year-round habitat, wild bison cannot establish viable populations as Congress intended under the National Forest Management Act.

Over 60 government-led hazing operations targeting the forced removal or harassment of buffalo occurred, taxing the health of buffalo by moving them away from forage and depleting fat reserves, while repeatedly disrupting wildlife species like pronghorn antelope, grizzly bears and bald eagles that share the land with buffalo.

Six bison were shot in the field by livestock agents for migrating into a drop-dead zone near Yankee Jim Canyon and Maiden Basin along the Yellowstone River in the Gardiner basin.

At least 12 bison were killed crossing HWY 287/191 that bisects wildlife migration corridors. 192 bison were killed in vehicle collisions from 1989 to 2003 inside Yellowstone National Park (Hardy 2005).

Kim Kaiser photo

Eighty-one buffalo calves were born in captivity. Several calves were born dead or died shortly after birth inside the trap.

Ten wild buffalo died or were euthanized as a result of injuries while held in Yellowstone National Park's trap at Stephens Creek.

One hundred twelve buffalo calves were separated from their mothers and family groups and sent to quarantine pens near Corwin Springs, Montana operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

Those calves were in addition to 45 buffalo quarantined at Slip N Slide Ranch near Dome Mountain.



For thousands of years Yellowstone bison have adapted and survived amidst native predators in one of the harshest climates in North America.

The Montana Department of Livestock under Governor Brian Schweitzer targeted buffalo in hazing operations that led to the capture of 158 wild bison migrating into the upper Madison Valley and Hebgen Lake Basin and their subsequent shipment to slaughterhouses.

The State of Montana's hunt ended in February 2008 with 63 wild buffalo killed. Nez Perce hunted 64 buffalo under treaty rights. Salish-Kootenai also hunted 39 buffalo.

The last publicly reported population count by the Park Service in early April 2008 found only 1,970 buffalo remaining.

In May 2008, Yellowstone National Park released 333 wild buffalo trapped at Stephens Creek, forcing them out of the Gardiner Basin to the Blacktail Plateau, their hides glued with tags identifying them as survivors of a deadly, ignorant plan that imperils America's last wild buffalo.

While the agencies met to make operational changes to its bison plan in 2008 (<http://ibmp.info/meetings.php>) the plan itself is inherently flawed and has not met either of its dual purposes: "maintain a wild, free ranging population of bison and address the risk of brucellosis transmission to protect the economic interest and viability of the livestock industry in the state of Montana."

A U.S. Government Accountability Office report (2008) clearly documents the lack of accountability to the American people and Congress, the lack of concrete measures of

progress towards goal achievement, lack of scientific review addressing assumptions and unknowns to improve decisions in the field, the failure to adapt new science when it emerges, the significant delays in progressing to the next step in a 3-step plan, the fact that bison are unnecessarily killed, or have lingered in quarantine for years because the agencies behind it have made it politically onerous and financially costly, and the millions of taxpayer dollars wasted on land deals that do little for wild bison roaming freely in their native range. (See Briefing Paper_GAO Report on Yellowstone bison).

The fact remains the agencies share their failure with the U.S. Congress and the Executive branch who uncritically provide funding and do not carry out their public trust duties properly or effectively. The spigot of continuing appropriations from the U.S. Congress provides no incentive for the state of Montana to change its ways and actually manage wild bison in the state. Clearly, the state of Montana has also breached its public trust responsibilities to wild buffalo that inhabit Montana. Nonetheless, the lack of Congressional scrutiny and Executive action to provide a new direction and change leadership to chart that path is a threat to wild bison as much as the plan in place today.

In response to the lack of accountability and threat to bison carried out under the rubric of the Interagency Bison Management Plan, a lawsuit was filed in November 2009 to stop the bison slaughter. The legal complaint is online:

<http://www.buffalofieldcampaign.org/legal/bisonhabitatlawsuit.html>

The plaintiffs say the National Park Service is violating its mission to leave unimpaired for future generations to enjoy the wild bison inhabiting their native range including Yellowstone National Park. The suit asks the court to enjoin the Forest Service and National Park Service from participating in or permitting actions that would lead to the slaughter of wild bison on National Forest and National Park Service lands including trapping for transport to slaughter houses and quarantine.

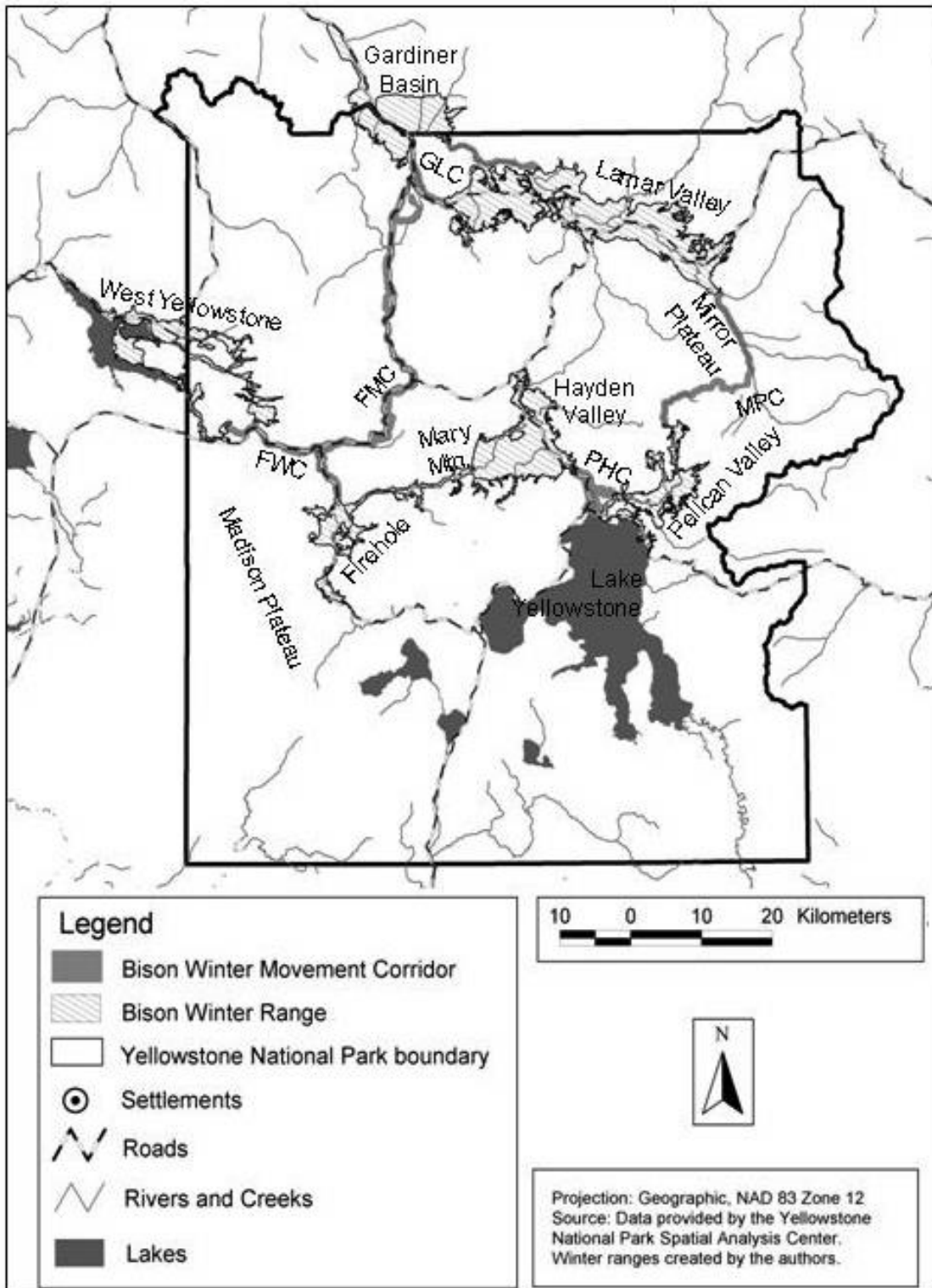
The U.S. Forest Service is also named in the suit for failing to manage habitat for viable populations of wild bison and sage grouse on the Gallatin National Forest. The plaintiffs say the Forest Service is violating its Congressional mandate providing for a diversity of native plant and wildlife species by managing habitat for cattle on National Forest lands to the detriment of native, migratory bison and sage grouse populations.

Plaintiffs, represented by attorneys from Western Watershed Project, include Buffalo Field Campaign, Tatanka Oyate, Gallatin Wildlife Association, Native Ecosystems Council, Yellowstone Buffalo Foundation, and Montana residents Meghan Gill, Chuck Irestone, and Daniel Brister.

The suit does not affect the state of Montana's bison hunt begun November 15, 2009 nor does it affect Native American tribes that retain treaty rights to hunt bison on National Forest lands.

Ken Cole photo





Bison winter range and migration corridors from Gates et al, THE ECOLOGY OF BISON MOVEMENTS AND DISTRIBUTION IN AND BEYOND YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK, A Critical Review With Implications for Winter Use and Transboundary Population Management, 2005.