

Buffalo Field Campaign



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Campaign 2002

Photo credits: Bottom right – Washington D.C., Dan Brister; left middle – snowmobile hazing, Ken Cole; bottom, second from left – calf being hit with 2 x 4, Mike Mease video; all other photos by Jay Ericson – sign, buffalo scenic, ATV hazing, snowmobile trespassing, BFC volunteers on patrol.

Buffalo Field Campaign is the only group working in the field every day to stop the slaughter of Yellowstone's wild free roaming buffalo. BFC Volunteers defend the buffalo's traditional winter habitat and advocate for their protection. Our patrols stand with the buffalo on their native habitat, and document every move made against the buffalo.

Traces

— Katherine Romano

*I smelled you yesterday
for the first time
my nose nestled in your soft hair
plucked from the side of a tree
a buffalo smell*

*I walked in your meadow
it was vacant
but I found traces of you everywhere*

*in the white bones and poop piles at my feet
in the mountains that have formed
to your contours in the sacred groves
your ancestors have told you about*

*and in my hand the smell of your hair
thick and almost sweet
it is the scent of what is missing*

Cold Mountain, Cold Rivers is the fiscal sponsor for Buffalo Field Campaign.

CMCR is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 1990 to promote awareness and citizen involvement in environmental and human rights issues.




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The Buffalo Field Campaign

This year marks the most buffalo killed since the winter of 1996-97: 202 dead buffalo, not counting the unborn bison of pregnant females. The Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL), U.S. Park Service, U.S. Forest Service and Fish and Game have returned their focus to zero tolerance and maximum abuse for buffalo on our public lands. All buffalo that have dared to take one step outside of Yellowstone National Park's invisible (to wildlife) boundaries have been either shot or hazed into traps with the destination of the slaughterhouse.

At the beginning of the season the MDOL decided to change how bison are tested for brucellosis so that an already faulty test that measures antibodies to the disease would be even more sensitive to inaccuracies. This test sent more than 70% of all captured buffalo to slaughter. According to the plan they are mandated to follow, the new test was never approved and should have been changed. After numerous groups and concerned citizens brought this illegal action to their attention, the test was changed back. By the end of the season, MDOL quit testing buffalo and all captured were sent to slaughter.

Several incidents of abuse have occurred this year inside the capture facility. We have witnessed and video documented buffalo being hit over the head for 15 minutes straight with 2 x 4's. We watched Rob Tierney, the head of MDOL's operations, strangle, beat and molest baby buffalo less than a week old. Another MDOL agent grabbed a yearling by its tiny horns and pulled it for more than 100 feet. When wildlife is treated like domestic cattle, injuries are inevitable. When many buffalo are caught in the capture facility at once, they can gore and trample one another. As long as we allow the MDOL, whose agents have no education in wildlife biology or management, to run these operations, we will see injured and dead buffalo inside the trap before they reach the slaughterhouse.

This year Buffalo Field Campaign took our message to decision-makers in both Helena, Montana (State Capital) and Washington D.C. Actions and rallies put pressure on our governor and DOL officials at their headquarters in Helena. BFC organized a "Buffalo Stampede" through the streets of D.C. Starting at Department of Agriculture and ending at Department of Interior, bison-costumed protesters marched past the Washington Monument. 550 people attended the stampede, unfortunately 500 of them were police officers.

On the frontlines we have watched law enforcement agencies trample our first and fourth amendment rights to document and bear witness to the buffalo slaughter. The "peace" officers have done their best to keep us in areas where we are unable to view their treatment of the buffalo. Police harassment and random arrests have been protocol this year. Anyone who dares to document the slaughter faces risk of arrest.

After watching the Bush administration unravel years of environmental progress and swindle his way into the White House and our new Governor, the "lap dog of industry," take the helm in Montana, people are left without much hope in the political realm. Sometimes it takes the sight of blood to wake people up. This year the buffalo blood we've seen has only made our resolve stronger. People from all walks of life are coming together for the buffalo. As of this year, BFC has had over 1200 volunteers from every state in the U.S. and countries as far as Israel and Australia that have come to stand with these beautiful buffalo. The word of the buffalo is reaching new ears everyday. We must all persist in our efforts, stand up tall and shout out louder, because the buffalo need our help.

As I watch again, one more time, a helicopter flies up and down the Madison River to disrupt all in its path, over 300 trumpeter swans (a sensitive species recently petitioned to be listed as threatened or endangered), sandhill cranes, white pelicans, blue heron, bald and golden eagles, osprey, wolves, lynx, grizzly and black bears, elk, moose, deer and all of the little creatures that sometimes are overlooked, my heart grows sad.

It is our job to continue to keep up the pressure, spread the word and never let this insanity go unnoticed. We must unite and not do what is best for ourselves, but do what we feel is right for the buffalo. The presence of wild buffalo is a gift to the land, to native cultures, and to all of humanity that must learn how to live and coexist with the wild. The population of buffalo was wastefully demolished down to 23 individuals in Yellowstone (from 6 million or so) and their wisdom was almost lost. 130 years later, we are allowing the same thing occur. It is our job to protect our children's future and that includes saving the Yellowstone buffalo.

With the Buffalo,
Michael S. Mease, BFC Field Coordinator



Buffalo Field Campaign headquarters on Hebgen Lake near West Yellowstone, Montana.
— Chuck Irestone photo.

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Email Updates

"Stop-the-slaughter" buffalo updates are emailed about 3-4 times/month. If you would like to receive it regularly, go to the following URL and sign up:
www.wildrockies.org/Buffero/politk99/stssign.html

All names are kept confidential and the list is not shared. Your privacy is respected.

Know what is happening to our national heritage... the last wild buffalo... and how you can make your concerns known.

Please pass this address on to your friends.



The great plains are known for their brutal winter storms and blizzards. Buffalo behavior is well adapted to these harsh conditions. When cold winter wind and snow bluster across the prairie, buffalo will point their horns into the wind and face the storm head on.

The buffalo of Yellowstone National Park are now facing another kind of storm, a political and biological one, which threatens their survival. The board members, volunteers, and supporters of the Buffalo Field Campaign will stand and face this storm with them as they struggle to survive into the future.
— Flo Gardipee

USFWS photo.

Yellowstone and the Buffalo Slaughter

— Dan Brister and Pete Leusch, BFC Coordinators

Fifty million buffalo once graced North America. Migrating with the seasons, rain, and growth of grasses, they were the largest concentration of mammals ever known to exist. Millions were gunned down in the second half of the 19th century. By the early 1900's all but a few of the once teeming herds were gone. By 1902 only 23 wild buffalo survived, taking refuge in the remote Yellowstone backcountry. Their direct descendants, the only continuously wild population in America, are alive today in and around Yellowstone.

Their future is uncertain. The state of Montana and public agencies have resurrected the slaughter, killing more than 3,000 native buffalo since 1985. During heavy winters, snow and ice obscure the grass in the park and hunger pushes the buffalo to lower elevations across the Montana border. When they cross this invisible line on their search for food, buffalo step into a death zone.



America's last wild bison are hazed by snowmobiles, helicopters, and ATVs; trapped and confined in cattle pens; and shot dead on their native range. The Montana Department of Livestock (DOL), an agency of the livestock industry, dictates the bison's fate. Blaming the slaughter on the bovine reproductive disease brucellosis, the DOL slaughters buffalo outside Yellowstone. Although there has never been a documented transmission of brucellosis from wild bison to livestock, the agencies continue to harass and kill bison.

Nearly every week a posse of snowmobiles, helicopters, and law enforcement vehicles descend on the Madison River to chase bison into the pen at Horse Butte. This river corridor is also vital habitat for elk, moose, bald eagles, grizzly bears, wolves, trumpeter swans and myriad other species. By disturbing their habitat in the heart of winter, DOL operations threaten all wildlife.

On the west side of the park, where the killing has taken place since 1997, there are no cattle present at the times of year when bison are out of the park. While elk and other wildlife are also known to carry the disease, only bison are hazed and slaughtered—so far.

In a five-month period in 1997 nearly 70 percent of the herd was lost. 1,084 animals were gunned down when they entered Montana and a comparable number died from the harsh winter. It was the worst year for buffalo since the 19th century.

Concerned citizens organized the Buffalo Field Campaign (BFC) the following winter to protect the buffalo and advocate on their behalf. BFC is a community of volunteers who have gathered to protect America's last wild bison and to share their story with the world.

The winter of 2001-2002 was our fifth. A difficult winter gave way to a brutal spring as more than a hundred Yellowstone buffalo were slaughtered by the Montana Department of Livestock in the last week of April. The agency, with assistance from the Park and Forest Service, killed thirty-two bison on April 25 and seventy-two on April 30. None of these buffalo were even tested for brucellosis, the supposed reason for the slaughter.

BFC volunteers videotaped the capture operations and recorded many incidents of abuse. Buffalo were chased through barbed-wire fences, slammed into the steel gates of the trap, and abused in confinement. Many pregnant cows were hazed and captured and one gave birth inside the Duck Creek Trap. After sending its mother to slaughter DOL agents released the calf, who repeatedly returned to the trap in search of its mother.

The spring slaughter brought this year's death toll above 200, the most buffalo killed since 1997. Twenty people were arrested, some for performing individual acts of civil disobedience, others as part of an increasing campaign of persecution and intimidation.

Volunteers monitor the buffalo on their native range and advocate for their protection. BFC is committed to gaining permanent protection for the Yellowstone buffalo and their critical habitat. Tactics range from research, administrative process, public, outreach, education, videography, to litigation.

While BFC's actions have made a huge difference, they have yet to stem the needless bloodshed. Hundreds of buffalo will leave the park next winter. Your help is needed if they are to survive.

BFC is a grassroots effort whose survival depends on you. As you read this newsletter, there are many ways you can support the critical work necessary to protect the bison!

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Legal Update

— By Darrell Geist, Executive Director,
Cold Mountain, Cold Rivers

Endangered Species Lawsuit

In May 2001 Cold Mountain, Cold Rivers, Buffalo Field Campaign, and The Ecology Center Inc. filed suit in federal court against the State of Montana and the federal government for illegally harming threatened bald eagles, migratory trumpeter swans and their habitat.

The lawsuit centers on Montana Dept. of Livestock operations to haze and capture wild buffalo migrating to Horse Butte Peninsula. Horse Butte and the Madison valley provide winter range and spring calving habitat for this last wild population of buffalo to occupy their native range. These spectacular wild lands provide habitat for bald eagles, Grey wolves, grizzly bears, moose, elk, boreal owl, wolverine, red fox, migrating ducks, geese and trumpeter swans.

The Montana Dept. of Livestock, U.S. Forest Service, Fish & Wildlife Service and National Park Service are charged with violating the Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, National Forest Management Act, National Environmental Protection Act, and Administrative Procedures Act for:

- * Undertaking prohibited activities in bald eagle nesting territories such as hazing buffalo with helicopters; hazing buffalo near Madison Arm/Hebgen Lake; using ATV's and shooting "cracker rounds" in restricted closure areas; and increased use of and disturbance to wildlife by snowmobiles.
- * Failing to take the requisite hard look and analyze cumulative effects of hazing buffalo in bald eagle territories and establish an environmental baseline to monitor impacts to endangered, threatened and sensitive species.
- * Operating under illegal Annual Operation Plans and in violation of the Special Use Permit terms and conditions set forth in Fish & Wildlife Service's Biological Opinion to allow the buffalo capture facility in bald eagle habitat.
- * Disturbing and displacing trumpeter swans and protected migratory birds from their habitat.
- * Failing to consult on biological impacts to Canadian lynx and their habitat.



Montana DOL helicopters were illegally deployed to haze and capture Yellowstone's native buffalo, disturbing habitat of threatened bald eagles and sensitive wildlife.
Photo by Jay Ericson.



The federal lawsuit is before Judge Charles Lovell and seeks to void MDOL's Special Use Permit allowing operation of Horse Butte buffalo capture facility; to provide an injunction prohibiting use of the capture facility; and require an environmental analysis that complies with federal law. The suit will be heard in fall 2002 in Helena, Montana.

"The people of the state do not wish to abdicate their sovereignty to the agencies which serve them."

— Montana Code 2-3-201

Horse Butte Capture Facility. Project Lighthawk, BFC Photo



Mature and immature bald eagles (above). — USFWS photos.

Right to Know Lawsuit

Since March 2001 the Montana Dept. of Livestock has obstructed representatives of Buffalo Field Campaign, The Ecology Center Inc., and Cold Mountain, Cold Rivers from inspecting the agency's records detailing their Yellowstone buffalo operations. When the state livestock agency failed to respond to our repeated requests to examine public records we filed suit July 2001 in state court asking Montana District Court Judge Thomas C. Honzel to uphold our constitutional right to know.

A series of hearings in Helena before Judge Honzel resulted in a court order directing the parties into settlement negotiations. The settlement agreement reached in May 2002 stipulated that the Montana Dept. of Livestock would provide access to records requested in March 2001.

When representatives of the groups arrived at the Montana Dept. of Livestock's offices, we were restricted to examining ten boxes and two file cabinets of archival records, none of which related to our initial requests. The livestock agency has taken an extreme and illegal course of action to prevent a fundamental constitutional right from being exercised by Montana citizens and we intend to fight for our right to know.

Attorney Brenda Lindlief Hall (Reynolds, Motl & Sherwood) recently filed a motion asking Judge Honzel to appoint a special master to oversee implementation of the settlement agreement and to hold a hearing for sanctions against the Montana Dept. of Livestock. Stay tuned!

Montana Constitution: "ARTICLE II, Section 9. Right to know. No Person shall be deprived of the right to examine documents or to observe the deliberations of all public bodies or agencies of state government and its subdivisions, except in cases in which the demand of individual privacy clearly exceeds the merits of public disclosure."

"MCA 2-6-102. Citizens entitled to inspect and copy public writings. (1) Every citizen has a right to inspect and take a copy of any public writing of this state."



A lone buffalo grazes along the Madison Arm of Hebgen Lake. Horse Butte is in the near-left background, with the capture facility located near its base. — Photo by Chuck Pezeshki

We need your support!

Please make a stand with the buffalo at Horse Butte.

Your contributions will support the Horse Butte Wildlands Protection Project and legal efforts to protect this unique area.

Horse Butte Protection Study

— By Myla McGowan

On the western boundary of Yellowstone National Park there is a unique piece of mostly public land that separates the two arms of Hebgen Lake. This area is known as the Horse Butte Peninsula. Surrounded by rugged mountains and formidable peaks, this relatively low elevation peninsula provides spring habitat for the Yellowstone bison, critical lynx habitat, bald eagle nesting territory, and open water trumpeter swan refuge. Native westslope cutthroat trout inhabit the creeks and there are numerous plant species not found in the surrounding alpine regions. Because of the lower elevation and relatively early plant green-up, the Horse Butte Peninsula provided excellent hunting and fishing grounds for Native Americans, and archeological explorations have found remnants of early Native American artifacts.

Horse Butte is currently under intense human pressure because of bison hazing activities, activities surrounding the bison capture facility, recreational snowmobile use, cattle grazing, and residential development.

BFC has initiated a study to assess the cultural and ecological significance of Horse Butte and the impacts of human activities on this ecosystem. The study will draw on information from archeological surveys, predicted threatened and endangered species habitat ranges, and species observations from BFC's daily patrols. We will also look at historical Forest Service range vegetation records as well as current range conditions to understand the effects of cattle grazing on the Butte.

The study involves surveys of sensitive plant species, since a thorough assessment of plants on Horse Butte has never been conducted. The GIS data we collect will provide us with key background information on the Butte such as soil types, vegetation types, snowmelt and green-up rates, land-use activity, and its historical fire record. This data will help us determine the importance of Horse Butte as wildlife habitat and as a connecting corridor between Yellowstone National Park and the surrounding lands.

The Buffalo Field Campaign has been active in collecting and archiving wildlife observations, movements, and human disturbance activities. They are the only group in the field with the buffalo every day. This data will be particularly useful to evaluate the range of various species, to identify the daily and seasonal importance of Horse Butte to wildlife, and to help guide efforts to change human use and management regimes in this unique part of the world.

— Myla McGowan is an ecologist with EnviroVision in Bozeman, Montana.



2/05/01 WILD BUFFALO IN HOUDINI'S MEADOW WEST YELLOWSTONE MONTANA

Houdini

— By Mike Mease

We were blessed in 1999 with a very mild winter when few buffalo left the park. For most of that winter there was only one bull out of the park. This one huge buffalo became our dear friend and we playfully nicknamed him "Houdini" for his uncanny ability to disappear from the Department of Livestock (DOL).

You would think that with only one buffalo out of the park the DOL would take some time off and stop wasting tax payers' hard earned money. Instead, they attempted to haze this lone bull eight times in January and February. Houdini's favorite habitat is a grassy meadow about a mile outside Yellowstone. This meadow is on the Gallatin National Forest in an area where there are no cattle. Snowmobiles are the DOL's tools of choice for hazing and agents illegally ride where they shouldn't be, off-route through creeks and tributaries.

Houdini is aware of a snowmobile's limitations and when he hears them always heads for the thick timber. The snowmobiles on his trail often get stuck in the deep snow between the trees. The DOL agents spend their energy digging one another out as Houdini hides in the woods and watches from a safe distance. This was the case during all of 1999.

On a spring day in that year Houdini suddenly left the meadow. He walked about a quarter mile into the park, rubbing against many of the trees along his path. He spent a total of four hours in the park before returning to the meadow. Within a week more than 150 buffalo had come out of the park along his trail. Older bull buffalo often lead the way for the herds to their calving grounds and the first green grasses of spring.

In 2000 Houdini returned to his meadow followed by 13 younger bulls. The DOL showed their usual lack of tolerance for them and resumed its torturous tactic of trying to haze them back to the Park. On days when we know that the DOL are coming to harass them we sometimes give the buffalo a warning by moving them to safe areas. This means slowly walking the buffalo into thick woods where DOL snowmobiles can't penetrate.

On days when the DOL is not around we sit near the buffalo unobtrusively, making camp several hundred yards away. We check on the buffalo several times each patrol, observing their behavior without bothering them. On one of the hazing days we had just shepherded 14 buffalo into the woods when six DOL agents arrived on snowmobiles. The agents went into the woods after our friends and the circus was in full swing. Several DOL snowmobiles went through a tributary and continued into the woods, searching for the elusive buffalo. Just out of sight and behind them came Houdini stepping in their tracks along the tributary and into the woods. Just behind him were seven younger bulls, following his lead and learning to dodge the DOL. After six unsuccessful hours, the DOL gave up.

We returned to our camp near the meadow. Just before sunset 11 of the 14 bulls came within 20 feet of our camp on their way back to the meadow. Each one stopped as they passed, glanced in our direction, and shook its head, as if to nod in thanks for the warning we gave. The following morning the missing three bulls and five other members of their family (two moms and three yearlings) came down the same path. The first big bull came within five feet of us, waited for his family to pass, and then followed them to the meadow. There are no words that can express the feelings of being part of the buffalo family.

This winter Houdini educated more young bulls in the ways of dodging the DOL and their machines. The one DOL weapon that I had never seen the buffalo escape is the helicopter. But this year we witnessed Houdini and a friend get away from a chopper that had been hounding them for more than two hours. When the helicopter—needing to refuel—finally left, both buffalo hightailed it back to the park.

It is amazing to watch these brilliant buffalo outsmart the DOL, but it is downright depressing that they have to do so in the first place. Houdini has now gone back to Yellowstone for another summer, where he is safe until next fall's snows bring him back to his meadow. He has left us all with the wisdom of persistence. We are honored to be a part of his family and will never give up until Houdini and all the wild buffalo are free to roam.

Let the Buffalo Roam!



Special Thanks to these Foundations and Individuals:

BFC Board, Coordinators and volunteers!
 Acorn Foundation
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 Joan Baez
 Bay Area Yellowstone Buffalo Committee
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 the Senders
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 ZZYX Foundation

"I WOULD NOT seriously regret the total disappearance of the buffalo from our western plains in its effect upon the Indians. I would regard it rather as a means of hastening their sense of dependence upon the products of the soil and their own labors." – Secretary of the Interior Columbus Delano, 1873

BFC Enlists Puppets to Stop the Slaughter

— By Summer Nelson, BFC Coordinator

The winter and spring of 2001-2002 was the most difficult winter in BFC's history as we witnessed the senseless slaughter of 202 buffalo and the unnecessary harassment of hundreds more. Opposition to the slaughter took a creative turn this winter as volunteers alchemized salvaged cardboard, wood, fabric, bike tubes, wire, paper mache and paint into large street theater puppets to help bring the buffalo's plight to a wider audience.

Governor Judy Martz was represented in a twelve-foot tall puppet, and was accompanied by a two-person life-sized buffalo, and a grim reaper agent from the Department of Livestock (DOL) that held marionettes of the Forest Service and Park Service in his hands.

The puppets first performed in March on the steps of the Montana capitol building in Helena, when a group of buffalo supporters completed a seven-day hunger vigil and rally. The performance involved citizens pleading to the Governor Martz puppet to protect the buffalo. At first, she covered her eyes to the slaughter, but after the people declared their desire to see the buffalo remain wild, the governor made the right choice and hazed the DOL away.

For the second performance, an all-species parade marched down the Forest Service road to the Horse Butte capture facility, where wild bison are captured and sent to slaughter. 40 people carried puppets, banners and DOL bowling pins to the facility, where they greeted several DOL agents at the police line. Several of the unique species that inhabit Horse Butte were represented, including bison, bald eagle, trumpeter swans, moose and woodpeckers. Again, Martz acted out of character and shamed the agents for their actions against bison and other wildlife. Bowling then broke out in front of the facility, with wildlife taking aim to knock the DOL out of the ecosystem. The group left peacefully and allowed the agents to ponder their errors. Judging from the grim reaper's mysterious theft from a later patrol when numerous DOL agents were in town, it seems the performance made a powerful impact on the agents.

The third performance took place outside of the Governor's Conference on Tourism in West Yellowstone. The street theater was kept out of the conference center and Martz avoided the performance. A rather obnoxious cow touted herself, with the help of Martz and federal officials, as the thing to see in Montana. The tourists, who had seen enough cattle in their own state, were excited to view buffalo and other wildlife and became frustrated and disappointed. Eventually they took back their money, left the state, and left Governor Martz in a frantic dilemma, wondering if keeping bison around might actually be better for Montana. The puppets and street theater enriched the Campaign's buffalo advocacy, giving voice to the many species affected by the DOL's actions.



Ken Cole photo.

Every bison management operation puts not only bison in jeopardy, but kills other wildlife as well. The agencies are squandering our tax dollars, terrorizing our wildlife, and placing the entire Yellowstone ecosystem at risk. — Peter Leusch, BFC Volunteer and Coordinator



Chuck Irestone photo.



USFWS photo.

Coming to Yellowstone... A lesson

— By Emily Kodama

In the chilly pre-dawn hours, my patrolmates and I strap on our backpacks and snowshoes and head off into the dim forest. It is April, but spring comes late here on the western border of Yellowstone National Park, the coldest spot in the lower forty-eight, and the temperature hovers in the 20s. As we weave our way through the snowy woods, our tracks overlay those of elk, moose, bison, wolf, and grizzly. At the edge of the Madison River, where it flows out of the Park, we stop and pull out binoculars, scanning the valley. The mist shifts slightly, and the silhouette of a bison, his fur silvery with frost, emerges across the river. As first light breaks, we can see six more bull bison standing nearby. It is a romantic sight, but our purpose this morning is somber and practical: to watch over these buffalo and, if necessary, do what we can to discourage them from walking the few hundred yards out of the park. Neighboring Montana is hostile territory, and for the last 17 years Yellowstone bison have suffered lethal wildlife “management” at the hands of the state.

In 1999, on a whim, I went to a presentation by members of a group called Buffalo Field Campaign (BFC). It was then that I first learned of the plight of the Yellowstone bison. I watched video of buffalo being shot in the field and loaded onto trucks by agents of the Montana Department of Livestock. Those bison not shot in the field were hazed into capture facilities where the terrified animals frantically hurled themselves against the metal walls and gored each other in panic. In a single winter (1996-97) the state of Montana killed nearly 1100 buffalo, over one-third of the entire Yellowstone herd. BFC, we learned, is a grassroots campaign dedicated to documenting the slaughter and doing whatever possible to stop it. Volunteers are out in the field with the buffalo 365 days a year documenting, shepherding bison to safe ground, and engaging in non-violent protest. I came to West Yellowstone in December of that year, planning to spend a few weeks volunteering with BFC. Two field seasons later, I am still here, still outraged by the treatment of the bison and honored to be able to spend so much time watching and learning from them.

Volunteers come from all 50 states and many foreign countries to work with BFC and take a stand for the buffalo. We run daily field patrols from dawn to dusk, and get around primarily on foot, skis, or snowshoes. Our first duty is to document. The simple presence of witnesses with video cameras has shamed the state into shifting from shooting untested bison in the field to capture, testing, and slaughter. The latter, although perhaps even more cruel because of the prolonged physical and psychological distress it inflicts, is more palatable to the nightly news-viewing public and does result in fewer bison being killed.

Volunteers are provided communal meals and accommodations in a large log cabin and tipis, and are equipped for long hours out in the field in temperatures that can dip as low as 50 below zero. The campaign attracts an eclectic mix of varying ages and backgrounds, but we all share a love for the buffalo and a firm commitment to non-violence.

I am by nature a cautious person; direct action is challenging. Action is frightening, raw, exhilarating, messy, joyful, frustrating and liberating. It scares me and feeds my spirit both. In the words of Ed Abbey, “Sentiment without action is the ruin of the soul.” I am learning to live with that. Life here is physically and emotionally demanding, but I feel acutely aware of how lucky I am. I do work I truly believe is important, amongst dedicated, passionate individuals, and live in one of the most spectacular spots on earth. Most of all it is a privilege to be with the buffalo, who embody so much that we humans would benefit from emulating. If we can ever stop seeing them as a problem which must be controlled and restore them to the place of honor they occupied for animals that lived sustainably on this ground for millennia, we, too, may find that the bison are some of our greatest teachers.

I was sitting, on patrol in April, watching the buffalo graze peacefully on Horse Butte. Suddenly I heard, then saw, a helicopter approach from the north. The helicopter flew directly over the bald eagle closure, between the signs which read “area closed to all human activity.” As the chopper passed overhead I looked through the binoculars and read “Montana Department of Livestock” on the side of the grey machine, directly below the rotors. The helicopter continued to fly south over the Butte and then turned to the east and began to haze over 40 buffalo, many of them pregnant females.

— Jonas Ehdin, BFC Volunteer



Ken Cole photo.

Seeds of Peace

Perhaps the greatest feat of the Campaign is the feeding of the hungry hordes of volunteers heading in and out of the field, requiring nourishment enough to fuel bodies in consistently subzero temperatures, with appetites created by miles of skiing, snowshoeing or post-holing through the snow. Demanding stomachs are not quiet, and year after year the Seeds of Peace collective exceeds the demand, nourishing every volunteer. Accommodating the full spectrum, from vegan to meat-eater, and every cheese lover or “freegan” in between, Seeds conscientiously and deliciously dishes out amazing meals every day. They are an integral force in the Campaign, allowing BFC to survive, and the cooks often pull field patrols between meals.

Seeds of Peace is a collective providing food and logistical support around environmental and human rights issues. If you need help on your action or project or if you'd like to make a donation please get in touch:

Seeds of Peace
PO Box 8896
Missoula, MT 59807
(406) 549-8863; seedspeace@wildrockies.org



The buffalo of Yellowstone don't need much, really, just a place to graze and to give birth to the next generation. The defenders of the buffalo aren't asking anything for themselves, which is unusual in a time of self and wealth and comfort. All they ask for is for the buffalo to have a place to graze and to give birth to the next generation. What is hard about that? My deepest gratitude to BFC for their determined dedication to the buffalo.

— Rosalie Little Thunder

A Story...

— By Scott Frazier, BFC Board member

This past spring I was involved in a conference about environmental issues in Native Peoples communities. The conference was over four days and included a part about Sacred Sites. It has come to light that many Native Sacred sites have been violated due to flooding, drilling or what ever the government has chosen to do.

Flo Gardipee came to talk about buffalo DNA issues and the effect that the current slaughter has on the gene pool of all the future buffalo. Many people, let alone Native People, do not know or understand the vast manipulations that have already hurt our most natural spiritual resource, nor do they realize the small amount of variety that is in motion today.

I was standing outside one of the conference doors getting some fresh air, when two men approached me from the Shoshone tribe. These men had come to the conference to ask that locations of sacred sites not be given to the public for fear that the sites would be exploited. They had waited two days to be heard but at no time were they allowed to speak.

As I listened to them I felt a great closeness to the many people who wish the world could listen but weren't willing to raise their voices because of respect of tradition. As I stood with them they asked me why the buffalo leave the park in the spring, because these men were my elder, I simply replied by asking them.

They told me something very interesting. They said the reason the buffalo leave the Park in the spring is to find the medicine plants they need to become healthy from the long winter. They come out of the park to find a certain plant. Once they eat enough of the plant, then they would go back where they were safe. These are old buffalo teaching the young buffalo tradition and herbal knowledge. These are great spirits seeking sacred sites for healing.

There are many people on this turtle island. Many people won't speak out until they are affected because of customs. The Field Campaign is being the voice for many for many reasons, yet the sacred buffalo is bleeding still. The buffalo are our sacred resource and the executions must stop before our hope is lost. Please help us all by speaking up for the buffalo.

— Aho, Ehnamani.

(ed. note: Botanists working on BFC's Horse Butte Wildland Protection Project have confirmed two sensitive plants on the Butte as of mid-June 2002.)

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Western Watersheds Project

We apologize to anyone we may have overlooked.

Government's Management Plan Puts Genetic Integrity of Yellowstone's Wild Bison at Risk

— By Flo Gardipee

In August of 2000, the Record of Decision for the Bison Management Plan for the State of Montana and Yellowstone National Park was released. This Plan contradicts the scientific research and studies listed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement's (FEIS) bibliography (<http://www.nps.gov/planning/yell/bisonfinal/main2.htm>). The Plan proposes to cap the Yellowstone bison population at 3,000 animals, based solely on political pressure to control the herd, not on any scientific data or principles.

We must look at the history of bison in this country to gain a full understanding of the Plan's potential impact. When Euro-Americans arrived in the west there were an estimated 30 to 80 million bison. By the 1890's those once thundering herds were reduced to less than a few hundred animals in North America. This created a huge genetic bottleneck in the bison population and an insurmountable reduction in genetic variation.

Most present day bison herds have been established with eight to 50 individuals, placing them at risk for a condition known as the "founder effect." The founder effect is when a founding animal population is established from such a small number of individuals that genetic variation cannot be guaranteed. Populations established in this manner are subject to the effects of inbreeding and genetic drift and eventual loss of fitness. The Yellowstone bison herd, descended from less than 30 individuals, is one such herd.

The Yellowstone herd exhibits other factors which can contribute to a loss of genetic variation in populations: isolation; no migration (or gene flow); and heavy selection pressures. There is no migration of other bison into Yellowstone, so there is no introduction of new genetic material. They are subject to an artificial selection pressure when government agencies cull the bison herd of individuals that are seropositive for brucellosis.

Why is it important to preserve the wild Yellowstone bison?

A 1993 study revealed that of 14 public bison herds, two had completely lost heterozygosity (a measure of variability) through the effects of genetic drift and seven others were well on their way. Over half of the public herds are on the verge of inbreeding depression due to a variety of factors. The founder effect, intensive culling of these herds, isolation, and the absence of migration have contributed heavily to this situation. The greatest threat is the application of livestock (i.e. cattle) management techniques to wild bison herds which further threaten their genetic viability. Such forms of management serve only to increase the possibility of bison losing their long term evolutionary potential.

Of the 300,000 bison in the U.S. and Canada, less than 20,000 reside in state and national parks, and only about 3,000 remain in the last truly wild bison herd. The Plan allows that number to drop to 1,700. Bison in private stock are selected and bred according to a set of preferred standards established by the economic demands of the bison industry. Physical attributes such as shape, size and proportion, coat color, docile vs. "wild" behavior, and conversion of feed to flesh are important considerations in determining herd composition. Breeding for specific characteristics eventually leads to fixation and loss of genetic variation. Due to the large genetic bottleneck bison suffered in the past, they are especially susceptible to this condition. Captive bison herds which are bred to satisfy these demands are at risk of being domesticated. Further compounding this risk are the skewed sex ratios (smaller proportion of males to females) applied to these herds for the purpose of increasing the production rate for economic gain.

Several ranchers who participated in the early restoration of bison, such as Charles Goodnight, bred bison with cattle in an effort to create a new commercial livestock that would possess the best attributes of both animals. In a genetics study by Dr. James Derr of Texas A&M University, it was revealed that many bison in private herds possess evidence of this hybridization with cattle. Hybrids were also present in several public herds such as Custer State Park. However, no evidence of cattle DNA has been found in the Yellowstone bison herd. In addition, genetic testing reveals a healthy level of genetic variability within Yellowstone's herd as well. For these reasons, the Yellowstone bison are the genetic well spring for future wild bison herds.

If bison are going to survive into the future as a genetically intact species, it is imperative that wild, free ranging bison herds are allowed to grow and perpetuate themselves in a natural environment.

Yellowstone bison are in jeopardy of losing their unique genetic integrity

Government agencies insist on needless slaughtering of the Yellowstone bison in spite of scientific evidence that they carry a gene called NRAMP 1 (Natural Resistance Associated Macrophage Protein 1), which enables bison to develop resistance to not only brucellosis, but for tuberculosis and salmonellosis as well. This may explain why most Yellowstone bison test positive for antibodies (seropositive) to brucellosis but remain culture negative (no organisms present).

If the government continues to cull seropositive buffalo from Yellowstone, they could remove the unique superior genetic quality which has enabled them to survive a holocaust and come back from the brink of extinction. This is a direct threat to the very survival and fitness of this magnificent herd.

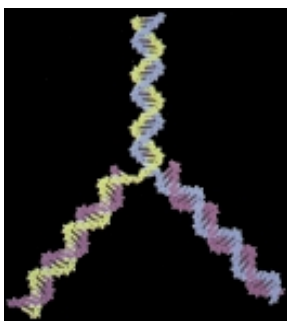
The FEIS states that genetic variation can be maintained in Yellowstone bison in a herd of less than 600. There is no scientific evidence or study cited in the bibliography of the FEIS which confirms this. In fact, all of the studies listed in that bibliography provide evidence to the contrary. The idea of maintaining such a small genetically isolated population which is already threatened by other factors such as the founder effect, no migration, and heavy selection pressures violates every principle of conservation genetics.

It is time for the bureaucrats, who apparently possess little or no scientific knowledge, to remove themselves from wildlife management and allow those with the proper credentials and education to do the job the public hired them for—protection of wildlife!

Due to the impact of their historical origin, Yellowstone bison are a genetically unique herd deserving protection and preservation. This population must be conserved in order to ensure its continued survival and health. The government's Plan will cause irreparable harm to the genetic variability necessary to insure their future survival.

When politics and economics dictate the management of a wild species, such as bison, the outcome is always detrimental to their long term survival. The key to the future evolutionary success of bison as a species, is in protecting and promoting the Yellowstone buffalo as a wild, free ranging herd.

— Flo Gardipee raises buffalo and is a senior in Wildlife Biology and Native American Studies at the University of Montana. She received the Student Leader of the Year Award from NAS and was named as a Udall scholar for 2002/2003. Flo is a member of the BFC Board and works for The Ecology Center, Inc. as a research assistant for the Bison Ecology Project.



A wild buffalo being tested in a DOL capture facility. — BFC File Photo

What is Brucellosis?

- * Brucellosis is a disease caused by a gram negative bacteria, characterized by an undulating body temperature. It was unknown in this country before the introduction of European cattle. Although debilitating, it is rarely fatal. The Center for Disease Control does not consider it to be a major public health threat, nor requires reporting of it, and current statistics reveal a low incidence in human beings.
- * Brucellosis may be transmitted to wildlife and domestic livestock through contact with aborted fetuses and birth materials infected with the organism. Infection may occur during breeding. Humans may contract brucellosis by contact with infected tissues, through open wounds or cuts, ingestion of unpasteurized milk, or through accidental inoculation with the vaccine. Only two cases were reported in Montana in the last ten years, and they were from gutting infected elk. There are no documented cases of buffalo transmitting brucellosis to humans or livestock in Montana.

The CARD Test vs. Culture Techniques.

- * The CARD test is used in the field to determine if a buffalo is seropositive for brucellosis. This test only detects antibodies to the brucellosis organism, not the presence of the organism itself! Antibodies are formed in the host in response to exposure to a potentially infectious agent. These antibodies are made up of proteins referred to as immunoglobulins or Ig for short.
- * There are three main and significant immunoglobulins. IgM and IgG are primarily involved in responding to infectious agents, and IgE usually only responds in allergic reactions. IgM antibodies are the first to be formed in response to contact with any new infectious agent. IgM production usually continues as long as the organisms remain in the host, ceases when the organism is cleared from the body, and falls off rapidly after the onset of IgG antibody synthesis. Persistent IgM production suggests that the infectious agent is still present. IgG antibody production begins rather late in the immune response and continues at high levels well after the infectious agents have been eliminated. IgG levels eventually drop off to low levels and may persist for the host's lifetime. IgG antibodies also are formed in response to vaccinations and enable them to maintain immunity to certain infections. Maternal IgG antibodies are small enough to cross the placenta and can pass on immunities to the fetus.
- * The CARD test shows a positive result only in the presence of IgG antibodies, detecting only the animal's immune response to exposure to brucella organisms. The test is limited to this purpose! It cannot determine if infection is present. This can only be proven by actually culturing out the organism itself. Specimens for culture are not obtained on all seropositive buffalo, and of those that are cultured only a small percent actually grow out brucella organisms. What could be the reason?

What is the NRAMP 1 Gene?

- * Current research has discovered that some buffalo possess a gene called NRAMP 1 (Natural Resistance Associated Macrophage Protein 1), which enables them to develop an immunity to brucellosis, and allows them to clear the organism from their bodies. Brucellosis is transmitted usually during breeding. Most bison do not begin breeding until about two years of age. If they get exposed to brucellosis at that time, the NRAMP 1 gene "switches" on and the bison make antibodies and develop long term immunity.
- * In a study performed on 190 bison, 119 were seropositive. Of those 119, only 23 cultured positive. The mean age of the bison that were culture positive and seropositive was 2.34 years! The level of culture positives drops off sharply by age three. This means that when a buffalo is exposed to brucellosis during their first breeding season, they are developing immunity and clearing that organism from their bodies. Most of the seropositive bison have merely developed long term immunity to brucellosis.
- * Other factors can affect the accuracy of the CARD test and culture techniques. The CARD test is only qualitative — macroscopically read as a positive or negative result. It cannot be correlated to a level of IgG antibody. The test should be run at a room temperature of no less than 50 degrees F, in a slightly humid environment. The samples should be spun only in a properly calibrated centrifuge designed specifically for the CARD test. The CARD test should be rotated for exactly four minutes. Any further manipulation can result in gel-like substances which can be read as false positive. This test detects only long term immunity in the form of IgG antibodies. Yet, the DOL relies on these results alone to determine if a buffalo is slaughtered.
- * In Dec. 2001, USDA gave permission to MDOL to implement a new testing methodology called the Fluorescent Polarization Assay (FPA). This test was touted as being more sensitive than previous methods. Although it is more sensitive for detecting IgG antibodies to brucellosis exposure, it proved even less accurate for diagnosing infection. A quantitative result of 90.0 or above is considered a positive test. Of 156 bison who were tested by the FPA, 127 were considered positive for brucellosis antibodies. When compared to culture results only 32 were actually culture positive with results ranging from 117.1 to 323.4. However, 95 of these FPA positive bison were culture negative with results ranging from 93.4 to 296.6. This study revealed that the FPA test was of little or no diagnostic value for bison. It further illustrates the need for more research of the bison immune system before we implement testing methods designed for use in cattle. Overall, only 21% of FPA positive bison were actually infected! Use of this test resulted in about 80% of the bison needlessly sent to slaughter. The FPA test was discontinued after the NPS and conservation groups raised the NEPA issue surrounding the new test, and Yellowstone refused to use the test without documentation of its accuracy in bison. To this date neither MDOL, nor USDA have provided this.
- * As for the few cultures that are taken, failure to obtain positive results from a suspect host usually is due to non-presence of infection, or inappropriate sampling techniques including failure to use a sufficient sample. False positives can occur with cross contamination of specimens. Considering all of the variables which can alter the quality and accuracy of these testing methods, in conjunction with the random nature of the population sampling, it's clear that there is no real evidence to support the claim that there is widespread brucellosis infection in Yellowstone buffalo.

What about Elk?

- * It is interesting to note that the same tests have shown that as many as 50% of the 120,000 elk in the Yellowstone ecosystem are seropositive for brucellosis. There is about a 12% abortion rate among native elk due to brucellosis. Yet, they are allowed to migrate freely and are more likely to co-mingle with cattle than buffalo. In fact, I have observed that buffalo will avoid most contact with cattle. I question why the elk have been left alone. But we know quite well that it is their popularity with hunters and the money they generate that protects them from the DOL — for now.
- * When the elk from Gray's River feeding ground in Wyoming tested positive for brucellosis antibodies, local authorities attributed this to "exposure" or a "bad strain of vaccine." Yet if bison test positive for antibodies the Montana Department of Livestock considers them "infected", regardless of culture status.
- * This past year elk who migrated into Idaho from the Gray's River feeding ground in Wyoming exposed a private cattle herd to brucellosis. Several cattle from this herd tested positive for brucellosis antibodies. Culture results confirmed the transmission of an identical strain of brucellosis from the elk to the cattle. This event resulted in over 100 cattle from this herd being removed because of exposure.
- * There are two vaccines approved for use in cattle, strain 19 and RB51. Neither of these vaccines have proven to be completely safe or effective in elk and bison, and no safe delivery system has been developed.

Are Elk Next?

- * Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) recently conducted a survey for brucellosis antibodies in elk that migrate from Yellowstone into the state. This study revealed a low seroprevalence which has prompted FWP to consider "trigger" points for lethal management of elk who might threaten Montana's cattle industry. How will these trigger points be determined and how will these elk be managed? Will we see elk shot as they enter the state of Montana or shipped to slaughter in stock trailers?



FIND OUT what is happening to America's Last, Wild Buffalo

Buffalo Field Campaign

in the field, protecting the last wild buffalo 365 days a year

www.wildbison.org



Banner by Chuck Pezeshki and Kelley Racicot (pezeshki@moscow.com).

Program Development Update

— Su Gregerson; BFC Program Development Coordinator

Buffalo Field Campaign is the only group working in the field 365 days a year with the last free roaming, wild bison. The Campaign is also much more than that. It encompasses everyone that cares for the buffalo and demands their protection for future generations. It includes those who cherish the beauty and wildness of the greater Yellowstone ecosystem and realizes this habitat is critical for the buffalo and all the species that live there. The Campaign is the totality of all of our efforts - including the tens of thousands of folks who support our strategies, but have never set foot in Montana or Yellowstone. Thanks for allowing us to be on the frontlines and for your letters of support and donations - we couldn't do it without all of you!

Accomplishments:

- * Volunteers from across the country and around the world come to West Yellowstone to join us on our daily patrols. This infusion of public support makes it possible to maintain our constant vigil on the Park's western boundary from October through June. Volunteers were in the field from before dawn to after dusk in harsh winter conditions. Each patrol was equipped with video cameras, radios and maps and trained in media advocacy, non-violence and backcountry skills. During the summer, volunteers set up educational tables in Yellowstone National Park. The total number of volunteers that have been to camp is over 1300!
- * Our media and networking efforts have helped to raise awareness of this issue around the globe. Every new person who learns of the buffalo's plight and speaks out brings them closer to protection for future generations.
- * We also follow up with other "big picture" strategies such as litigation that holds public agencies accountable for their actions. (see our legal update article). We maintain our vigil in the field, document management violations and follow up with long term protection strategies.
- * We witness the destructive effects of current buffalo policy on the Yellowstone ecosystem as a whole. An incredible diversity of plant and wildlife species and habitat types thrives in this ecosystem. By building a broad base of public involvement for not only the plight of the buffalo but the impacts that public policies are having on all the species, we are strategically moving towards true protection. Our Horse Butte Wildlands Protection Project research will be a large contribution towards this goal.
- * NEPA analysis is underway on the cattle grazing allotments on the Butte and we have taken the lead by providing the public with the information and research needed to make solid comments on the DEIS when it is released. Contact BFC for more info on how you can get involved with this process.
- * Diversity is the key: In March, 2002, BFC sponsored a public forum on science and spirituality of Yellowstone bison management in Bozeman, Mt. The panel discussion addressed the ethics of the current Yellowstone Bison Management Plan, and included Mary Meagher (an expert in Yellowstone bison ecology.), Peter Illyn (a former evangelical minister and current executive director of Restoring Eden), Scott Frazier (Crow tribal member and spiritual traditionalist) and Mike Mease (BFC Field Coordinator).

These are only a few examples of how BFC is in the lead to protect the buffalo. It would be great to gain protection for the buffalo and their habitat and be "put out of work" and we are making great advances - but, there is still a lot of work to be done. It is critical that BFC volunteers continue to be the eyes and the ears for the American public and advocate for the last free roaming wild buffalo and their habitat.

Please take a moment and reflect on the value of the wild Yellowstone buffalo to you and to future generations. Sixty percent of our income is from concerned individuals like you. Please - send your support, now. Each donation is critical to our success. We're a small grassroots group with no big offices or high paid staff - just dedicated folks that volunteer and care.

Together we can make a difference!
Su, bfc-programs@wildrockies.org

What You can do to Help Save the Last Wild Buffalo...

In communities world-wide, people are rallying to support the last wild buffalo by organizing peace marches, public presentations, letter writing campaigns, drum circles, concerts and other forms of non-violent action to raise awareness. On April 4th 2002 in Washington, D.C., supporters dressed in buffalo costumes led a stampede from the U.S.D.A. to the U.S. Department of the Interior, receiving national media coverage. There will be another next April. In Boulder, Colorado, buffalo supporters held a drum circle at the city park drawing attention to the terrible plight of these sacred animals. A Memorial Day concert last year in Northport, NY, raised \$800 to support BFC operations. Buffalo Exchange stores across the country helped raise awareness on Earth Day.

These are just a few examples of how your community can help save the buffalo. Contact us to receive a packet with suggestions for starting a Buffalo Support Group in your community. Be active, speak out, refute the lies, have fun, do your part!

MAIL- FAX-PHONE-EMAIL: The most effective way to let public officials know how you feel is to send letters, faxes, phone calls then emails, in that order.

Several supporters in a Congressional district can organize a visit to either a district office of a member of Congress or to their Washington, DC office. Call the Member's office to schedule a meeting.

To find out who your representative is: <http://www.house.gov/writerep/>

To find out who your senator is: www.senate.gov/senators/index.cfm

For tips and samples on writing to members of Congress, see these web sites: <http://congress.org/>
<http://legislators.com/c-span/contact.html>
<http://www.cfsi.org/writingcongress.html>

Contributions to BFC are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law and support our aggressive, front line, grassroots volunteer work. We put the wild buffalo first! BFC is the only group working 365 days a year in Yellowstone protecting the last wild free-roaming buffalo.

Speak Out for the Buffalo!

Use your pen, phone, or computer to urge our public officials to stop the slaughter and implement common sense solutions to the problem. Letters to the editor of your local paper are a great way to let people know about this atrocity. Check out our website for more info and speak out for the buffalo! It just takes a moment and does make a difference!

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email: agsec@usda.gov

Let them know how important wild buffalo are. Do they even know what's happening?

President George Bush
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1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, D.C. 20500
Phone: (202) 456-1414; Fax: (202) 456-2461
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email: kcooper@state.mt.us

Governor Judy Martz
State Capitol
Helena, MT 59620
within Montana: (800) 332-2272
Out of state: Phone: (406) 444-3111
fax: (406) 444-4151
email: jdelger@state.mt.us

Will you spend your money in a State with such a backwards Bison Management Plan?

Montana Promotions Division
Betsy Baumgart, Administrator
Box 200533
Helena, MT 59620-0533
email: bbaumgart@state.mt.us
(800) 847-4868, (406) 444-2654

We Need Your Support to Protect the Last Free Roaming Buffalo!

Please make a tax deductible donation to the Buffalo Field Campaign

Your donation feeds, clothes, equips and houses volunteers, supports our public education and outreach efforts, and helps us protect Yellowstone's native wild buffalo! \$38 supports one activist in the field for one week.

Thank you!

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

email _____

Send a newsletter to:

I can help defend the buffalo with my contribution:

\$380__ \$250__ \$100__ \$50__ \$38__ Other _____

Also:

Send me ___ Notecards @ \$15/package of 10

Send me ___ T-shirts @ \$20 Sizes: _____ Color: _____

Please send contributions and requests to:

Buffalo Field Campaign; PO Box 957, West Yellowstone, MT. 59758

Yes! I'd like to help support the Buffalo Field Campaign

- Please send a tax deductible receipt
- I commit to support the buffalo again next year, also - send me a reminder
- Put me on your email list
- Let me know about stock gifts or bequests (confidential)
- Send _____ copies of this newsletter for me to redistribute
- Contact me re: gear/food/car/in-kind donations
- I'll be a part of the International Buffalo Network!
- I'll help recycle computer printer cartridges for the buffalo!
- Tell me about Bucks for Buffalo Jars!