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FISH & WILDLIFE
ENHANCEMENT

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JAN. 5, 1999

Mr. Bruce Babbitt
Secretary of the Interior
Department of the Interior
18th and "C" Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Babbitt:

I, as a citizen of the United States, am deeply concerned about the fate and survival of the wild herd of buffalo at the Yellowstone National Park.

This is a petition to list the herd at Yellowstone National Park as endangered pursuant to the Endangered Species Act because it is endangered in a significant portion of its range, the environs of Yellowstone National Park. Petitioner also requests that the region surrounding Yellowstone National Park coterminous with the migratory or quasi-migratory range of

that herd be designated a Critical Habitat. The Petitioner chooses the option of either listing the herd as a subspecies or as a distinct population group, or both. A suitable extension of their habitat would be the region north of the Yellowstone River, and a common hunting ground designated for the Blackfoot and Flathead Nations under a treaty in 1855. Since the treaty provisions were modified unilaterally, without the consent of the Flathead Nation, it would presumably be still in force.

The reasons for listing the Yellowstone herd as endangered ^{are} both biological and historical.

Prehistorical man followed the buffalo over the land bridge that once connected the Asian and North American continents. Stone points found near Obsidian Cliffs in the Yellowstone National Park link Native Americans with the buffalo back 11,000 years. Blood analysis indicates that blood found on the points includes bison blood. Campsites according to carbon analysis date the fires having burned 11,000 years ago.

The Yellowstone herd is the only wild, unfenced buffalo herd in the nation. Buffalo are now thought to have engaged in quasi-migration, moving according to where there was adequate forage and more suitable climate. There was not a massive north and south migration like waterfowl, but, instead, a fluctuation of a more regional nature, sometimes north, sometimes south, sometimes east, sometimes west. In the case of the Yellowstone herd, animals sometimes leave the park and head north, sometimes west, sometimes south. The migratory route is usually always down from the higher altitudes in winter to lower altitudes to escape harsh winter climates.

For this reason buffalo population groups evolved in relationship to the region with regard to their migratory habits.

These herds, protected by the mountains and by the Yellowstone National Park status as a national park, escaped the slaughter of the mid to late 1800s. A few score survived, creating in part a genetic pool responsible for the thousands of buffalo that now populate the United States.

Some scientists believe that because the herd inhabited mountainous regions that it consisted of Mountain Buffalo, often also called Wood Buffalo. It is this remnant herd that helped save the buffalo from extinction.

The herd grew from a few score to about 3,000 in 1996. Part of its growth stems from the introduction of Plains Buffalo into the Yellowstone National Park. The Mountain or Wood Buffalo as a pure species is now extinct in the United States. However, a hybrid or cross between the Mountain Buffalo and the Plains Buffalo may exist at Yellowstone, thus being the only such herd in the nation. Over 1,000 animals of this unique group were shot or slaughtered by the Montana Department of Livestock as the animals crossed the border of the Park in 1997 to escape the severe winter.

On some of these animals were found ~~with~~ collars used by biologists to track their migratory paths. The collars were found on animals shot by the DOL. Information from these migratory studies would be useful in determining

the critical habitat of the herd.

This is the last wild herd in the United States. Its Ancestors were responsible for enabling man to populate North America. The buffalo herds were followed by early man from Asia to the present day United States.

Half the herd is now gone due to their slaughter, their destruction attempting to interrupt their migratory movement. At present they are stopped at the Park border by state officials using rifles, trucks and helicopters. Some are shot, some are hazed back into the Park. Due to the stress, some of the females abort. The animals were headed toward grasslands both public and private located at lower altitudes, grasslands occupied by non-native, old world cattle.

We, as a nation, are exercising a preference for ~~over~~ a world-wide abundant domestic species over the last wild herd of native buffalo in existence today in the United States. Some scientist believe that if more slaughtering occurs and if another severe winter comes, this herd will collapse, that is, cease to exist. Gone will be the last link between

MAN OF North America and the major meat animal which early man followed here, the buffalo.

This is a distinct population group both historically and due to its unique migratory nature, its migratory habits being molded by the region which it occupies. It is the last unfenced herd, fencing has a profound influence on the migratory habits of the species in that it blocks the natural expression of the herd's instincts.

At present several plans are being studied as to how best to manage these animals, from one plan allowing free ranging to one, a Senate bill, advocating the elimination or forcible return of all Yellowstone buffalo leaving the Park.

No plan involves the Native American, which seems to demonstrate a degree of racial arrogance, especially when you consider that the American Indian has had a 11,000 year association with the buffalo and was responsible for successfully herding the animals, which reached a population on the plains in excess of 30 million.

A government policy favors the American Indian in relationship to the preservation of endangered species. Native Americans are given preference in the management of such things as habitat regarding endangered species.

It would thus make good common sense to include the Native American in any program aimed at stopping the destruction of this endangered distinct population group. As a possible solution to a tenable habitat, the region north of the Yellowstone River, historically set aside for the buffalo and its hunting by Plains and Columbia Basin Indians, should be studied.

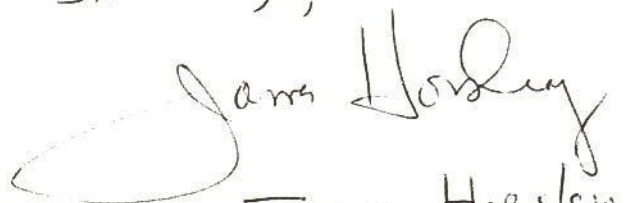
We have had two relative mild winters, the next winter may not be so mild, pushing the buffalo onto the killing fields of the low land grass lands.

This last link between primitive man and the animal that helped such people get to this continent and survive should be protected from extinction as a distinct population segment, namely the last wild buffalo herd in the nation, the Yellowstone buffalo.

The Petitioner urges that the Yellowstone herd be listed as an endangered species or distinct population segment, and, to assure its survival, study the migratory habits of the animal, allowing it free range so as to conduct the study. With such a study in hand, recommendations could be made as to critical habitat.

Based on the historical use of the region set aside for buffalo hunting for the American Indian tribes, namely the area north of the Yellowstone River, the Petitioner requests that this region be considered as a habitat, a reserve allowing the buffalo the expression of its migratory instinct. Further, the Petitioner requests that the Native American be involved in the management of the Yellowstone buffalo to assure their survival.

Sincerely,


James Horsley

cc.
✓ Bill Parker, Endangered Species Chief, Denver