



2020-2021

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Wasthead and feature photos by Stephany Seay, BFC

Buffalo Struggle to Survive: The Issue in Brief

Since April of 1997, Buffalo Field Campaign has been standing in defense of the country’s last wild buffalo: the Yellowstone herds. Our mission is 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.” We envision a world in which buffalo are allowed to exist as they choose, naturally restoring themselves throughout their native range.

Struggle to Survive, continued inside

In the Field Deadly Year for the Imperiled Central Herd

Our 2019-2020 field season began amazingly. We were blessed with many new and returning volunteers, beaming with talents and fresh with passion. Winter, however, was slow to come, like the year before. In mid-November, on the west side in the Hebgen Basin, one large family group finally arrived. Unfortunately, within

literal minutes of their appearance, hunters also arrived. Not more than 250 yards from Yellowstone’s boundary, two adult females from the first family group to enter Montana this season were shot. After such an unwelcoming, the rest of the family retreated into the park not to be seen again for months. Being from the Central Herd, they likely migrated north into the Gardiner Basin, where they would be met with even worse fates.

The Yellowstone buffalo population consists of the Northern Herd and the Central Herd. Buffalo from the Central Herd are the true descendants of the 23 who saved themselves from extinction long ago. Today they are on the brink of extinction; Central Herd buffalo migrate west into the Hebgen Basin, and also north into the Gardiner Basin, so they are doubly impacted by Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) actions.

Deadly Year, continued inside

Buffalo or Bison?

Both are correct. Buffalo is the popular name for North American Bison, whose scientific name is *Bison bison*. Buffalo have many names given to them from the Buffalo Cultures who evolved with them, including ee-nee-wah (Blackfeet), quay-quai (Salish), tatanka (Lakota), ee dan non (Aaniiih), hotova’a (Cheyenne), qoq’a lx (Nez Perce), and many more.



Photo by Stephany Seay, BFC

At the behest of the livestock industry, buffalo and wolf have both been subjected to decades of deadly government mismanagement.

Deadly Year, *continued from front*

With the Hebgen Basin once again empty of buffalo after that November hunt, we found ourselves patrolling their migration corridors, but for months they never showed. The weather was mild enough to allow them the relative ease of living a life within Yellowstone's boundaries. That all changed mid-winter after a few big snow events, and by late February the snow was deep enough that buffalo were driven to lower elevations in the Gardiner Basin. The Hebgen Basin remained eerily quiet.

With such a late start to migration, and the IBMP cohorts aiming to kill upwards of 900 buffalo, no time was wasted. We opened our Gardiner camp to run daily patrols there, and hunters swarmed the area as soon as buffalo began to migrate out of Yellowstone's north boundary into Montana. Day after day buffalo would attempt to reach their winter grounds, crossing Yellowstone's boundary, only to be met by intense gunfire. With hunters eager to fulfill the IBMP's quota, entire family groups were wiped out in a single day. Often they were so anxious to make their kills that they would shoot into groups of running buffalo,

killing some, wounding others—the wounded fleeing into the park to die a suffering death or be “dispatched” by Park rangers.

In the midst of this intense hunting pressure, Yellowstone exacerbated the situation, violating treaty hunting rights by opening their Stephens Creek buffalo trap, located within the park's boundaries. Buffalo from both the Northern and Central Herds were rounded up and forced through the horrors of an industrial strength cattle corral, where they were poked and prodded, separated from their family members, and loaded onto stock trailers headed for the slaughterhouse.

In the end, within less than two months, over 900 buffalo were forever eliminated from the last continuously wild population. Less than a month before calving season began hundreds of buffalo—including pregnant moms—fell to the bullet and the trap. Yellowstone confined 105 buffalo to quarantine, where they will live a life of domestication, never to be free to roam again.



Photo by Stephany Seay, BFC

As the bulk of the killing came to a close, calving season was upon us. The Central Herd returned to the Hebgen Basin. It is always a miracle that they come again. Our patrols were busy day and night, warning traffic of buffalo migrating across the highway to reach their

calving grounds on and around Horse Butte. As the snow melted, the pregnant moms burst at the seams with new life. To the Central Herd each new calf is not only a miracle but a necessity. This herd has been hammered for decades, for centuries even, and their resilience is astounding. Buffalo are Earth's chosen ones for creating, maintaining, and healing endangered prairie and grasslands communities. They can heal the wounded land.

But they need our help in giving them the room, the space, the freedom to do so. Take action to end the treaty-violating capture operations and put a moratorium on hunting in the Hebgen Basin. These protective measures are absolutely necessary to give the Central Herd room to recover. 🐾

Endangered Species Protection

Buffalo Field Campaign, Friends of Animals, and Western Watersheds Project are back in court to defend our petition to list the Distinct Population Segment of Yellowstone bison under the Endangered Species Act. The buffalo advocacy groups filed a complaint in court in March 2020 to reverse another U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service finding that dismissed our petition evidence that migratory bison are threatened or endangered in the wild.

The wildlife agency's second finding is as flawed as their first, which was struck down as unlawful by U.S. District Judge Christopher R. Cooper in January 2018. The Fish & Wildlife Service is unnecessarily delaying a species status review, which is the next step in the listing process. Delaying the status review is preventing an honest evaluation of the factors driving the risk of extinction for our country's remnant migratory bison herds.

Please support our Endangered Species campaign. Make a contribution or share our two ads created to raise public awareness. Find those ads and more at: buffalofieldcampaign.org/endangered-bison-endangered-migration. 🐾



Photo by Cindy Rosin, BFC

Hunting continues in Hebgen Basin west of the park despite the declining numbers of the Central Herd. This distinct herd is in danger of extinction if we do not stop the pressures from hunting and slaughter.

Struggle to Survive, *continued from front*

Every year millions of people from around the world visit Yellowstone National Park with the hope of seeing wild buffalo. Just over a century ago, this remnant population barely escaped extinction by seeking refuge in remote areas of what is now Yellowstone. America's "greatest conservation success story," however, has yet to come true for the few buffalo who remain in the wild. They are still threatened with extinction by the very people sworn to protect them: Yellowstone National Park—in service to Montana's cattle lobby. While there are 500,000 buffalo in North America, most are managed as livestock and are "beefalo" that have been interbred with cattle. Only 11,000 to 13,000 buffalo remain wildlife, and of those, just 4,500 are the wild, migratory buffalo that reside in Yellowstone, the last true descendants of the once great herds of North America.

Wild bison are currently mismanaged under a joint government plan—the Interagency Bison Management Plan—crafted by cattle interests. The catalyst for the plan is a state law, MCA 81-2-120, that gives the Montana Department of Livestock control over wild buffalo, a clear conflict of interest from an agency that serves the cattle industry. This law classifies buffalo as "an animal in need of disease control" to be managed for removal under state veterinarian authority.

Livestock interests claim wild buffalo threaten cows with brucellosis—a bacteria originating in invasive cattle. There



Photo by Cindy Rosin, BFC

The myth of managing for brucellosis: buffalo await shipment to slaughter in Yellowstone's trap while elk, implicated in infecting cattle with brucellosis, are free to roam.

Introducing James Holt, Our New Executive Director



In September of 2019 Buffalo Field Campaign welcomed James Holt Sr. of the Nimiipuu (Nez Perce Tribe) as our new Executive Director. James brings a strong connection to the many native tribes for whom the buffalo are so important and we look forward to continuing our fight for buffalo into the future with James at the helm. 🐾

has never been a documented case of wild buffalo transmitting brucellosis to cattle. Elk have been implicated numerous times yet are free to roam. The centuries-old range war over grass and who gets to eat it is still being waged against the buffalo.

Yellowstone buffalo face serious threats, including government trapping-for-slaughter, excessive hunting, domestication through quarantine, and harassment on National Forest habitat. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature has "red listed" the American buffalo as "threatened with near extinction." Even the state of Montana classifies wild buffalo as "at risk" and "vulnerable to global extinction or extirpation in the state." Regardless of their biological status, wild buffalo have no protection, not even in Yellowstone National Park, where a bison trap has sent over 10,000 to slaughterhouses.

With no prospect in sight to protect buffalo under state law, we have turned to the Endangered Species Act to protect these imperiled gentle giants. Buffalo Field Campaign welcomes you to join our efforts to defend this sacred species. 🐾

Support Buffalo Field Campaign Needs You!

We are living in unprecedented times. From the global pandemic of Covid-19 to the rising up of people worldwide for justice and equality, there is much that needs our attention. We at Buffalo Field Campaign understand if you feel driven to direct your resources to causes directly related to the crises at hand, or if you are not currently able to support

us financially. There are many other ways to help the buffalo: engage with us on social media, distribute newsletters in your community, write letters to the editor or your members



Photo by Stephany Seay, BFC

of Congress, and take action to save the Central Herd. That said, if you are able, please make a donation using the enclosed envelope or online at BuffaloFieldCampaign.org. Your donations keep our patrols in the field and the pressure on in the policy arena. With your help we will defend the last wild, migratory buffalo until they once again roam free. 🐾



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Protecting the Last Wild Bison

Photo courtesy of Lyle Wood

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Take Action Be a Voice for Wild Buffalo!

Save the Central Herd

Yellowstone's Central Herd is in dire straits. Their numbers have plummeted from 3,531 in 2005 to barely 1,000 today. Both Yellowstone and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks recommended no hunting in the Hebgen Basin to protect the Central Herd, but this recommendation carries no weight and Yellowstone continues to slaughter indiscriminately year after year. These agencies must practice what they preach and take meaningful action to protect the distinct Central Herd and their habitat. Tell Yellowstone to place a moratorium on trapping wild buffalo, and insist that MT FWP issue a ceasefire and close hunting in the Hebgen Basin.

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Photo by Tallyah Sansa, BFC

Come stand with wild buffalo!

Get Involved & Volunteer!

Contact BFC to learn about volunteering on the front lines, joining our summer outreach team, hosting video showings, distributing newsletters, and other ways you can spread the word to save the herds! Email info@buffalofieldcampaign.org or call (406) 646-0070. See all the details at BuffaloFieldCampaign.org/volunteer-with-us.

Support BFC!

Individuals like you contribute the majority of Buffalo Field Campaign's budget. Visit BuffaloFieldCampaign.org/merch to find our new canvas tote bag, our 2021 Wild Buffalo Calendar, and other BFC merchandise to show off your support for wild buffalo! Make a secure online contribution at BuffaloFieldCampaign.org or use the enclosed envelope to donate by mail. All donations are tax deductible.

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