



**BUFFALO**  
FIELD CAMPAIGN

### **Interagency Bison Management Plan: What is it, and How Did It Come About?**

In 1995 the Montana legislature transferred management of wild Yellowstone bison from the Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) to the Department of Livestock (DOL).

This change shifted management away from an agency trained in and guided by wildlife sciences to an entity whose staff of “livestock inspectors” is charged with maximizing profits for cattle producers. This quickly resulted in the senseless slaughter of 1,084 wild bison during the winter of 1996-1997. The DOL’s management authority, drawn from Montana law 81-2-120, led to the creation of the Interagency Bison Management Plan and has resulted in the senseless killing of more than 6,000 of America’s last wild bison.

Cattle grazing Montana’s make up less than one-quarter of 1 percent of total U.S. beef production. Because it takes seventy-three times the land base to raise a cow in Montana as it does in Iowa, and because a cow in the West requires fifty acres of grazing land for every one acre required in the East, millions of acres of public land are now overgrazed to the point where they can no longer support native flora and fauna.

Despite the unsuitability of much of Montana for raising cattle, livestock producers wield tremendous power. Using the false claim that wild bison could transmit the livestock disease brucellosis to cattle—something that has never occurred—the State of Montana sued the federal government for “allowing” wild bison to migrate out of Yellowstone National Park. After years of legal wrangling, the judge ordered both sides to negotiate their differences and work together on a management plan for wild bison. The Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP), signed into effect in December of 2000, was the result. The Plan’s stated purpose, “to maintain a wild, free ranging population of bison and address the [scientifically non-existent] risk of brucellosis transmission to protect the economic interest and viability of the livestock industry in the state of Montana” set the stage for the largest bison slaughter since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

This plan has been used to keep the wild bison within the confines of Yellowstone and at an arbitrary (rather than science-based) population target of between 3,000 and 3,500 individuals. The DOL’s methods include hazing, hunting, shooting, and capturing for slaughter any bison that approach or cross the border with Montana. Surprisingly, Yellowstone has slaughtered more bison than the state of Montana under the IBMP. Bison exceeding the population cap are labeled “surplus” and killed. Currently, the IBMP costs tax payers between 3 and 4 million dollars per year.

The Interagency Bison Management was supposed to be replaced in 2015, and a new plan is in the early stages of being drafted. BFC has created our own plan modeled after the way wild elk are managed in Montana. Our plan draws on the best available science to effectively safeguard this last stronghold of wild bison.

*“Protecting the Last Wild Bison”*