



# BUFFALO FIELD CAMPAIGN

Jan. 18, 2023

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Dear Friends of the Buffalo:

Tac' leeheyn (Good day). I write to you on behalf of Buffalo Field Campaign, our tens of thousands of supporters, and as a member of the Nez Perce Tribe. It is my solemn honor to communicate with you today.

I recently arrived, along with three of my children, at Buffalo Field Campaign's headquarters on Hebgen Lake via a snow-packed U.S. Highway 191 about 90 minutes before a semi-truck slammed into a pod of 15 pregnant mother buffalo and yearlings, killing 13 and leaving behind two orphans - one of which, pictured below, lost a horn as well as his mother in the accident, and lost his sibling to a hunter the next day.



With the early migrations of buffalo out of the Park this year, staff and volunteers with Buffalo Field Campaign have been out on the roads around West Yellowstone every day this winter facilitating safe migration of these expectant mothers, yearlings, and the occasional bull bison onto Horse Butte along the Madison River.

*"Protecting the Last Wild Bison"*

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Having already lost six bison to late-night vehicle collisions, we were all heartbroken by this latest tragedy. It is especially difficult to lose these members of Yellowstone's central herd, descendants of the original 23 survivors, whose population has already declined below safe viability levels, prompting the petition we filed under the ESA, along with Western Watersheds and Friends of the Animals.

Our National Mammal deserves more protection than this.

We are determined to turn this tragedy into healing action. We immediately started a petition directed to all of you, as stewards of Yellowstone's wildlife, to earmark/direct enough of the \$350M appropriated by Congress for safe wildlife passage to fund a dedicated "Bison Wildlife Bridge" (and associated infrastructure) along the Madison River. Such a bridge would accommodate, along with other wildlife, the buffalo's annual migrations to and from their historic calving grounds on Horse Butte, which was designated as protected habitat by Montana's Governor in 2015. And it would help to reverse the decline of the central herd.

If you have not already, we encourage you to read [Brett French's fine reporting](#) of this incident and issue in the Helena Independent Record. As French reports, the senior research ecologist for the Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University has studied wildlife crossings around the world, including work along Highway 191, and sees the value of a wildlife bridge at the Madison River crossing. In addition, French cites a 2012 study by two WTI researchers recommending an animal detection system to alert drivers to wildlife on the road, which would represent a cost-effective mitigation measure until the Bison Wildlife Bridge could be completed.

As our national wildlands and wildlife stewards, your vocal support for these measures would be greatly appreciated and well-received. As indicated, we are not alone in seeking this leadership from your offices. In the short time it has been up, our [petition on change.org](#) has already garnered over 3,000 signatures. The story of the tragic collision made national news, and generated feature stories in the Helena, Bozeman, and Billings newspapers.

It is long overdue, in other words, to implement the expert recommendations that have been out there for a decade now to safeguard wildlife on this critical 7-mile stretch of unlit highway that happens to be responsible for seven of every ten bison-vehicle collisions. So far this season, 19 buffalo, four moose and a grizzly bear have died in collisions on local highways near the town of West Yellowstone. Seventeen of those bison were struck between mile-markers 2.0 and 9.0 on U.S. Highway 191. Spring is actually the season when the risk of collisions on these roads is highest, and this year's high toll coincides with an early migration out of the Park that may be attributable to the unusual flooding experienced last summer.

The solution is so simple: to erect a wildlife bridge with fencing, and possibly tunnels, along this lethal stretch of highway.

Qeciyewyew (thank you) for your consideration of this important issue. The future of wild Yellowstone buffalo must be strengthened by improving the regional transportation infrastructure. Please assist the Campaign in speaking for the needs of wild buffalo throughout

their natal homelands. We can honor Buffalo, protect treaty rights, and bolster cultural and subsistence lifeways, by standing for their homeland and protecting the family units the herds consist of.

I look forward to your leadership regarding this most important issue. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by email or on my cell phone.

For the Buffalo,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James Holt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

James Holt, Executive Director  
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