



BUFFALO
FIELD CAMPAIGN

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West Yellowstone, MT 59758

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PHOTO: Sandra Zelasko ©2022

*Protecting Yellowstone's
Wild Bison Since 1997*

Support: Buffalo Field Campaign Needs You!

There are many ways to help the buffalo: distributing newsletters in your community; engaging with us on social media; writing letters to the editor and members of Congress or the Montana Legislature; and helping protect the buffalo under the Endangered Species Act.

Individuals like you contribute the majority of the Campaign's grassroots-funded budget. Visit BuffaloFieldCampaign.org/merch to find our canvas tote bag, our **2023 Wild Bison Calendar**, t-shirts, stickers, and other BFC merchandise to show your support for wild buffalo!

You can donate using the enclosed envelope or online at BuffaloFieldCampaign.org. Your donations help keep our patrols in the field and the needs of buffalo in the forefront of the policy, legal and legislative arenas. With your help we will continue to defend the last wild, migratory buffalo!

BFC is a 501c(3) nonprofit and all donations are tax deductible.



PHOTO: BFC Archives ©2022

The original
BFC crew in
fall of 1997



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Get Involved & Volunteer!

BFC has a number of volunteer opportunities seasonally to support our mission. We thrive by embracing each person's unique offering of talent, time, volunteering in the field, taking action online, and connecting with our team. Our volunteers are crucial and give us

power to create needed positive change. Contact BFC to learn about volunteering on the front lines, hosting video showings, distributing newsletters, and other ways you can help to spread the word to save the herd!

Email volunteer@buffalofieldcampaign.org or call (406) 646-0070. See all the details at BuffaloFieldCampaign.org/volunteer-with-us.

Stay Engaged!

Visit our website for our "Take Action" page and to sign up for weekly *Updates from the Field*. Visit our social media sites and plug in:

- ▶ youtube.com/buffalofieldcampaign
- ▶ facebook.com/buffalofieldcampaign
- ▶ instagram.com/buffalofieldcampaign
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Buffalo Field Campaign Newsletter 2022-2023



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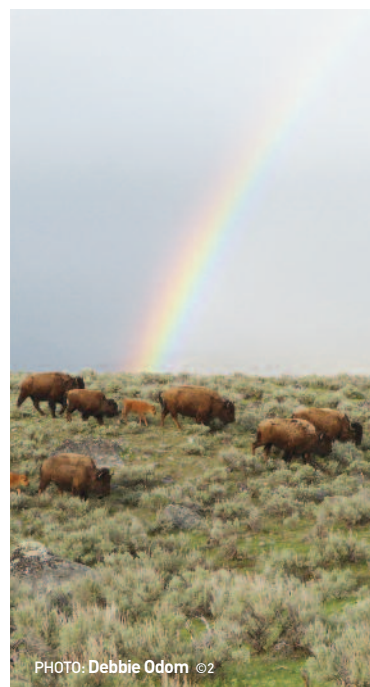


PHOTO: Debbie Odom ©2

Facing the Storm

It has taken dedication, teamwork, expert talent, and amazing supporters for the Campaign to advance our mission for a free-roaming herd of wild bison throughout the Yellowstone Ecosystem. Time and time again, we have proven our competency and legitimacy as it pertains to Yellowstone bison advocacy and ecology. *The struggle is far from over.* Like the Buffalo, we must face the storm and continue to advance. Our strategies intertwine with each other as we strive to realize our vision for wild, Yellowstone bison. We continue to advocate for a comprehensive legislative, policy, and legal solution that represents our commitment to bison being treated as wildlife, reflects the spirit of our western values, and respects the treaty-reserved lifeways of indigenous peoples.

Many federal agencies, creating a federal nexus, are responsible for the diminishing genetic viability of the only continuously-wild herds of plains bison (*Bison bison*). Coincidentally, that same federal nexus has unique obligations to the American public and to tribes who signed treaties involving Yellowstone bison. Therefore, it is imperative the Campaign continues to improve communications for our supporters, and nurture relationships with tribal peoples. It is a huge task to adequately spread awareness regarding our ecosystem-based, scientific solution for this keystone species. The Inter-agency Bison Management Plan failed wild bison, while it catered to the cattle industry as a special interest. We cannot allow that narrow shortsightedness to drive federal wildlife policy in the Yellowstone again.

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The American Buffalo: Our Climate Keystone Species

Anthropogenic climate change is now re-defining the future of life on planet Earth, thanks in large part to the refusal of world governments to phase out fossil fuels in time to avoid triggering global tipping points. For example, the Thwaites Glacier in Antarctica is predicted to collapse before 2030, which will raise sea levels ten feet this century. Just this year, we saw unprecedented flooding in Yellowstone NP that required the evacuation of tourists for the first time since the 1988 wildfires. We're entering uncharted waters for all life on Earth, and human responses to the coming catastrophies will shape the future.

What can be done?

At this point, replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy is no longer sufficient to prevent the collapse of human civilization. We must instead find ways to draw carbon down from the atmosphere, sequestering it in the ocean and soil. Fortunately, nature has ways of accomplishing this at minimal cost, which is why the focus of climate

activism is slowly shifting from fighting fossil fuels to preserving and increasing biodiversity through ecological restoration.

Yellowstone's wild bison will play a pivotal role in saving our civilization from collapse. The only thing that will stand in their way are the entrenched politics of livestock that exploits our public lands and wildlife at the expense of the climate. Buffalo Field Campaign



PHOTO: Mike Burdic ©2022

is well positioned to champion our National Mammal as *America's climate keystone species*. This is the idea behind our "Facing the Storm" climate campaign on behalf of wild bison.

According to the most recent science informing the adoption of a new international biodiversity pact: "Large mammals," including Yellowstone's wild bison, "serve as landscape engineers, shaping the structure and composition of natural habitats."

See: Wynne, et al., "An ecoregion-based approach to restoring the world's intact large mammal assemblages" (*Ecography*, 2022). In fact, according to this study, "twenty species, if reintroduced or allowed to recolonize through improved connectivity" would increase global

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Recently, we've witnessed the bison quarantine infrastructure surrounding Yellowstone National Park grow to unprecedented levels. The only continuously-wild herds of bison are being positioned to be the well-spring for bison restoration on tribal lands, fill the herd management needs within the national park system, and benefit select nonprofit organizations. While the Campaign is not against the recovery and restoration of bison to other ecosystems, any increase in bison translocations from the herds in Yellowstone must be consistent with population increases throughout the ecosystem. As the US Fish and Wildlife Service noted in granting our ESA petition for status review, **bison are presently confined to only fifteen percent (15%) of their 7,720 square mile historic range** in and around Yellowstone NP. It is important to differentiate between enacting bison translocations on the backs of an ailing Central Herd, versus slowly increasing translocations based upon the attainment of ecosystem-based population milestones, while bison naturally fill their natal range. This is not a zero-sum game. There are workable solutions that honor wild bison.

Listing bison as threatened or endangered by continued implementation of the IBMP could mark the end of the annual culls, and could potentially result in Yellowstone's plains bison being accorded wildlife status throughout their historical range. As the federal government completes its scientific analysis for Yellowstone bison, we must consistently draw attention to the fallacies of existing management, and the contributions of individual federal agencies in that failed outcome. Similarly, we will continue to educate sovereign decision makers about the ecological (and economic) benefits of bison as a keystone species, while emphasizing the importance of restoring large, intact landscapes to combat climate change and recover from adverse, human-caused environmental impacts.

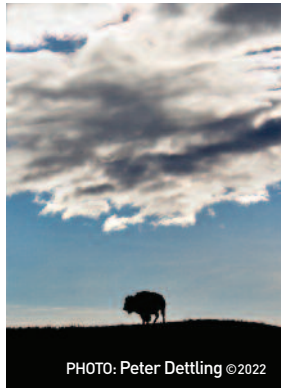


PHOTO: Peter Dettling ©2022

A lot is being asked of Yellowstone bison within the larger framework of the greater Yellowstone ecosystem. Both must be allowed to heal and return to a healthier condition. This would trigger a cascade of biological, ecological, and economic benefits. The future iteration of the Inter-agency Bison Management Plan, and the role of sovereign governments in the planning, must be guided by appropriate science and law. BFC will continue to push for tailored wildlife legislation, fundamental policy changes, an increased role for tribes as sovereign co-managers, and the further development of the science necessary to shift priorities of federal agencies and policy makers. 🗣️

– James Holt, Sr., BFC Executive Director

biodiversity by 54% (4.3M sq. mi.). According to the authors: **"Intact ecosystems are recognized for their exceptional value in conserving biodiversity, stabilizing the climate, sustaining livelihoods of indigenous peoples and providing essential services for humanity."** Win/win.



PHOTO: Thia Martin ©2022

In other words, while we continue to fight fossil fuel behemoths over control of the skies, restoring terrestrial ecosystems will save us from ourselves, since "ecoregions that retain intact large

mammalian faunas also [draw down] large amounts of carbon." Accordingly, the Biodiversity Conventions up for adoption at a U.N. Conference in Montreal later this year will map out "an ecoregion-based approach to accelerate the recovery of large mammal faunas among more than 190 of the world's 730 ecoregions that historically contained large mammal species."

It's all about coming into proper relationship with the land, its' native species, and one another. And in this effort, according to that same study, the American Buffalo has a critical role to play. According to Vynne, et al., there are 32 ecoregions in the U.S. totaling over 500,000 sq. mi. that could be restored by reintroducing wild buffalo. A featured article in the Washington Post characterizes bison as "Climate Heroes":

The return of the bison is a victory not only for the sake of biodiversity but for the entire ecosystem in which they live. As a keystone species, the bison sustain their environment from the top down. "They move through, graze everything down. It's a type of disturbance — like fire would be," said [biologist] Dan McDonald. "The fresh green draws other animals that would feed on it: elk and deer and whatever other type of grazers that would consume some of that new forage." When large herds move synchronously across the land, they create what scientists have dubbed a "green wave." The bison's vigorous grazing stimulates plant growth, creating a flood of new vegetation that follows in the bison's wake to be "surfied" by animals large and small. Green waves can be so dramatic that some — such as the one created by Yellowstone's bison herd — can be seen from space.

But as the Post article goes on to point out, **"holistic herd management techniques spearheaded by tribes operate on this principle: Bison are wildlife — not livestock. These animals require lots of land to maintain ecological balance..."**

It is this colonialist view of bison as something other than wildlife that needs to change quickly in Montana. That is our challenge. This is literally a matter of survival, and it's up to us to right the wrongs of our ancestors. **Now, more than ever, we need your help.** 🗣️

– Tom Woodbury, BFC Director of Communications

Yellowstone Field Report

Guided by the rancher-mentality of the unscientific inter-agency bison "management" plan (IBMP), Montana's Department of Livestock annually sets out to kill one-fifth to one-quarter of the entire Buffalo population in the Yellowstone ecosystem. In response to a rapidly changing climate, and the herds' ancestral knowledge, Buffalo are adapting on the fly. The last two years' snowfall has been well below normal (punctuated by historic flooding events), resulting in far fewer Buffalo migrating to the Gardiner basin. Less than 300 migrated two years ago, while this year we saw less than 50! The herd knows what awaits them when they enter the Gardiner killing fields — YNP traps, family members shipped to slaughter, hunting grounds — and this also influences their behaviors.

Meanwhile, Montana has regressed, with a governor that body-slams reporters, kills wolves illegally, and is busy gutting Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, turning what was a world-class agency into an ignorant anti-science hunter's club. In response to persistent public pressure and criticism from the Courts, the National Park Service is at least now pushing to increase the carrying capacity of Buffalo inside the Park. These same herds that once took shelter in this rugged landscape to avoid extirpation by genocidal forces are now adapting to the latest mass extinction event, perpetuated by the IBMP.

Welcome to Yellowstone, the series, right?

In contrast to Montana's backward political thinking, the United Nations, tribal nations, BFC, WWF, and climate scientists are working to restore grassland ecosystems through rapid expansion of tribal herds and bison habitats across the West. Montana's public lands would benefit immensely from treating bison as wildlife, just like Elk and grizzlies—just ask the people of Horse Butte. This is why BFC's efforts are needed now more than ever—documenting abuses, bearing witness, fighting extinction in the courts, keeping the Buffalo (and humans) safe at night along the highways, and advocating for wild bison as a climate keystone species that can lead us out of the gathering storm. Watching and learning from these sacred beings is the gift we receive, while fighting for their place in the natural order is how we reciprocate.

Be a Buffalo: take care of the herd. 🗣️

– Mike Mease, BFC Co-Founder



PHOTO: BFC Archives ©2021



PHOTO: Don MacCarter ©2022

Habitat Report: The Third Time's a Charm!

It took three Presidential administrations and two rounds of litigation for BFC to finally get a positive determination on the "90-day" ESA petition we filed along with Western Watersheds Project in 2014. While we're hopeful that science will prevail in the 12-month status review that follows that determination, America's wild buffalo could really use your help in ensuring a fair review by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (part of the Dept. of Interior). As BFC's Habitat Coordinator (and paralegal support for the litigation) Darrell Geist points out, and as the courts agree, there are actually two herds of buffalo in the Park, and "[t]he genetically distinct subpopulation of wild bison in the Central range is at risk of extinction. Nothing is being done to turn that fact around." That's because the Park Service's "population control" (killing) of wild bison falls disproportionately on the central herd.

In granting our petition, the USFWS acknowledged that we had presented "substantial scientific or commercial information" indicating that listing bison as threatened may be warranted. Agency scientists are considering whether the IBMP's severe restrictions on the bison's range and access to winter habitat, along with trapping and culling, constitute undue threats to our national mammal's continued existence. **Wild bison are confined to only 15% of their historic range in and around Yellowstone NP, and aren't even accorded wildlife status in Montana.** Both the Park Service and the Department of Interior are now headed up by Native Americans. Please take the time to let them know how important it is to restore bison to their historic range—both culturally and to help the climate—free from undue interference by private livestock producers. Visit our website for more information on who to contact. 🗣️

Help BFC Through the Buffalo Backbone Subscription Program

Join the Herd Today and become a **Red Dog, Yearling, Herd Matriarch, or Herd Bull** with a monthly subscription! Your participation in the Buffalo Backbone Program goes directly to provide protection and advocacy for Wild Buffalo by sustaining the infrastructure necessary for your round-the-clock team of volunteers to track and monitor wild bison movements and health. In return, this subscription giving program offers you educational and outreach materials as well as regular engagements that connect you in real time to the Beauty of Nature and the Story of the Buffalo. **Visit our website for details!**