



## BUFFALO FIELD CAMPAIGN

November 28, 2017

To Interagency Bison Management Plan Decision-Makers

RE: Status of Central Bison Herd

Dear State, Federal, and Tribal Bison Managers,

The Central bison herd of Yellowstone has declined by nearly half since last year, to fewer than 835 buffalo. This subpopulation has been in serious decline for many years, due to the management actions undertaken by the State of Montana and Yellowstone National Park.

Yellowstone National Park bison biologists, tribal members, and bison advocates are seriously concerned about the future of this herd. Bison managers know that the Central herd migrates west into the Hebgen Basin and also north into the Gardiner Basin, meaning they are doubly impacted by hunting, capture-for-slaughter, harassment, and other management operations.

In 2005, the Central herd numbered about 3,500 buffalo. As of this summer, Yellowstone estimated there were 847 remaining in this subpopulation. Based on this shocking decline, Yellowstone bison biologists are recommending that state and tribal hunting cease in the Hebgen Basin. This recommendation is falling on deaf ears. Since state and tribal hunting has commenced, the population has already declined even further, down to 831 individuals at the time of this letter.

Buffalo Field Campaign fully supports this hunting closure as a first step. This is a great place to start, especially now that wild buffalo have gained year-round habitat in the Hebgen Basin. A second step, is for the state of Montana to cease hazing or harassing the few survivors left.

But, the conservation burden must not fall to hunters alone. It is irresponsible and unjust for Yellowstone biologists to suggest hunters cease to kill, when they intend to capture-for-slaughter or removal, hundreds of wild buffalo this winter, knowing that many of these buffalo will be from the Central herd. But, aside from a few radio collared females, they will not know which buffalo are from which herd. Therefore, Yellowstone must end plans to capture for slaughter or removal from the landscape. If Yellowstone moves forward with capture-for-slaughter operations, they will be neglecting their responsibility to the buffalo, ignoring the tragic shift that they recognize and have directly caused, and will be placing the bulk of the conservation burden on hunters, especially the five Tribes hunting under treaty right.

*"Protecting the Last Wild Bison"*

Exacerbating the situation are the amended hunting regulations modified by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. Until this year, a state hunter who drew a bison tag could hunt within a two-week period in either the Gardiner Basin, or the Hebgen Basin, not both. In response to a crowded landscape where excessive hunting takes place causing extreme competition among hunters, as well as a perceived “race against the trap,” those regulations have been changed for the worse. Now, state hunters are free to hunt anytime during the full three-month period in either Basin, meaning every state hunter who holds a bison tag for the Hebgen Basin could descend upon the Central herd at once.

With both Montana FWP and the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes having “bison hunt hotlines,” the buffalo don’t stand a chance.

The public demands a cease fire, a moratorium on capture for any reason, and more habitat for buffalo to roam free. The majority of Montanans and Tribes want wild, migratory bison throughout Montana. Wild bison need expanded habitat in Montana, particularly on the north side where every migratory bison is met with Yellowstone’s trap and the bottle-neck corridor that leads to the firing line and killing fields. The buffalo need leadership and a new habitat-based proposal that respects wild bison like wild elk in Montana. Where is the leadership today?

Right now, you need to take immediate action to end hunting and harassment of buffalo in the Hebgen Basin, and place a moratorium on capture at Stephens Creek to ensure the survival of the Central herd. This is an emergency situation requiring emergency action, meaning everyone must curtail their part in the blood lust. There is no time to waste!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael S. Mease". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a light-colored background.

Michael S. Mease  
Board President, Buffalo Field Campaign