

STATE OF MONTANA LEGISLATURE
HOUSE AGRICULTURAL COMMITTEE
HEARING ON SB 353

TESTIMONY OF ERVIN CARLSON, OPPONENT
ON BEHALF OF THE
BLACKFEET NATION AND
INTERTRIBAL BISON COOPERATIVE

Honorable members of the House Agricultural Committee, I am Ervin Carlson, Blackfeet Tribal member and President of the InterTribal Bison Cooperative, a coalition of 54 federally recognized Tribes across 18 states. I thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to SB 353, a bill that revises the management of wild buffalo or bison and provides for the neutering of Yellowstone Park wild buffalo and transfer of the neutered buffalo to qualified Indian Tribal organizations.

The InterTribal Bison Cooperative (ITBC) is comprised of Indian Tribes dedicated to restoring buffalo to tribal lands in a manner that is culturally compatible with tribal beliefs and practices. Buffalo thrived in abundance on the plains of the United States for many centuries before they were hunted to near extinction in the 1800's. During this period of history, buffalo were critical to survival of the American Indian. Buffalo provided food, shelter, clothing and essential tools for Indian people and insured continuance of their subsistence way of life. Naturally, Indian people developed a strong spiritual and cultural respect for the buffalo that has not diminished with the passage of time.

ITBC was formally organized in 1992 by seven Tribes that had small buffalo herds, with a combined total of 1500 animals. During ITBC's relatively short 10-year tenure, it has been highly successful at developing existing buffalo herds and restoring buffalo to Indian lands that had no buffalo prior to 1991. Today, over 35 Indian Tribes are engaged in raising over 15,000 buffalo. ITBC is now assisting many Tribes with developing sustainable herds to be raised as wildlife and to be utilized as a healthy food source for Native American populations. In fact, ITBC has initiated a preventative health care initiative utilizing buffalo to treat and prevent diet related diseases among Native American populations. Thus, ITBC member Tribes seek healthy bison for continued herd development. Presently, ITBC has cooperative relationships for bison management with the Badlands National Park and the Wind Cave National Park in South Dakota and the Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota. These relationships involve ITBC member Tribes receiving excess bison for herd development.

ITBC has had a long-standing interest in the Yellowstone Park bison and has attended meetings of the Greater Yellowstone Inter-Agency Brucellosis Committee since its inception in 1992. After years of negotiation, ITBC now represents Indian Tribes as a formal member of the GYIBC. As you are aware, the GYIBC is tasked with addressing the brucellosis issue in the Greater Yellowstone Area and has been investigating various alternatives to eradicate brucellosis. ITBC is greatly interested in solutions that will balance the protection of livestock from brucellosis and discontinue the needless killing of buffalo.

While Senate Bill 353 provides an alternative to the killing of bison that wander out of the Yellowstone Park into the State of Montana, ITBC does not support the bill for the following reasons:

1. Neutering Yellowstone bison defeats efforts to effectively manage and preserve a keynote wildlife species. ITBC has advocated for the preservation of the genetic viability of the Yellowstone Bison herd, which remains free from cattle inbreeding. Neutering bison defeats efforts to promote sound management of Yellowstone bison and to protect the genetic integrity of the herd.
2. Neutering Yellowstone bison creates no benefit in disease control. Yellowstone bison have been slaughtered to protect livestock from the risk of contracting brucellosis from bison. ITBC has promoted treatment of bison tested positive for brucellosis and also for the development of a quarantine facility rather than immediate slaughter for bison that enter Montana. Simply neutering the bison entering Montana provides no incentive to address the brucellosis problem. Neutering bison while allowing Yellowstone elk to cross borders between federal and state lands appears an ineffective effort to address brucellosis in the Greater Yellowstone Area. The recent brucellosis in Wyoming cattle has been directly linked to elk but bison have continued to be the target of eradication efforts.
3. Neutering Yellowstone bison is contradictory to the cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices of Native Americans. ITBC has undertaken an informal role as protector of the North American bison and is concerned with preserving the Yellowstone bison population as a whole. ITBC does not support interfering with the natural selection process and finds the prospect of neutering untested bison offensive to the cultural and spiritual respect Native Americans have for bison.

ITBC does support the transfer of brucellosis free bison to Native American Tribes. However, ITBC does not support expending public funds to neuter bison that will provide no benefit to Tribal bison herd growth. Tribes will likely have to slaughter the neutered bison to avoid management costs. ITBC views the proposal to round up bison, expend costs to neuter the animals and transport them to Indian Reservations for the purpose of slaughter as an unnecessary use of funds that should be directed toward development of effective treatment of brucellosis. Tribes were not consulted and most Tribes are not interested in managing neutered animals. The Salish-Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation, the Crow Tribe of Indians, the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, the Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy's Reservation and the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of the Fort Peck Reservation all join the Blackfeet Nation and the InterTribal Bison Cooperative in opposing SB 353.

In conclusion, ITBC has maintained the position that buffalo in the Greater Yellowstone Area should be maintained as wildlife and left to exist naturally as other wildlife species with their identity and integrity preserved. We support coordinated efforts to find viable brucellosis treatment methods as alternatives to slaughter and neutering.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide this testimony in an effort to protect the Yellowstone bison from unnatural interference and I urge your vote against SB 353.

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FORT PECK TRIBES ADMINIS

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FORT PECK TRIBES

Assiniboine & Sioux

VIA Fax
406.259.3251

March 9, 2005

Majel Russel, Counsel
Inter Tribal Bison Cooperative
P.O. Box 928
Billings, Montana 59201-0928

RE: Senate Bill 353

Dear Ms. Russel;

The Fort Peck Tribes' Natural Resources Committee went on record today to oppose the above-captioned bill in it's entirety.

We agree with ITBC that the Tribes would have to slaughter the neutered bison to reduce increasing management costs. Money spent on the neutering procedure and the transport to Indian Reservations would be better spent on effective brucellosis treatment or prevention.

In addition, we also feel that the neutering of bison is contradictory to the cultural and spiritual beliefs we hold at Fort Peck.

Thank you for this opportunity to present our view on SB 353. If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Ray K. Eder
Chairman

xc: Tribal Executive Board
Val Smith, Buffalo Project
File

The Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy's Reservation

Phone: (406) 395-4478 or 4210 - Finance Office
(406) 395-4282 or 4321 - Business Committee

RR 1 #544
Box Elder, MT 59521

A RESOLUTION

NO 2005

TO OPPOSE MONTANA SENATE BILL 353, A BILL THAT ALLOWS FOR THE NEUTERING OF YELLOWSTONE BISON AND TRANSFER OF NEUTERED BISON TO MONTANA INDIAN TRIBES

WHEREAS, the Chippewa Cree Business Committee is the governing body of the Chippewa Cree Tribe of Rocky Boy's Reservation by authority of the Constitution and By-Laws of the Chippewa Cree Tribe, approved on the 23rd day of November 1935; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to their inherent sovereignty and Constitution and By-Laws of the Chippewa Cree Tribe, the Chippewa Cree Business Committee is charged with the duty to promote and protect the health, security and general welfare of the Chippewa Cree Tribe; and

WHEREAS, the Chippewa Cree Tribe currently maintains a viable bison herd and is a member of the InterTribal Bison Cooperative; and

WHEREAS, the Chippewa Cree Tribe is interested in receiving healthy bison to increase herd size in an effort to restore bison to Tribal lands and to produce bison for various Tribal purposes including providing a healthy food source for treatment and prevention of diet related illness among the Tribal population; and

WHEREAS, the Tribal Business Committee has reviewed SB 353, a bill to allow for the neutering of Yellowstone bison and transfer of the neutered bison to Indian Tribes; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Tribal Business Committee opposes SB 353 for the following reasons: 1) neutering bison does not protect the genetic viability of the Yellowstone Bison; 2) neutering bison creates no benefit in the treatment of brucellosis; and 3) neutering Yellowstone bison is contradictory to the cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices of the Chippewa Cree Tribe; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Tribal Business Committee is not interested in receiving neutered bison that will not facilitate herd development and will only be available for immediate slaughter purposes.

CERTIFICATION

I, THE UNDERSIGNED, AS SECRETARY/TREASURER OF THE BUSINESS COMMITTEE OF THE CHIPPEWA CREE TRIBE HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THE BUSINESS COMMITTEE IS COMPOSED OF NINE MEMBERS, OF WHOM Nine (9) MEMBERS CONSTITUTING A QUORUM, WERE PRESENT AT A MEETING, DULY AND REGULARLY CALLED, NOTICED, CONVENED AND HELD THIS 9th DAY OF March 2005, AND THAT THE FOREGOING RESOLUTION WAS FULLY ADOPTED, AT SUCH MEETING, BY THE AFFIRMATIVE VOTE OF Eight (8) MEMBERS FOR AND Zero (0) MEMBERS AGAINST, AND THAT THIS RESOLUTION HAS NOT BEEN RESCINDED OR AMENDED IN ANY WAY.

John C. Houlihan
CHAIRMAN, BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Janice Meyer
SECRETARY/TREASURER