

Comments on SB 353
By Stephany J. Seay
P.O. Box 265
Arlee, MT 59758

March 10, 2005

I call on you to make the right decision and vote NO on SB 353.

The buffalo of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem are the last remaining link to the great herds who once thundered across the Great Plains. These buffalo are genetically unique. They still know how to migrate, they have continuously occupied their native range, and they are the only buffalo to be unfenced. They are a genetic gold mine for any efforts to restore the American bison to their former range, and there are many such efforts on Tribal lands and elsewhere in America.

To render these buffalo infertile would be tragic, and that is exactly what this legislation will do. You will cut their lifeline, and the future of buffalo will be weakened. Giving the Indian people such an ultimatum – infertility or slaughter – is a shameful act, and an incredible insult to the intelligence of the First People of this continent.

This legislation is just another attempt to domesticate America's last wild herd of buffalo. We have just celebrated the buffalo as an icon of the American west on the recently re-issued buffalo nickel, yet Montana is willing to strip them of their ability to carry forth into the next generation. This legislation is pathetic and incredibly unpatriotic.

VOTE NO on SB 353

What is the cost for such an undertaking? What is the feasibility of performing invasive surgery on wildlife? Who benefits from this? No one but the livestock industry, and they rule the wild lands and wildlife with an iron fist. It makes far more sense, and is far more feasible and reasonable to better manage cattle. They are the livestock species responsible for spreading the disease brucellosis to our wildlife, and there are many of us who would see the livestock industry take responsibility for this, and stop harming our wildlife, stop blaming our wildlife, stop killing our wildlife because of something cattle brought to this land.

The fear that the livestock industry has, the reason for not allowing buffalo to roam, or to get themselves back to their native range, is brucellosis. Yet there has never been a documented case of a wild buffalo transmitting brucellosis to cattle. It is the other way around. The only time wildlife has possibly transmitted brucellosis is in Wyoming, where the state and federal government host elk feed lots. Unnatural feeding grounds, and force animals to congregate in unnatural numbers – a cesspool for disease. Again, the disease originated in cattle, and cattle should be the ones that are managed for it.

This latest insulting effort serves no purpose. It is a waste of time and taxpayer money, and is completely disrespectful to buffalo and the Indian people, and for you American patriots and lovers of history, it is a slap in the face.

Montana does not own this country's last wild buffalo, they are not Montana's to do with as you please, but your cattle are. Find ways to better manage them. Focus efforts there.

Montana could be the first state to have a truly wild and free-roaming herd. Imagine the good fortunes this would bring to the state's economy. Montana should strongly consider holding the buffalo as the state mammal. What a treasured asset we have here, and what a serious mistake we will make if this legislation passes. It would be a crime.

Do not give the Indian people this sick ultimatum. Stop the buffalo slaughter and heavy-handed management, respect buffalo as wildlife and allow MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks to manage them rather than the DOL, invite the Indian nations to the table to help you make the right decisions, and acquire lands and open existing lands and let the buffalo roam. Neuter or slaughter is a horrible ultimatum, and that is what you offer the Indian people with this legislation. Give the buffalo room to roam and they will return to their native range, to tribal lands, on their own.

Vote no on SB 353.

Thank you.

Stephany J. Seay
Montana resident, taxpayer and voter

3/10/05

Submitted to Montana
House Ag. Committee
Re: SB 353

STATEMENT, to be read by the Buffalo Field Campaign before the Montana
Legislator

It is a sad day for all Americans when there are only 4000 of the worlds pure genetic free roaming buffalo and they are treated as a pariah that have to be removed or exterminated for the protection of cattle that populate the entire planet. What will you tell your children someday when they ask why buffalo are only in museums in the extinct section?

VOTE NO on SB 353

Buffalo are a gift from the creator as are all living species. They are the symbol of the freedom that is inherent in all that America represents in the world. To destroy this last herd would not only bring shame on the great state Montana, but also destroy a symbol of American pride, freedom and tenacious strength.

VOTE NO on SB 353

The decisions that you make from this day forward affect not only Montana, but your children and their children, including all America. How do you want to be remembered in this life time as a person of preserving our American heritage or contributing toward its destruction.

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The legislators attempts to roundup, slaughter, neuter, hunt buffalo, especially the attempt to allow Indians to hunt only by traditional methods was an affront to all Indians. Montana's insensitivity and methods toward the buffalo is reminiscent of the policy towards the Indians. The attempts to find any excuse overt or covert, legal or illegal to remove Indians for the express purpose of taking their land. If that policy was enforced against another human race, well it does not surprise me that a similar policy is in place against the buffalo. For greed is the great motivator of self indulgence.

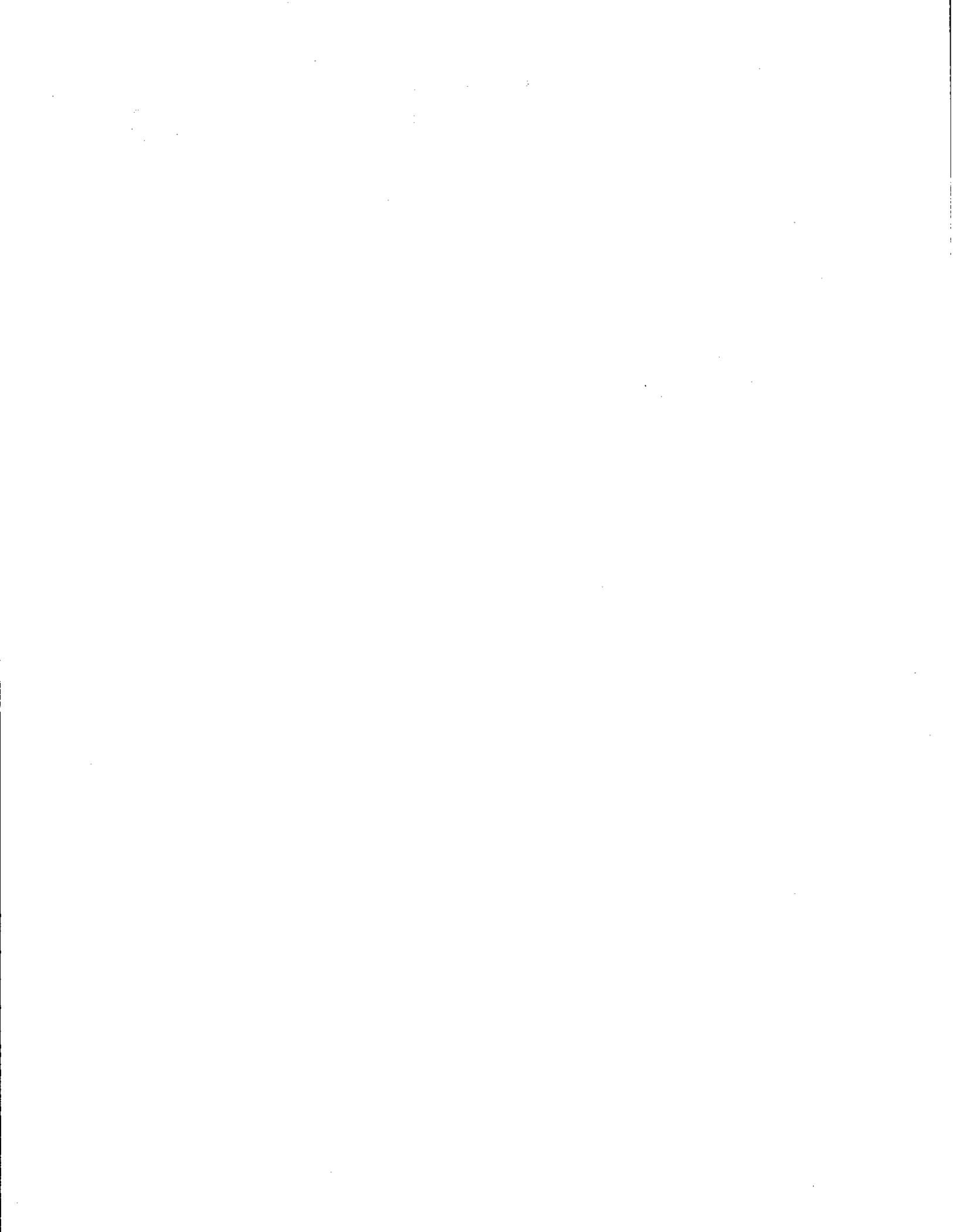
VOTE NO on SB 353

If you are Christian or a traditional spiritual Indian, our creators are the same God. However, God never gave man the authority to destroy the earth and all living things upon it. Remember these Indian words always; "For what befalls mother earth, befalls the children of humankind."

VOTE NO on SB 353

Marty (Fire Rider) Hiles, co-host American Indian Movement Today Show on World Talk Radio, Worlds largest American Indian Talk Radio show.
www.WorldTalkRadio.com 760-231-6169 martyhh@cox.net

Joseph Red Bear, President, American Indian Movement San Diego
www.AimSanDiego.org 951-767-1743 josephrb@aimsandiego.org





Buffalo Field Campaign

PO Box 957 West Yellowstone, MT 59758

(406) 646-0070 phone (406) 646-0071 fax

buffalo@wildrockies.org www.buffalofieldcampaign.org

Buffalo Quarantine

Summary: The topic of quarantine in relation to Yellowstone buffalo has received significant attention in recent years, particularly in the past few months. USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), with assistance from the MT Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), has recently approved the first phase of a quarantine feasibility study. The study involves taking 100 buffalo calves captured under the Interagency Bison Management Plan when the population of the Yellowstone herd numbers more than 3000. At least half the buffalo will be slaughtered and culture tested for brucellosis. The remaining buffalo will be held over for phase two, which is expected to be similar in nature. If any buffalo remain after phase two, they will enter phase three, the calving phase. More buffalo will be slaughtered and tested. If any buffalo remain, they may be placed at their final release site to be held behind a fence for one more year and then finally released as "wild" buffalo. The buffalo will be held in a 400-acre facility for phase one. They will be periodically tested for brucellosis and artificially fed as necessary. Future phases of the study will occur at similar sites. While this is not the only possible scenario for quarantining Yellowstone buffalo, it is the only one currently under consideration by APHIS. APHIS has not prioritized the development of alternative diagnosis tools for brucellosis or potential novel treatments for the disease. Further, APHIS has adamantly objected to tribal involvement in the quarantine process.

Problems with quarantine of Yellowstone Buffalo:

- 1. Genetics:** The Yellowstone buffalo herd is unique. Yellowstone buffalo are the only buffalo with a continuous history of being wild and unfenced. They are genetically unique, exhibiting the highest level of genetic diversity of all buffalo in the world. Actions which remove a very specific segment of the Yellowstone herd will have drastic impacts on the genetic diversity of targeted subpopulations. Specifically, the APHIS plan calls for removing 80 female buffalo calves and 20 male calves on an annual basis. While no analysis has been conducted on the impacts to this specific population, it is likely that such a removal will constitute a 50% reduction in female calves that have survived their first winter. Because selection will also include the slaughter of sero-positive calves and only involve those that migrate out of Yellowstone, the specific impact on the subpopulation from which the test subject calves derive will be devastating to the future of that subpopulation.
- 2. Domestication:** Quarantine of the extent proposed by APHIS for Yellowstone buffalo is not consistent with standard wildlife management practices. Quarantine periods of short duration have been used with other species with some success and with significant impacts to the quarantined animals once released. The type of quarantine proposed is specifically a technique for domestic livestock. The

quarantined buffalo will be subjected to human handling throughout the process and will receive supplemental feed. They will be isolated from other members of the herd from which they learn the techniques necessary for survival in the wild. They will be exposed only to other buffalo in their age class and will lose the family structure characteristic of wild animals. Breeding will occur in captivity with male buffalo that will not compete for breeding rights, thus disturbing the natural selectivity and behavior that would be exercised in the wild. Quarantine, captive breeding, and artificial feeding will cause a breakdown of family structure, unnatural breeding patterns, and a general loss of skills learned from natural settings and seasonal migration. In short, the buffalo that survive quarantine will be much like domestic buffalo and therefore will not benefit species conservation. They will be like other captive herds, which would make a more suitable population for such programs.

3. **Purpose and Need:** Quarantine has been proposed for Yellowstone buffalo in the context of a need to control population growth and to promote restoration of buffalo to other areas. However, population pressures are due to artificial constructs. The target population of 3000 buffalo for Yellowstone National Park is not based on the ecological carrying capacity of the park. Further, if winter range habitat is extended for the buffalo, the potential for greater populations of buffalo will be greatly expanded. If those extensions of habitat are consistent with migratory patterns, it is possible for buffalo to naturally move to areas currently considered for the placement of quarantined buffalo. Management plans to address the risk of brucellosis transmission could be developed for the new areas to insure the retention of Montana's brucellosis class free status.
4. **Native American Tribes:** Native American tribes, who have a vested interest in the restoration of buffalo to tribal lands, have not been included in the planning and development of buffalo relocation proposals. Tribal reservation lands present the best possible scenario for buffalo relocation programs because as sovereign nations, the tribes have a greater ability to manage land use to be consistent with the principles of quarantine without the need for the domesticating influence of small heavily regulated pastures and artificial feed.

Conclusion: Quarantine is an inappropriate tool for Yellowstone buffalo. The genetic uniqueness and historical significance of Yellowstone buffalo requires that management decisions be carefully considered and thoroughly evaluated. Quarantine of the nature proposed is exclusively suited for domestic animals and is not consistent with accepted wildlife conservation practices. Quarantine that focuses on specific population segments, age, and sex classes will have a drastic effect on the genetic diversity of the buffalo. Such selection will compromise the future of the buffalo that remain in Yellowstone and will not succeed in creating other herds with the cherished characteristics of the Yellowstone buffalo. The need for invasive population management and relocation of buffalo should be discussed in the context of expanded habitat options in the Greater Yellowstone Area. Native American tribes must be involved in the development and implementation of buffalo restoration projects. Respect for the sacred nature of Yellowstone buffalo must be at the forefront of decisions determining their future.