

**TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO SENATE BILL 353**

House Agricultural Committee

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I wish to express strong opposition to SB 353.

Try to do it with a general observation and then an alternative suggestion ...

I share a desire to see buffalo on all of Montana's tribal lands.

But SB 353 would simply continue our assault on America's last truly wild, genetically pure buffalo, perpetuating a travesty.

The Yellowstone buffalo herd has extraordinary biological, cultural, and historical significance, yet it's singled out for shameful treatment unlike any other wildlife population in this country.

If Yellowstone buffalo set foot in our state, they are hazed or slaughtered.

These animals have been chased, captured, tested, vaccinated, tagged, and had just about everything else we can think of done to them – remember vaginal transmitters – in the name of protecting Montana livestock from brucellosis.

In the winter, when most of this occurs on the west side of Yellowstone, the nearest cows that could in any way – conceivably – be threatened by brucellosis are more than 30 miles away, but that makes no difference.

That we spend more than \$3 million a year to supposedly protect the interests of four small livestock operators that choose to place reproductive cows on the north boundary of Yellowstone – the world's premier wildlife park – makes no difference.

We could work with those few ranchers to find another place to put their cows, or to improve their fencing, or to vaccinate, or to encourage them to graze yearlings, steers, or horses instead of reproductive cows, compensating them for their trouble.

But we don't.

At the Senate Ag. Committee hearing on HJR 22 this past Monday, one skeptical Senator described the situation this way. He said "It's as if when I'm concerned about my dog getting rabies, I go out to the woods and fields around my place and try to round up all the skunks and vaccinate them instead of just vaccinating my dog."

That's how we approach the Yellowstone buffalo issue ...

And now you're considering neutering those animals, as if we're not doing enough to them already.

These are America's last native wild buffalo – this one herd in this one place – and we're doing everything we can to take the wild out of them.

If we'd turn just a fraction of our attention to managing a few cows just a little different, we wouldn't have a brucellosis "problem" and we could celebrate some truly wild buffalo – not neutered pets – in big sky country.

SB 353 is insulting to the very notion of wildlife and, I believe, to the cultural aspirations of fellow Montanans who are Native American.

I hope you'll vote no.

I said I'd also offer a suggestion ...

If the goal of SB 353 is to bring buffalo to tribal lands, consider this ...

According to the 2004 EA prepared by MT FWP for the bison quarantine feasibility study, "there are 8300 plains bison, classified as genetically pure, in 13 conservation herds and they present the best source stocks available for restoration efforts."

The Yellowstone buffalo herd now numbers about 4200. They are wild, and they have brucellosis.

That leaves more than 4,000 that are either fenced or confined to islands or mountain tops or national reserves of one sort or another that aren't wild and that don't have brucellosis.

The number is growing and the herds need to be culled.

Why not look into utilizing those animals? They wouldn't need to be neutered. They could reproduce.

This seems like a more logical idea if the goal is to get new herds established.

Again, please vote no on SB 353.