

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 22

For the Senate Committee on Livestock, Agriculture, and Irrigation

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I wish to express strong opposition to HJR 22.

I share desires to safeguard the well being of Montana's livestock industry. However this resolution placing APHIS (United States Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service) in charge of eliminating brucellosis from the Yellowstone area is unnecessary and misguided.

The interests of a few Montana livestock operators must be balanced with the future of America's only truly wild, genetically pure native buffalo herd.

When I say a "few" livestock operators, that's exactly what I mean.

On the west side of Yellowstone Park, where buffalo hazing has been taking place this winter, as it has for years, the nearest cows are more than 30 miles away.

Without cows in the picture, there is no brucellosis threat from buffalo. There is no problem.

In summer one cattle herd is trucked in to Horse Butte from out of state. By then buffalo have returned to deep within the Park. But if brucellosis is still deemed a threat, surely that one herd can be adequately fenced, vaccinated, and monitored to insure it is not, somehow, infected with brucellosis.

On the north side of Yellowstone – the only other place buffalo emerge from the Park – there are only four livestock operators present from Yankee Jim Canyon south to the Park boundary.

Again, surely we can work with those four small operators, with only a few hundred cows among them, to find creative, commonsense ways to eliminate perceived brucellosis threats. Possibilities include:

- finding equitable alternative pastures for their stock
- encouraging yearlings, steers, or horses instead of reproductive cows
- strong fencing
- vaccinations
- monitoring

If we can establish a wild buffalo quarantine facility, as the state is doing, directly across from the largest cattle herd in the area, owned by the Church Universal and Triumphant, it seems like we could be easily protecting the Church's herd and three others.

If they insist on maintaining reproductive cows at the boundary of the world's premier wildlife park – we can keep brucellosis out, just as it's kept in the quarantine.

This might cost a little money, but we're spending several million dollars a year to carry out current efforts to confine buffalo in the Park. Putting APHIS in charge will mean more of the same.

Also, this is not just an agricultural issue. It's also, at least equally, a wildlife issue. Handing it over to APHIS is bad policy and contrary to the values of the public at large that places extraordinary significance on our last wild buffalo from ecological, historic, and cultural perspectives.

In sum, focusing all our brucellosis management efforts on wildlife is an expensive, impractical, and tragic proposition, especially as we ignore the very few reproductive cows that graze next to Yellowstone as if there is no other place they could do that.

The result is wasted tax dollars, a black eye for our state, and wild buffalo continuing to be essentially extinct in Montana.

I urge you to take a more common sense, creative approach to brucellosis concerns in the Yellowstone area, starting by dropping this resolution.