



BUFFALO FIELD CAMPAIGN

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Chairman Lee Randall and members of the House Agriculture committee
Montana House of Representatives
PO Box 200400
Helena, MT 59620-0400

Mr. Chairman and members of the House Agriculture committee,

On behalf of Buffalo Field Campaign I am submitting testimony on HB 396. Mr. Chairman, I would also request that my testimony be shared with committee members and entered into the hearing record. Thank you.

Buffalo Field Campaign is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) whose mission is to stop the slaughter of Yellowstone's wild buffalo herd, protect the natural habitat of wild free-roaming buffalo and native wildlife, and to work with people of all Nations to honor the sacredness of the wild buffalo.

Buffalo Field Campaign is located in West Yellowstone, Gallatin County, Montana, and is supported by volunteers and citizens in Montana and by people from around the world who value America's native wildlife and the ecosystems upon which they depend, and enjoy the natural wonders of our irreplaceable public lands.

As an organization and on behalf of our members, Buffalo Field Campaign is concerned and actively involved with protecting the last remaining descendants of indigenous buffalo in North America to occupy their original range, and securing long-term protection for viable populations of wild buffalo and year-round habitat.

Buffalo Field Campaign is adamantly opposed to HB 396, for many reasons.

HB 396 attempts to cede state and Tribal authority over wildlife to County Commissioner(s) control by requiring their approval before any buffalo could be released or relocated in a county or counties in Montana.

HB 396 would seek to give County Commissioners unprecedented authority over buffalo introduced or transferred in Montana as public wildlife.

Our heritage of native wildlife species does not belong to the state or any one person or interest group but to future generations who are the beneficiaries of our wildlife heritage trust.

The state has a trustee authority and responsibility for our wildlife – this duty is not a power that can be taken away from the people by the Montana legislature to benefit one body or interest group.

HB 396 would also legislate a conflict of interest by providing that wild buffalo may be sold by the Dept. of Livestock to 'offset' the costs of capturing, testing, quarantining and vaccinating the native species.

This provision in HB 396 would open the door for Montana to turn the last buffalo population that retains their identity as a wildlife species into chattel and private property.

We strongly object, in the strongest terms, to any legislative act that attempts to commercialize our native wildlife and rob the people of Montana of our natural heritage, to be auctioned and sold off by the livestock department.

Has the Montana legislature no shame?

There is also an error in thinking embedded in HB 396 about who 'pays'.

Montana currently 'pays' hardly anything -- but is the recipient of well over 6 million American taxpayer dollars that has funded the government destruction of over 3,200 wild buffalo since 2000 – for the governor-approved plan embodied in MCA 81-2-120.

All of these financial agreements and reports showing Montana to be a recipient of federal taxpayer welfare are available for review online:
<http://www.buffalofieldcampaign.org/legislative/taxpayerfunding.html>

According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2008), Montana is now thirteen years into its 'bison management plan' that costs over \$3,000,000 taxpayer dollars to capture, test, quarantine and vaccinate bison every year. This governor-approved plan has destroyed thousands of wild buffalo at a cost of tens of millions of taxpayer dollars – a costly and destructive plan with no end and little accountability.

The decision over reintroducing the public's wildlife in Montana does not belong to County Commissioners. We seriously doubt that an American Indian Tribe would cede jurisdiction and sovereignty over their affairs to a board of county commissioners.

Wildlife management belongs to wildlife agencies entrusted with ensuring our wildlife heritage is protected and persists for future generations to enjoy and experience. The buffalo, a valued native species, deserves that level of trust embodied in our constitutional responsibility to conserve our natural heritage.

A Fiscal Note for HB 396 has been requested to determine the costs borne by Montanans. These costs, along with the provisions of HB 396, are unbearable and should not have to be paid any longer by taxpayers in Montana and across our nation.

HB 396 is not amendable. Thank you for taking action to by voting to defeat HB 396.

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