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Last year, through a similar letter, the Phillips County Livestock Association (Association) responded to a letter sent to county residents from the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) regarding their desire to eliminate livestock grazing in Phillips County in favor of restoring "Wild Free Roaming Bison".

Again the Association would like to respond to this new letter dated November 8, 2013 and its misguided thought with some facts. The Charles M. Russell Wildlife Refuge (CMR) has lost 16,000 AUM's which could be used to grow enough beef to feed 25,000 people annually. Unfortunate, when you consider the US beef cow herd is the smallest since 1950 and recently South Dakota lost an additional 20,000 livestock in a blizzard. The agricultural economic loss of flooding, the blizzard and the closure of two beef packing plants and hundreds of feedlots in the southern US due to drought is more than \$7 billion annually. Only 1% of the US population is engaged in food production. It will take cooperation from "Mother Nature" and 5 to 7 years to rebuild the US cow herd.

Food production has to increase 70% to feed a richer global world and beef production will have to increase 58%. Due to the cattle shortage, the US is importing 2.4 billion pounds of beef (low quality cuts due to the poor economy), 70% of all lamb in the US is imported, and when China's Shuanghui International purchase Smithfield Food (controlling 25% of US hog processing), some US consumer will get to compete with some of the 1.3 billion Chinese for an Easter Ham. EGT is an Asian company that has invested \$50 million in Montana building 3 large grain elevators. The global demand for food and the resources to grow food are increasing significantly.

In a 2002 online survey by Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, state recreational facility managers indicated that more than \$62 million would be needed to fulfill outdoor recreation facility maintenance needs in Montana (Montana 2008 SCORP Executive

Summary, <http://fwp.mt.gov/fwDoc.html?id=17907>). More recently the American Society of Civil Engineers reported that all recreation maintenance needs in Montana would require a \$347.6 million investment (<http://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/a/#p/state-facts/montana>). The civil engineer report identified \$3.6 trillion in national infrastructure needs in the US. The Association asks the NWF, what generation is going to pay for this maintenance and repair?

The Association hosted three livestock operators representing Henry Mountain Utah. They testified that bison compete with other wildlife (namely mule deer in Utah) for habitat and forage. Bison also compete with livestock for winter forage. All three Utah livestock operators echoed the caution that if you get bison you will have trouble.

Any bison in CMR will compete with a world class elk herd that locals and people from across the country come to enjoy. Elk from CMR spend a significant amount of time on private land throughout the year. Bison will leave the CMR in a similar fashion, leading to damage on private land and create real disease issues for livestock operators. This will not be tolerated. As stated in Senate Bill 212 bison must be contained: "animal containment measures that ensure that any animal transplanted or released on private or public land will be contained in designated areas. Containment measures must include but are not limited to: (i) any fencing required". CMR also represents federal land that is legally tied to agriculture and private land. Private land owners have not approved of bison on their property. Bison cannot be simply managed like other species and this is why the Montana Legislature passed Senate Bill 212. The Association will oppose any effort to classify bison as wildlife.

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The Association was not aware that NWF was allowed to choose where bison should be placed in Montana as indicated in the letter. The Association notes that currently there are bison at Moise National Bison Range, Yellowstone National Park, Theodor Roosevelt National Park, on tribal land, and in Alberta. Hunting is possible around Yellowstone National Park, within private herds and on some tribal land. There are over 500,000 bison in the US. The NWF plan would eliminate the 8,500 private bison in herds in Montana and the contribution they make to their industry. Yellowstone is an example of how bison and livestock cannot co-exist. NWF should focus on cleaning up the issues that plague Yellowstone National Park rather than creating another problem. The Association will oppose any redistribution of bison to any area not approved by local county commissioners.

The US faces some significant issues including a Federal Government that has accumulated \$17 trillion in debt and unfunded obligations of \$58 trillion which is increasing at the rate of \$8 million per minute. Social Security and Medicare are insolvent and are spending more than they take in annually and interest payments on the debt are \$220 billion annually and growing. The US work force participation rate is the smallest in 35 years, meaning 88.3 million workers are unemployed or have left the work force. For college graduates, 50% are unemployed or underemployed. The USDA estimates that 1 out of 6 humans in the US are hungry. These conditions are largely due to our poor fiscal condition, which will be left to future generations without significant reforms; let's not leave them dependent on imported food also.

In conclusion the Association believes that bison and other species have become more important than the basic needs of human beings. The open letter published by the NWF is completely the idea and vision of the NWF and does not reflect the written notes of consensus from bison meeting held in Lewistown September 26-27, 2013. The NWF should focus on aiding the poor and contributing to the national debt, the Association will continue to feed the masses.

Jesse Blunt, President  
Phillips County Livestock Association