

# Cauldron of Democracy: American Pluralism and the Fight over Yellowstone Bison

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## Introduction

Imagine being a member of Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery when they encountered a herd of bison at the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers:

*Such was the multitude of these animals that although the river, including an island over which they passed, was a mile in length, the herd stretched as thick as they could swim completely from one side to the other, and the party was obliged to stop for an hour. (Taylor, 2011, pp. 6–7)*

That massive herd made up only a fraction of the millions of bison (*Bison bison*), commonly called “buffalo,” that roamed the Great Plains at the opening of the nineteenth century. Yet before the century's close, fewer than 1,000 animals remained. They were victims of sundry predations, but mainly the market in hides that surged in the 1870s, after European tanners crafted a technique for turning them into leather for use in soldiers' boots and machine belts. North America's largest mammal, which had survived 10,000 years of hunting by Native Americans, was almost eradicated by a decade of market capitalism (Taylor, 2011, pp. 9–11).

Thanks to last minute interventions by ranchers, conservationists, and government officials, the twentieth century witnessed a dramatic recovery of American bison, which today number some 500,000. As a result of captive breeding, the vast majority of these animals contain a small percentage of cattle genes. However, Yellowstone National Park preserved an unadulterated remnant of the original North American herd.

Given their iconic status, it is surprising to discover that within the Greater Yellowstone Area bison are the subject of heated political controversy. At issue is the threat posed by free-roaming bison to the cattle ranching business. On one side are ranchers and their interest groups, locally elected representatives, and the Montana Department of Livestock, while on the other are an array of environmental groups, Native American tribes, and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. In between is the National Park Service, with its often challenging mandate to conserve nature and wildlife and to “leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations” (Winks, 1997).

This array of stakeholders makes the management of Yellowstone bison an instructive case study in American pluralism. The pluralist model of American democracy studies the way various interest groups compete to influence law and policy. In addition to the many groups that often have conflicting interests and goals, American democracy is also characterized by separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism. Separation of powers means that governing authority is divided among legislative, executive and judicial branches that are capable of checking and balancing one another, so that no single branch can dictate policy free from the oversight and countervailing authority of the others. Federalism means that governing authority is also divided between federal and state governments. Because authority is spread across multiple branches and levels of government, there are multiple points of access for competing interest groups to apply pressure in the pursuit of their various policy goals. This makes for a very complicated and tedious

political process that helps to explain the public's frustration with gridlock, whereby problems drag on and little if anything seems to get done. On the other hand, the system tends to prevent any single interest group from running roughshod over others, thus securing the rights of various groups to make their voices heard. The following case illustrates both the possibilities and challenges of natural resources management in the context of pluralist democracy. It explores how competing interest groups and various levels of government interact to forge a management policy that secures the conservation of Yellowstone bison, but limits the population size and geographic range of the species.

## The History of Bison Management in Yellowstone National Park

Prior to the 1960s, Yellowstone's bison were herded as livestock, fed hay, and regularly culled to limit the population to a few hundred animals. But changes in public attitudes and scientific understanding of ecosystems eventually challenged the park's original management practices. The 1963 Leopold Report recommended scientific management based on understanding of ecological systems, and it led to a fundamental shift in management philosophy throughout the park system (Keitner, 2013). In effect, human intervention in natural processes was to be minimized. According to the report, the purpose of a national park should be to "represent a vignette of primitive America" (Leopold, 1963).

The shift to natural regulation in Yellowstone meant the suspension of culling, which allowed bison to proliferate. The park's herd grew from a mere 397 individuals in 1967 to almost 5,000 in 2014. As a result of larger populations, some bison began migrating out of the park in winter, seeking forage on the low grounds to the north and west. This prompted complaints from area ranchers, who feared that Yellowstone bison could potentially infect their cattle with brucellosis (Keitner, 2013). This set the stage for an ongoing political drama whose cast of characters and clash of values portray both the limits and opportunities of pluralist democracy.

### Brucellosis

Bison may have ruled the plains for thousands of years, but for the past century and a half, Montana has been cattle country. Over 95% of Great Plains grasslands are occupied by cattle ranches, and agriculture is Montana's top source of income (Gates et al., 2010). In the minds of many ranchers, Yellowstone bison are a disease vector that poses a direct threat to their livelihood.

While Yellowstone bison are the most representative progeny of one of the most iconic American animals, they are also chronically infected with the *Brucella abortus* bacterium. Bison and elk in the Greater Yellowstone Area are the only wild species in the United States known to carry the disease. Brucellosis can cause spontaneous abortions in cattle, as well as infertility and reduced milk production. Nationally, annual costs from these impacts exceeded \$400 million in the mid-twentieth century, but eradication efforts have reduced them to less than \$1 million today. If an outbreak prompts federal inspectors to suspend Montana's brucellosis Class Free status,<sup>1</sup> it may cost the state's cattle producers millions of dollars per year from testing and lost income. Federal regulations require that an infected herd must be slaughtered, and neighboring herds must be tested. The majority of Montana's cattle are exported outside the state, and the stigma of unhealthy animals could make outside buyers reluctant to purchase from Montana. These cumulative costs could be devastating for some ranchers (United States Department of Agriculture; Wray, 2008).

But just how likely it is that Yellowstone bison could spread brucellosis to cattle is an open question. For one thing, not all animals that test positive for *Brucella* are infectious. Rather, only female bison are potentially capable of transmitting the disease, which may be contracted by cattle from contact with reproductive discharges, such as aborted fetuses and afterbirth (United States Department of Agriculture). While about 50% of Yellowstone bison test positive for brucellosis, only about 15% of seropositive<sup>2</sup> females are actually infectious. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), epidemiological evidence has identified bison as the most likely source of infections found in some cattle herds in North Dakota and Wyoming, and transmission has been demonstrated by researchers at Texas A&M University under controlled conditions. However, there have been no confirmed cases of bison to cattle

<sup>1</sup> "Class Free" status signifies that the U.S. Department of Agriculture has certified a state to be free of brucellosis infection.

<sup>2</sup> Seropositive: testing positive on a serological exam.

transmission in the wild, while the Greater Yellowstone Area has seen over 20 cases of elk to cattle transmission since 2002 (Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service; Gates et al., 2010; Montana Farm Bureau Federation; National Park Service: Yellowstone).

## Population Management

After years of interim plans and legal wrangling among concerned government agencies, in 2000 court-ordered mediation produced the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP), a coordinated policy among the National Park Service, the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), the U.S. Forest Service, the Montana Department of Livestock, and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (Gates et al., 2010; National Park Service: Yellowstone).<sup>3</sup> The plan includes several key provisions, subject to periodic adjustments:<sup>4</sup>

- Bison that exit the park may be hazed back in with ATVs, snowmobiles, helicopters, and the use of rubber bullets.
- When hazing is ineffective, bison may be captured and held at the Stephens Creek Facility inside the northern boundary of the park near Gardiner, Montana.
- Bison not hazed back into the park or captured may be shot by Montana Department of Livestock officials or licensed hunters, including Indian tribes with treaty hunting rights.
- Captured bison females may be tested for brucellosis.
- Seronegative calves, yearlings, and non-pregnant adult females are vaccinated; but current vaccines are only about 65% effective. Vaccinated bison are released back into the park.
- Seropositive bison are shipped to slaughter. The meat is safe for human consumption and is donated to food banks or Indian tribes.
- Park officials determine how many bison to cull each year, with the goal of maintaining an end-of-winter population of approximately 3,000 head.
- A limited number of bison may forage in designated areas outside the park (see Figure 1, next page).

Even though several government agencies are involved with the IBMP, they tend to represent distinct positions:

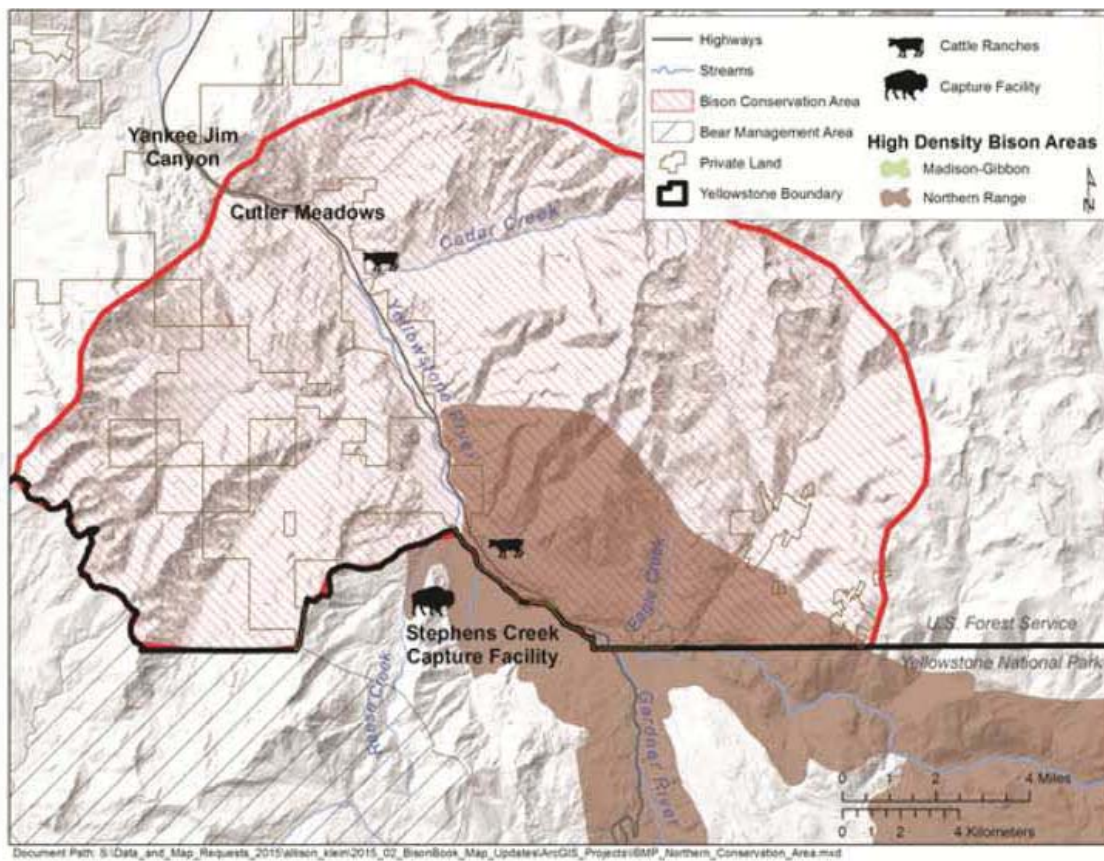
- *National Park Service*: While seeking to conserve a free-range herd and to protect “natural processes,” Yellowstone administrators responded to a court order and other political pressures to negotiate the IBMP, which entails regular culling to manage the bison population.
- *Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP)*: State wildlife agents would prefer to manage bison like other wildlife, such as elk. When the animals migrate beyond park borders into Montana, their population size may be managed through public “fair-chase hunting.”
- *Montana Department of Livestock (DOL)*: The DOL essentially represents the cattle industry, which is extremely important for the state's economy. Consequently, its agents prefer a zero tolerance policy toward bison outside the park due to the risk of brucellosis transmission to cattle. Before the DOL will agree to additional habitat for bison, it insists that the park must substantially reduce the population.

The IBMP continues to rely heavily on slaughter as the primary mechanism of population management, and not everyone is happy about it. In the winter of 2007–2008, state and federal authorities culled about 1,500 animals. This amounted to about one-third of the park's entire herd and was the largest death toll for Yellowstone bison since the mass slaughter of the late nineteenth century (Natural Resources Defense Council, 2008). In addition to protests from environmental groups, some Native Americans also decried the vast scale and inhumane nature of the slaughter in 2007–2008.

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<sup>3</sup> In 2009, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, the Inter Tribal Buffalo Council, and the Nez Perce Tribe joined the Interagency Bison Management Plan.

<sup>4</sup> The bulleted list is summarized from: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service; Interagency Bison Management Plan, 2015; National Park Service: Yellowstone.



*Figure 1.* Northern Management Area (Interagency Bison Management Plan, 2015, p. 14). The red line marks the northern boundary of the area north of the park where bison are allowed to migrate during some or all of the year.

Despite public criticism, however, the IBMP's population management program has continued apace. During the winter of 2014–2015, park officials estimated that as many as 1,200 bison could cross into Montana, prompting them to cull about 700 animals, the largest number since 2007–2008 (Brown, 2014; Associated Press, 2014). The park projected that without any population management, the bison herd would grow to approximately 6,000 by 2016. The park planned to cull up to 900 animals during the winter of 2015–2016, with similar expectations for the next couple of winters (Brown, 2016).

Park officials and bison advocacy groups seek to relieve the population pressures that require large-scale culling by securing expanded habitat for bison outside the park. In 2012, an agreement between park officials and the state of Montana secured a revision to the Interagency Bison Management Plan to authorize seasonal migration of bison on an additional 75,000 acres in Montana's Gardiner Basin, just north of Yellowstone National Park. While many ranchers would prefer that no bison leave the park for fear of their spreading brucellosis to cattle, Montana state officials agreed to the expanded habitat. On their part, park officials agree to haze bison back into the park before cattle arrive for summer grazing and to continue managing the population at the agreed target of 3,000 head. From the perspective of park officials, addressing the demands of Montana ranchers and state livestock officials to manage the size of the bison population is the bargaining chip that has secured limited tolerance of bison in designated areas outside the park. Failure to manage the population could result in the return of a zero-tolerance policy from the state (Associated Press, 2013; National Park Service: Yellowstone). Nevertheless, many environmental activists and Native Americans continue to protest the hazing and culling policy. From a political standpoint, park administrators are walking a tightrope. In 2015, the governor of Montana authorized an additional 400 square miles north and west of Yellowstone National Park for year-round bison habitat, and a new bison management plan is scheduled to be published in 2016 (Brown, 2015).

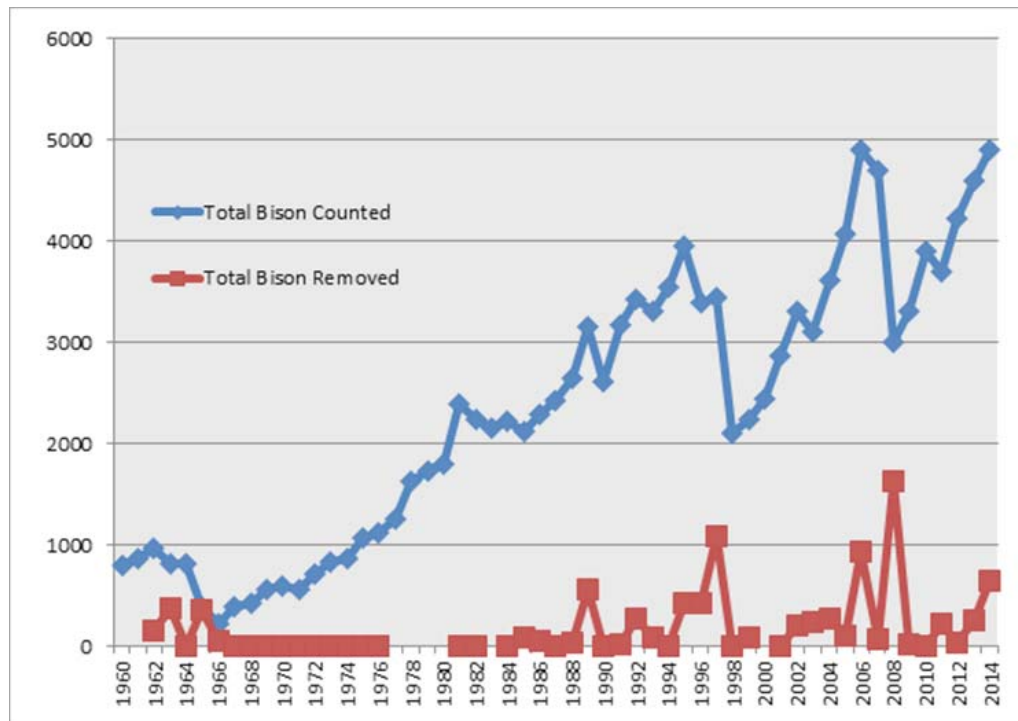


Figure 2: Annual Yellowstone bison population and removals (Buffalo Field Campaign, 2014; Montana Farm Bureau Federation; National Park Service). Gaps in the red line indicate that no bison were removed or data were not available for those years.

## Re-Wilding the West

On the morning of March 6, 2014, Comfrey Jacobs handcuffed himself to a 55 gallon barrel filled with concrete and attached it with wire-mesh to the entrance gate of Yellowstone National Park's Stephens Creek bison holding facility (Figure 3). His intention was to delay livestock trailers from transporting captured bison to slaughter, and to draw public attention to the practice. Jacobs was arrested and charged with disorderly conduct and interfering with a government agency function.

Comfrey Jacobs is an activist with the Buffalo Field Campaign (BFC), an advocacy group based in West Yellowstone, Montana. Its volunteers conduct daily patrols to monitor and document the hazing, shooting, and slaughter of Yellowstone bison. Wrapped snugly in caps and jackets, they are hot on the trail of hunters, Department of Livestock agents and Yellowstone National Park officials involved with what they call bison "mismanagement." They aim to draw public attention to their concerns through video postings on YouTube and the organization's website. The BFC website notes, "there are tens of thousands of acres of public lands surrounding Yellowstone that could sustain thousands more" bison. In other words, the last remaining great herd of free-roaming, genetically pure American buffalo should be respected and protected as wildlife, rather than corralled and slaughtered as livestock (Buffalo Field Campaign, 2014).



Figure 3. Buffalo Field Campaign activist blocking bison slaughter. Credit: Deby Dixon photo, courtesy of Buffalo Field Campaign, used with permission.

## Restoring the Buffalo Nation

The fate of many Native American groups has been intimately tied to the American bison for thousands of years. In addition to providing a high-protein, low-fat diet to sustain the people through harsh winters and a generally hardscrabble existence, traditionally bison bones were used for tools, bison dung was burned for fuel, and bison intestines were fashioned into useful containers. Despite the large scale harvests at buffalo jumps,<sup>5</sup> Native American bison hunting was ecologically sustainable, and millions of bison continued to roam the plains for centuries. However, the Great Slaughter of the late nineteenth century not only severed Native Americans' access to an essential food source, but it severed their relationship with an animal that lay at the heart of some tribes' cultural identity and religious worldview. As the great Lakota holy man Sitting Bull proclaimed, "A cold wind blew across the prairie when the last buffalo fell—a death wind for my people" (Zontek, 2007, p. 27).

However, in recent decades some tribes have renewed their cultural relationship with the American bison by playing an important role in its ongoing recovery. That role has been spearheaded by an organization called the Inter Tribal Buffalo Council (ITBC): <http://itbcbuffalo.com/>. The ITBC was founded in 1990 "to restore bison to Indian nations in a manner that is compatible with their spiritual and cultural beliefs and practices." According to the organization's website, "to reestablish healthy buffalo populations on tribal lands is to reestablish hope for Indian people" (Inter Tribal Buffalo Council, 2011). Since its founding, the ITBC has facilitated the transfer of surplus bison from numerous federal and state-managed herds to tribal lands. Representing 56 tribes, it has grown the collective Native American herd from 1,500 in 1990 to more than 15,000 today, and vastly expanded the amount of bison range on reservations (Adams and Dood, 2011; Zontek, 2007). In 2009, the Inter Tribal Buffalo Council and three Native American tribes with treaty hunting rights joined the Interagency Bison Management Plan. As a management partner, the ITBC advocates for expanded bison habitat outside the park, and for the transfer of brucellosis-free Yellowstone bison to Indian reservations (National Park Service: Yellowstone; Yellowstone bison have "right to roam," 2014).

The tribal interest in hosting bison herds has opened up one of the more promising outlets for managing Yellowstone's population through more humane means than annual slaughter. The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks and USDA initiated a quarantine program in 2005 to observe calves that tested seronegative for brucellosis. After five years, the calves and their offspring were determined to be brucellosis-free, and in 2012 sixty-one of the calves and their offspring were transferred to Fort Peck Indian Reservation (National Park Service: Yellowstone). This transfer not only provided an alternative to slaughter, but it also honored the cultural relationship between Yellowstone's bison and Fort Peck's Assiniboine and Sioux Indians.

In addition to Indian reservations, the Department of the Interior has named 20 potential public land sites in 10 states for relocation of Yellowstone bison that have passed quarantine inspection (Associated Press, 2014). Whether revitalizing the relationship between Native Americans and the once great "buffalo nation," or supplying additional conservation herds, the transfer of brucellosis-free bison to other sites is one promising strategy for Yellowstone National Park to manage its burgeoning population in a manner that is both ecologically sound and ethically responsible.

## Conclusion

This case study has considered the competing interests of key stakeholders: ranchers, environmentalists, and Native American tribes—all important actors on the stage of American democracy. But the most important stakeholder, above any single interest group, is we the people. The American public has the ultimate stake in how our national resources are managed, and it is the job of the National Park Service to represent us. Finding the precise policy formula for doing so effectively, while taking into account the concerns of all stakeholders, is an ongoing challenge for park administrators.

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<sup>5</sup> Buffalo jumps are sites where Native Americans historically hunted bison by herding them over cliffs.

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## Handout for Cattle Ranchers

### Assignments

1. Read “Cauldron of Democracy: American Pluralism and the Fight over Yellowstone Bison.”
2. Watch the video *Silencing the Thunder* at:  
<http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/short-film-showcase/is-it-ok-to-kill-americas-wild-bison>
3. Review the National Park Service’s *Public Scoping Newsletter* on the development of a new bison management plan, found as a pdf at the bottom of the following webpage:  
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=111&projectID=50877&documentID=64791>  
Consider the following options that could be part of a new bison management plan:
  - End culling as a population control method.
  - Expand year-round bison habitat on state and federal lands.
  - Limit hazing of bison to confining them to designated habitat areas and to keeping them separated from livestock.
  - Authorize public hunting as a means to control the bison population, raise revenue, and honor treaty obligations to Native American tribes.
  - Raise the target bison population from 3,000 to 7,500.
4. Your group should prepare a 1–2 page position paper on the options and provide the class and instructor with copies. The paper should express your stakeholder’s position and concerns regarding each proposal. A spokesperson from each student group should prepare to deliver a brief policy statement in class, and each student should be prepared to participate in an open discussion of the pros and cons of the proposals. Remember to stay in character!
5. After the role-playing exercise and/or in-class discussion, each student should write a one-page reflection on what you learned from the activity.

### Resources

Listed below are links and position summaries of groups that represent your stakeholder interests and have taken public positions on the Yellowstone bison controversy. Your group may choose to represent your assigned stakeholder in general, or to assign specific organizations for individual students to research and represent.

Montana Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife (SFW): <http://mt-sfw.org/>

SFW is opposed to the introduction of free-roaming bison due to risks to private property and conflicts with the cattle industry. It opposes transfer of bison within the state, and believes that management authority should remain with the Department of Livestock rather than the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Montana Women Involved in Farm Economics (MTWIFE): <http://mtwife.wordpress.com/>

MTWIFE opposes free-ranging bison within the state.

Montana Cattle Women: <http://www.montanacattlewomen.org/>

Montana Cattle Women opposes free-ranging bison due to concerns over brucellosis and property damage. In the words of an organizational spokesperson: “That is a taking of our property rights.”<sup>1</sup>

Montana Farm Bureau Federation (MFBF):

<http://mfbf.org/montana-agricultural-issues/land-use-and-wildlife-management/brucellosis/>

MFBF opposes the establishment of wild or free-roaming bison in Montana due to the risk of property damage and the spread of brucellosis to cattle. It believes that bison should be classified as livestock and regulated by the Montana Department of Livestock.

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<sup>1</sup>Adams, S.M., and A.R. Dood. 2011. *Plains Bison Ecology, Management, and Conservation*. Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Available at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/bison/plainsEcology.html>, p. 128.



Montana Association of Counties (MACo): <http://www.mtcounties.org/>

MACo represents Montana counties and their interests. It has adopted two resolutions pertaining to Yellowstone bison. The first seeks “amendments to the Interagency Bison Management Plan that would allow the counties adjacent to Yellowstone National Park to be a signatory to any agreement involving bison management in the state of Montana.” The second resolution calls for the Montana Department of Livestock to regulate the movement of bison across county lines.

Montana Legislator: [http://leg.mt.gov/css/Sessions/63rd/leg\\_info.asp?HouseID=2&SessionID=107&LAWSID=13750](http://leg.mt.gov/css/Sessions/63rd/leg_info.asp?HouseID=2&SessionID=107&LAWSID=13750)

An outspoken bison opponent is State Senator John Brenden, who has backed numerous bills in support of a zero tolerance policy toward bison outside of the park. Among these were bills to 1) prevent the transfer of bison anywhere in the state, 2) require commissioners’ permission before bison could be brought into their counties, 3) allow landowners to shoot bison found on their property, 4) make the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks liable for property damage caused by bison. None of these bills passed. Senator Brenden has called bison a “creeping cancer” and “wooly tanks.” Comparing free-roaming bison to dinosaurs, he proclaimed, “Their time has passed.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> McKean, A. 2013, September 16. The new bison war. *Outdoor Life*. Available at: <http://www.outdoorlife.com/blogs/open-country/2013/09/new-bison-war>; Voggesser, G. 2013, April 17. Kill the bad bills, not the Buffalo: UPDATED. *Wildlife Promise*. Available at: <http://blog.nwf.org/2013/04/kill-the-bad-bills-not-the-buffalo/>.

## Handout for Environmentalists

### Assignments

1. Read “Cauldron of Democracy: American Pluralism and the Fight over Yellowstone Bison.”
2. Watch the video *Silencing the Thunder* at:  
<http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/short-film-showcase/is-it-ok-to-kill-americas-wild-bison>
3. Review the National Park Service’s *Public Scoping Newsletter* on the development of a new bison management plan, found as a pdf at the bottom of the following webpage:  
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=111&projectID=50877&documentID=64791>  
Consider the following options that could be part of a new bison management plan:
  - End culling as a population control method.
  - Expand year-round bison habitat on state and federal lands.
  - Limit hazing of bison to confining them to designated habitat areas and to keeping them separated from livestock.
  - Authorize public hunting as a means to control the bison population, raise revenue, and honor treaty obligations to Native American tribes.
  - Raise the target bison population from 3,000 to 7,500.
4. Your group should prepare a 1–2 page position paper on the options and provide the class and instructor with copies. The paper should express your stakeholder’s position and concerns regarding each proposal. A spokesperson from each student group should prepare to deliver a brief policy statement in class, and each student should be prepared to participate in an open discussion of the pros and cons of the proposals. Remember to stay in character!
5. After the role-playing exercise and/or in-class discussion, each student should write a one-page reflection on what you learned from the activity.

### Resources

Listed below are links and position summaries of groups that represent your stakeholder interests and have taken public positions on the Yellowstone bison controversy. Your group may choose to represent your assigned stakeholder in general, or to assign specific organizations for individual students to research and represent.

Defenders of Wildlife: <http://www.defenders.org/>

Defenders of Wildlife has called for an end to the slaughter of Yellowstone bison as a management tool, and it supports the restoration of bison as a wildlife species in other suitable locations in Montana.

Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC): <http://www.nrdc.org/>

NRDC supports the restoration of bison as a native wildlife species that is not fenced, aggressively managed, or culled. Bison should be managed like other wildlife species by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Currently, the NRDC supports year round grazing in areas outside the park where bison are currently tolerated in winter and early spring, and it favors managed hunting to control the population.

Montana Wildlife Federation (MWF): <http://www.montanawildlife.com>

MWF supports the expansion of wild bison herds within the Greater Yellowstone Area. Bison should be restored as a free-ranging wildlife species. The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks should have exclusive authority to manage the bison population in the state through recreational “fair-chase hunting.”

National Wildlife Federation (NWF): <http://www.nwf.org/>

Through its Wildlife Conflict Resolution Program, the NWF has worked to secure winter habitat for Yellowstone bison by negotiating with ranchers to retire cattle grazing allotments on public lands adjacent to the park, totaling more than half a million acres in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem that could potentially be

opened to bison migration. The NWF also works to secure the transfer of brucellosis-free Yellowstone bison to Native American reservations.

Gallatin Wildlife Association (GWA): <http://gallatinwildlifeassociation.org/>

GWA is a regional conservation organization that represents hunters and anglers in southwest Montana. It seeks to establish year round populations of free-ranging bison in Montana that would be conserved and managed through public hunting, similar to elk. It opposes the current Interagency Bison Management Plan, which relies on hazing and slaughter to control the population.

Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GWC): <http://www.greateryellowstone.org/>

GWC supports opportunities for Yellowstone bison to roam freely on appropriate public and private lands within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. It also supports transferring surplus bison to other suitable habitats to mitigate the need for slaughter.

National Park Conservation Association (NPCA): <http://www.npca.org/>

NPCA supports the migration of Yellowstone bison into suitable habitat within Montana. It is working with the Gallatin National Forest to identify cattle grazing allotments for potential buyout and retirement. It favors the transfer of bison management authority away from the Montana Department of Livestock back to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, meaning that it favors the management of bison as wildlife rather than livestock. It supports the transfer of brucellosis-free bison to Native American reservations or other suitable locations in Montana.

Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS): <http://www.wcs.org/>

WCS is an international conservation group that identifies bison as a keystone species that is necessary for sustaining prairie ecosystems. It therefore advocates the restoration of wild free-roaming bison on a large scale in habitats across North America.

World Wildlife Fund (WWF): <http://www.worldwildlife.org/>

WWF is an international conservation organization whose long-term goal is the recovery of endangered and keystone species and natural processes within the Northern Great Plains. Consequently, it is focused on the large-scale restoration of wild bison, with the aim of establishing three to four herds that each consist of 5,000 or more animals. To achieve this goal, WWF is working with the American Prairie Foundation (APF) to establish a herd of bison on the American Prairie Reserve in northeast Montana.

Buffalo Field Campaign: <http://www.buffalofieldcampaign.org/>

The mission of the Buffalo Field Campaign 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. Volunteers spend all day, from sunrise until sunset, watching and documenting actions taken against the buffalo. Tactics range from video documentation to nonviolent civil disobedience. The group envisions a life for buffalo in which they thrive within the state of inherent wildness as expressed in the organization's "Buffalo Bill of Rights."

Tour Company Operator: [http://visitmt.com/listing/categories\\_NET/MoreInfo.aspx?IDRRRecordID=9367](http://visitmt.com/listing/categories_NET/MoreInfo.aspx?IDRRRecordID=9367)

Steve Brown owns Adventure Yellowstone Inc. in Bozeman, Montana. The company offers year-round tours of the park. It is one of many gateway community businesses that are dependent on park tourism for survival. Steve Brown opposes the current bison management plan: "killing these animals is senseless and outrageous. In terms of tourist dollars, they are worth hundreds of millions of dollars a year. In terms of the heritage of the American West, they are priceless."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Zuckerman, L. 2014, February 12. Montana livestock official favors hunting in Yellowstone. *Reuters*. Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/13/us-usa-yellowstone-bison-idUSBREA1C01Z20140213>.

## Handout for Native American Tribes

### Assignments

1. Read “Cauldron of Democracy: American Pluralism and the Fight over Yellowstone Bison.”
2. Watch the video *Silencing the Thunder* at:  
<http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/short-film-showcase/is-it-ok-to-kill-americas-wild-bison>
3. Review the National Park Service’s *Public Scoping Newsletter* on the development of a new bison management plan, found as a pdf at the bottom of the following webpage:  
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=111&projectID=50877&documentID=64791>  
Consider the following options that could be part of a new bison management plan:
  - End culling as a population control method.
  - Expand year-round bison habitat on state and federal lands.
  - Limit hazing of bison to confining them to designated habitat areas and to keeping them separated from livestock.
  - Authorize public hunting as a means to control the bison population, raise revenue, and honor treaty obligations to Native American tribes.
  - Raise the target bison population from 3,000 to 7,500.
4. Your group should prepare a 1–2 page position paper on the options and provide the class and instructor with copies. The paper should express your stakeholder’s position and concerns regarding each proposal. A spokesperson from each student group should prepare to deliver a brief policy statement in class, and each student should be prepared to participate in an open discussion of the pros and cons of the proposals. Remember to stay in character!
5. After the role-playing exercise and/or in-class discussion, each student should write a one-page reflection on what you learned from the activity.

### Resource

Listed below is the link and position summary of your stakeholder group.

Inter Tribal Buffalo Council (ITBC): <http://itbcbuffalo.com/>

ITBC is committed to reestablishing buffalo herds on tribal lands in a manner that promotes cultural enhancement, spiritual revitalization, ecological restoration, and economic development. The organization acts as a facilitator in coordinating education and training programs, developing marketing strategies, coordinating the transfer of surplus buffalo from national parks to tribal lands, and providing technical assistance to its membership in developing sound management plans that will help each tribal herd become a successful and self-sufficient operation. The ITBC represents the perspective of its 56 tribal members through its participation in the Interagency Bison Management Plan.

## Handout for Government Agencies

### Assignments

1. Read “Cauldron of Democracy: American Pluralism and the Fight over Yellowstone Bison.”
2. Watch the video *Silencing the Thunder* at:  
<http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/short-film-showcase/is-it-ok-to-kill-americas-wild-bison>
3. Review the National Park Service’s *Public Scoping Newsletter* on the development of a new bison management plan, found as a pdf at the bottom of the following webpage:  
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=111&projectID=50877&documentID=64791>  
Consider the following options that could be part of a new bison management plan:
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  - Authorize public hunting as a means to control the bison population, raise revenue, and honor treaty obligations to Native American tribes.
  - Raise the target bison population from 3,000 to 7,500.
4. Your group should prepare a 1–2 page position paper on the options and provide the class and instructor with copies. The paper should express your stakeholder’s position and concerns regarding each proposal. A spokesperson from each student group should prepare to deliver a brief policy statement in class, and each student should be prepared to participate in an open discussion of the pros and cons of the proposals. Remember to stay in character!
5. After the role-playing exercise and/or in-class discussion, each student should write a one-page reflection on what you learned from the activity.

### Resources

Listed below are links and position summaries of key government agencies. Each agency takes a distinct position on the bison issue and should be represented separately, with at least one student representing each. The group position paper and in-class policy statement should summarize the distinct positions of each government agency.

National Park Service (Yellowstone administration): <http://www.nps.gov/yell/index.htm>

The National Park Service’s legislative mandate is found in the 1916 Organic Act: “To conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”<sup>1</sup> The Park Service’s interpretation of this mandate has varied over time, most notably with the shift to minimal intervention, ecologically based “natural processes” management in the late 1960s. However, under the Interagency Bison Management Plan adopted in 2000, Yellowstone has attempted to compromise with ranching interests in Montana. While securing the right of bison to seek forage outside of the park in designated areas during winter and early spring, the park has agreed to limit the population to approximately 3,000–3,500, and in some years has facilitated the slaughter of hundreds of animals.

Montana Department of Livestock (DOL): <http://liv.mt.gov/default.mcp>

DOL is the state agency that represents Montana’s extensive cattle industry. As such, it shares many ranchers’ concerns about the potential spread of brucellosis from bison to cattle. Though historically the DOL favored a zero-tolerance policy toward bison outside of the park, as a partner in the Interagency Bison Management Plan it tolerates bison in designated areas during winter and early spring. However, when bison are found outside of designated areas or remain outside of the park after set dates, DOL officials either haze them back into the park

<sup>1</sup> National Park Service. Available at: <http://www.nps.gov/dena/upload/NPS%20Organic%20Act.pdf>.

or shoot them. The DOL opposes any further expansion of bison habitat or extension of grazing periods outside the park unless the park agrees to reduce the size of the herd. One top DOL official has advocated allowing hunting of bison inside the park.

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks: <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/>

The FWP is responsible for wildlife management within the state, including hunting. While it is a partner in managing Yellowstone bison outside of the park, in 1995 the state legislature transferred primary authority to the Department of Livestock. The Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks tends to be more of an advocate for expanding bison habit outside of the park and managing bison like other wildlife.