

**Montana Wildlife Federation
Greater Yellowstone Coalition
National Parks Conservation Association
National Wildlife Federation
Defenders of Wildlife
Bear Creek Council**

May 14, 2008

The Honorable Governor Brian D. Schweitzer
Office of the Governor
Montana State Capitol Building
P.O. Box 200801
Helena MT 59620-0801

Re: Call for an Immediate Stop to Bison Hazing and Killing

Dear Governor Schweitzer:

On behalf of the Montana Wildlife Federation, Greater Yellowstone Coalition, National Parks Conservation Association, National Wildlife Federation, Defenders of Wildlife and Bear Creek Council we want to thank you for your consistent leadership in the search for solutions to the ongoing bison management controversy. Most recently, we were greatly encouraged by your announcement that the state has finalized an agreement with the Royal Teton Ranch that will allow limited numbers of bison to roam north out of Yellowstone National Park in future winters.

We agree with the statements you made in your April 17th press conference acknowledging that the Royal Teton Ranch Agreement was a significant step, but a first step nonetheless, and that additional management changes need to be made to accomplish the dual goals of the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP).

Under the adaptive management provision of the IBMP, there are options immediately available to the IBMP partners that will both protect Montana's brucellosis-free status and end the current practice of unnecessarily hazing and killing bison. **In order to immediately end the hazing and killing of Yellowstone's bison, we call on you to convene an emergency meeting of the IBMP partners to consider and, using the adaptive management clause, adopt emergency provisions that will immediately end the hazing this year.**

As you have consistently stated for several years, simply hazing and killing bison year after year expecting an improved result makes no sense. There is nothing more senseless than the mass wasting of this unique wildlife resource. This year, more than 1,700 bison

have been killed or removed from the Yellowstone herd—shattering all previous slaughter records. This is a tragic loss for America's largest, genetically pure bison population. At this time, every effort must be made to ensure that the estimated remaining 2,100 bison are provided tolerance and flexibility outside the park. We cannot afford to lose any more bison and hazing will negatively impact a herd already weak from a long, challenging winter.

There are currently 370 bison grazing on the western boundary of the park and on Horse Butte. The IBMP partners announced yesterday its intention to begin hazing these bison back into the park. This announcement is extraordinary given that there are no cattle on Horse Butte at any time of the year and because local residents welcome bison on the Butte.

Two significant changes have occurred on Horse Butte since the IBMP was signed in 2000 – the conservation community raised necessary funds to retire the Horse Butte grazing allotment and the Munns Ranch was sold to owners who publicly stated that cattle grazing will not continue and expressed their desire for bison to use the property. These voluntary efforts opened the door for more flexibility and tolerance for bison, yet the IBMP partners have refused to change the IBMP to recognize the changed circumstances. Instead of adapting to the changes, the IBMP partners are once again hazing bison back into the park. This is most unfortunate and unnecessary.

This situation once again calls upon your leadership to work to achieve a sensible solution this season that will allow the bison using Horse Butte to remain there. **While there are private properties and public grazing allotments in the Hebgen Basin that will have cattle later this summer, the landscape is such that the IBMP partners can provide bison tolerance in the Hebgen Basin without risking interaction with cattle. Bison tolerance can and should be provided south of Duck Creek and the Grayling Arm of Hebgen Lake; east of Hebgen Lake and the South Fork of the Madison River; and north of Route 20.** This tolerance should continue until bison naturally return to the park as the snow melts and the grass greens.

Once we get through the immediate crisis, we call on you to commit to significant long-term change in the IBMP utilizing the adaptive management provision provided within the plan. Real, practical solutions exist that will respect Montana's wildlife and don't impact the long-term health and viability of Montana's livestock industry. For example, bison should be tolerated in places – like Horse Butte – where no conflicts with cattle exist.

Along with you, we have been calling for change in bison management, but none seems to be coming anytime soon without your leadership. We stand by ready to work with you and your staff to do everything we can to help you lead the IBMP partners to real solutions for both our livestock industry and the Yellowstone bison herd.

We would be happy to sit down with you or your staff to craft both immediate and long-term solutions for bison.

Respectfully,

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