



Buffalo Field Campaign

West Yellowstone, Montana
Working in the field every day to stop the
slaughter of Yellowstone's wild free roaming buffalo

Total Yellowstone
Buffalo Killed
Since 1985
7,857
(past counts)

About Buffalo	About BFC	FAQ	Support the Buffalo	Media	Legislative	Science	Legal
---------------	-----------	-----	---------------------	-------	-------------	---------	-------

[Home](#)

About Buffalo

[Yellowstone Buffalo History](#)

[Buffalo & Native Americans](#)

[Yellowstone Buffalo Slaughter History](#)

[Buffalo Bill of Rights](#)

[Buffalo & Brucellosis](#)

[Interagency Bison Management Plan](#)

[Wild Buffalo vs. Domestic Buffalo](#)

[Buffalo or Bison?](#)

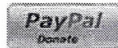
[Links](#)

[Maps](#)

[Solutions to the Slaughter](#)

[Buffalo Conservation Bibliography](#)

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Yellowstone Buffalo History

The Yellowstone herd is both genetically and behaviorally unique, being the only herd with continuously wild ancestry from the days when 50 million buffalo migrated freely across the Great Plains. At the end of the 19th century, after tens of millions had been slaughtered, only 23 wild buffalo survived. Taking refuge in Yellowstone's remote Pelican Valley, this remnant herd ensured the survival of the species in the wild. Today there are a little more than 3,000 buffalo living in and around Yellowstone, comprising America's only free-roaming and unfenced population.

See News Article [8/11/01- Ancient bones, future solutions, Archaeologist theorizes that bison may have had a greater presence in valley than previously thought](#)

More on "About Bison" at the [University of Michigan Museum of Zoology Bison page](#)

Yellowstone Valley and the Great Flood

"I have heard it told on the Cheyenne Reservation in Montana and the Seminole camps in the Florida Everglades, I have heard it from the Eskimos north of the Arctic Circle and the Indians south of the equator. The legend of the flood is the most universal of all legends. It is told in Asia, Africa, and Europe, in North America and the South Pacific."

Professor Hap Gilliland of Eastern Montana College was the first to record this legend of the great flood. This is one of the fifteen legends of the flood that he himself recorded in various parts of the world:

He was an old Indian. His face was weather beaten, but his eyes were still bright. I never knew what tribe he was from, though I could guess. Yet others from the tribe whom I talked to later had never heard his story.

We had been talking of the visions of the young men. He sat for a long time, looking out across the Yellowstone Valley through the pouring rain, before he spoke. "They are beginning to come back," he said.

"Who is coming back?" I asked.

"The animals," he said. "It has happened before."

"Tell me about it."

He thought for a long while before he lifted his hands and his eyes. "The Great Spirit smiled on this land when he made it. There were mountains and plains, forests and grasslands. There were animals of many kinds--and men."

The old man's hands moved smoothly, telling the story more clearly than his voice.

The Great Spirit told the people, "These animals are your brothers. Share the land with them. They will give you food and clothing. Live with them and protect them.

"Protect especially the buffalo, for the buffalo will give you food and shelter. The hide of the buffalo will keep you from the cold, from the heat, and from the rain. As long as you have the buffalo, you will never need to suffer."

For many winters the people lived at peace with the animals and with the land. When they killed a buffalo, they thanked the Great Spirit, and they used every part of the buffalo. It took care of every need.

Then other people came. They did not think of the animals as brothers. They killed, even when they did not need food. They burned and cut the forests, and the animals died. They shot the buffalo and called it sport. They killed the fish in the streams.

When the Great Spirit looked down, he was sad. He let the smoke of the fires lie in the valleys. The people coughed and choked. But still they burned and they killed.

So the Great Spirit sent rains to put out the fires and to destroy the people.

The rains fell, and the waters rose. The people moved from the flooded valleys to the higher land. Spotted Bear, the medicine man, gathered together his people. He said to them, "The Great Spirit has told us that as long as we have the buffalo we will be safe from heat and cold and rain. But there are no longer any buffalo. Unless we can find buffalo and live at peace with nature, we will all die."

Still the rains fell, and the waters rose. The people moved from the flooded plains to the hills. The young men went out and hunted for the buffalo. As they went they put out the fires. They made friends with the animals once more. They cleaned out the streams.

Still the rains fell, and the waters rose. The people moved from the flooded hills to the mountains. Two young

men came to Spotted Bear. "We have found the buffalo," they said.

"There was a cow, a calf, and a great white bull. The cow and the calf climbed up to the safety of the mountains. They should be back when the rain stops. But the bank gave way, and the bull was swept away by the floodwaters. We followed and got him to shore, but he had drowned. We have brought you his hide."

They unfolded a huge white buffalo skin.

Spotted Bear took the white buffalo hide. "Many people have been drowned," he said. "Our food has been carried away. But our young people are no longer destroying the world that was created for them. They have found the white buffalo. It will save those who are left."

Still the rains fell, and the waters rose. The people moved from the flooded mountains to the highest peaks.

Spotted Bear spread the white buffalo skin on the ground. He and the other medicine men scraped it and stretched it, and scraped it and stretched it.

Still the rains fell. Like all rawhide, the buffalo skin stretched when it was wet. Spotted Bear stretched it out over the village. All the people who were left crowded under it.

As the rains fell, the medicine men stretched the buffalo skin across the mountains. Each day they stretched it farther.

Then Spotted Bear tied one corner to the top of the Big Horn Mountains. That side, he fastened to the Pryors. The next corner he tied to the Bear Tooth Mountains. Crossing the Yellowstone Valley, he tied one corner to the Crazy Mountains, and the other to Signal Butte in the Bull Mountains.

The whole Yellowstone Valley was covered by the white buffalo skin. Though the rains still fell above, it did not fall in the Yellowstone Valley.

The waters sank away. Animals from the outside moved into the valley, under the white buffalo skin. The people shared the valley with them.

Still the rains fell above the buffalo skin. The skin stretched and began to sag.

Spotted Bear stood on the Bridger Mountains and raised the west end of the buffalo skin to catch the West Wind. The West Wind rushed in and was caught under the buffalo skin. The wind lifted the skin until it formed a great dome over the valley.

The Great Spirit saw that the people were living at peace with the earth. The rains stopped, and the sun shone. As the sun shone on the white buffalo skin, it gleamed with colours of red and yellow and blue.

As the sun shone on the rawhide, it began to shrink. The ends of the dome shrank away until all that was left was one great arch across the valley.

The old man's voice faded away; but his hands said "Look," and his arms moved toward the valley.

The rain had stopped and a rainbow arched across the Yellowstone Valley. A buffalo calf and its mother grazed beneath it.

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About Buffalo	About BFC	FAQ	Support the Buffalo	Media	Legislative	Science	Legal
-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------	-------------------------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------------	-------------------------	-----------------------

[Home](#)

Yellowstone Buffalo Slaughter History

About Buffalo

More wild buffalo have been slaughtered in America in the past ten years than at any time in the last century. Capitalizing on the Indian's complete dependence upon the buffalo, 19th century government leaders launched a campaign to wipe them out, and in so doing, force the Indians into a sedentary lifestyle more in line with the prevailing European notions of private property and "civilization." Secretary of Interior Columbus Delano made the following remarks in 1873, a year after Yellowstone National Park was established:

[Yellowstone Buffalo History](#)

[Buffalo & Native Americans](#)

[Yellowstone Buffalo Slaughter History](#)

[Buffalo Bill of Rights](#)

[Buffalo & Brucellosis](#)

[Interagency Bison Management Plan](#)

[Wild Buffalo vs. Domestic Buffalo](#)

[Buffalo or Bison?](#)

[Links](#)

[Maps](#)

[Solutions to the Slaughter](#)

[Buffalo Conservation Bibliography](#)

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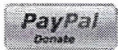
The civilization of the Indian is impossible while the buffalo remains upon the plains. I would not seriously regret the total disappearance of the buffalo from our western prairies, in its effect upon the Indians, regarding it as a means of hastening their sense of dependence upon the products of the soil and their own labors.

--Annual Report of the Department of the Interior

Not only did the whites view the survival of buffalo as a means of perpetuating Native American life ways, they saw the buffalo as being incompatible with their dream of a Great Plains cattle culture. It was a simple matter of competition; as long as buffalo remained wild, they would out-compete the cattle for forage and stand as a living reminder to the uncivilized nature of the pre-conquest West. These undercurrents come to the surface in the following speech against a bill which would have made it illegal for whites to kill buffalo.

The argument, made by U.S. Representative Conger, was delivered in 1874:

There is no law that Congress can pass that will prevent the buffalo from disappearing before the march of civilization. There is no law which human hands can write, there is no law which a Congress of men can enact, that will stay the disappearance of these wild animals before civilization. They eat the grass. They trample upon the plains upon which our settlers desire to herd their cattle and their sheep. They range over the very pastures where the settlers keep their herds of cattle. They destroy the pasture. They are as uncivilized as the Indian." 1874, U.S. Representative Conger.



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These attitudes remain strong even today. The influence of the cattle baron is heard loud and clear while the Native American voice falls on deaf ears. To the western livestock industry, cattle represent an economic interest and way of life, albeit barely a hundred years old. To Native Americans the buffalo represent the essence of their social, cultural, and spiritual identity and a relationship tens of thousands of years old. That the tribes haven't been allowed at the table where the ranchers, land managers, and politicians decide the fate of the buffalo reflects both the lack of wisdom and the utter disrespect of those in charge. No one has a closer relationship to the buffalo than the Native American. Why are the tribes being left out? Winona LaDuke, in an article printed last year in Indian Country Today, raises the same question:

Absent are the people who actually know the buffalo: the Nez Perce, Blackfeet and Crow, and others whose treaties encompass part of Yellowstone National Park, or the Winnebago, Ho Chunk, Lakota, Anishinabe, Kiowa, Gros Ventre, Cheyenne, Shoshone Bannock and others, whose spiritual practices, cultural practices, languages and lives are entirely intertwined with buffalo. To us, the buffalo is the Western Doorkeeper, the Elder Brother, the Great One.

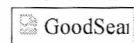
Not only is the tribal voice being ignored-- but as the actions of policy makers and Montana Law Enforcement Officers attest-- the religion and culture of those who consider the buffalo sacred are being willfully violated. The actions of Montana's Department of Livestock are in the same vein as the actions of their predecessors: the buffalo hunters and Army officers who perpetrated the slaughter in the 1870s. According to Lakota leader Joseph Chasing Horse, "When the U.S. government slaughtered the buffalo as a way to subjugate Indian people, they put into motion an imbalance in the ecosystem that continues today."

On March 7, 1997, during a winter when 1,084 buffalo were killed, American Indian tribal leaders from around the country gathered near Gardiner, Montana, to hold a day of prayer for the buffalo. The ceremony was disrupted by the echo of gunshots. Lakota elder Rosalie Little Thunder left the prayer circle to investigate the shots. Less than two miles away, Department of Livestock agents had killed fourteen buffalo. Walking across a field to pray over the bodies, she was arrested and charged with criminal trespass. To Little Thunder and other tribal members present there was no question of coincidence: "They shot the buffalo because we were at that place on that day at that time," she said.

Yellowstone Buffalo Slaughter Counts	
Detailed Bison Slaughter & Capture Charts 2001-2004	
Yellowstone Bison Slaughter History 1901-2000 (pdf 768kb)	
Winter	Total
2014/2015	30
2013/2014	653
2012/2013	256
2011/2012	33
2010/2011	230
2009/2010	7
2008/2009	22
2007/2008	1,631

2006/2007	67
2005/2006	1,016
2004/2005	101
2003/2004	281
2002/2003	246
2001/2002	202
2000/2001	6
1999/2000	0
1998/1999	94
1997/1998	11
1996/1997	1,084
1995/1996	433
1994/1995	427
1993/1994	5
1992/1993	79
1991/1992	271
1990/1991	14
1989/1990	4
1988/1989	569
1987/1988	35
1986/1987	6
1985/1986	57
Total:	7872

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 (past counts)

About Buffalo	About BFC	FAQ	Support the Buffalo	Media	Legislative	Science	Legal
-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------	-------------------------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------------	-------------------------	-----------------------

- [Home](#)
- [About Buffalo](#)
- [Yellowstone Buffalo History](#)
- [Buffalo & Native Americans](#)
- [Yellowstone Buffalo Slaughter History](#)
- [Buffalo Bill of Rights](#)
- [Buffalo & Brucellosis](#)
- [Interagency Bison Management Plan](#)
- [Wild Buffalo vs. Domestic Buffalo](#)
- [Buffalo or Bison?](#)
- [Links](#)
- [Maps](#)
- [Solutions to the Slaughter](#)
- [Buffalo Conservation Bibliography](#)
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Interagency Bison Management Plan Downloadable Documents Relevant to the Interagency Bison Management Plan [Interagency Bison Management Document Repository](#)

- * References to neuter, contraceptive and birth control found in the Record of Decision and Final Environmental Impact Statement and Bison Management Plan for the State of Montana and Yellowstone National Park 2000. (pp 20-21) ([Word Document, 62 KB, 16 pages](#))
- * Summary of the Modified Preferred Alternative for the Interagency Bison Management Plan, December, 1999 ([PDF, 36 KB, 2 pages](#))
- * Cost Benefit Analysis of the Risk of Brucellosis Transmission from Bison to Cattle ([PDF, 876kb, 44 pages](#))
- * Executive Summary of the Environmental Impact Statement for the Interagency Bison Management Plan, ([PDF, 40.2 MB, 83 pages](#))
- * Volume I of the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Interagency Bison Management Plan ([PDF, 123.57 MB, pages](#))
- * Volume II of the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Interagency Bison Management Plan ([PDF, 15.6 MB, 511 pages](#))
- * Volume III of the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Interagency Bison Management Plan ([PDF, 60.1 MB, pages](#))
- * Statements on the Royal Teton Ranch in the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Interagency Bison Management Plan ([PDF, 100 KB, 5 pages](#))
- * The Legal Authority and Roles for Each Agency in the Interagency Bison Management Plan ([PDF, 120 KB, 9 pages](#))
- * 2007 Operating Procedures for Implementing the Interagency Bison Management Plan ([PDF, 1,020 KB, 12 pages](#))
- * Federal Record of Decision for the Interagency Bison Management Plan ([PDF, 808 KB, 75 pages](#))
- * State of Montana Record of Decision for the Interagency Bison Management Plan ([PDF, 52 KB, 8 pages](#))
- * Five Year Agency Review of the Interagency Bison Management Plan ([PDF, 272 KB, 50 pages](#))
- * Statements on the Royal Teton Ranch in the Record of Decision for the Interagency Bison Management Plan ([PDF, 108 KB, 5 pages](#))

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				Legislative	Science
					Legal
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7,854
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About Buffalo	About BFC	FAQ	Support the Buffalo	Media	Legislative	Science	Legal
-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------	-------------------------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------------	-------------------------	-----------------------

[Home](#)

Brucellosis in Wild Bison Fact Sheet

See also [About Buffalo](#) > [Brucellosis & Buffalo](#)

[Home](#) > [Factsheets](#) >

Science

[Brucellosis Myth](#)

[Brucellosis Fact Sheet](#)

[Brucellosis & Bioterror](#)

[Brucellosis Eradication Program](#)

[Brucellosis in Idaho & Wyoming](#)

[Genetic Diversity](#)

[Greater Yellowstone Interagency](#)

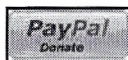
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[Overpopulation Fact Sheet](#)

[Carfentanil-Immobilizing Bison](#)

[Vaccination Program](#)

[Horse Butte Wildlands Protection Project](#)



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Summary: Brucellosis was first detected in the Yellowstone Buffalo herd in 1917. The buffalo were exposed to brucellosis by domestic cattle that were grazed in the park and held in confinement with buffalo. Brucellosis is most commonly transmitted among and between species through ingestion of infected birthing materials. Yellowstone buffalo developed a natural immune response to brucellosis and do not typically suffer from the disease. It is believed that many buffalo may also have a genetic immunity to brucellosis. Failed pregnancies, the most common symptom of brucellosis, are relatively unknown in Yellowstone buffalo. The most likely mode of exposure among buffalo is ingestion of small amounts of bacteria from newborn live calves. Essentially, the buffalo in Yellowstone are vaccinating themselves for brucellosis, developing an immune response, and clearing the bacteria. There has never been a documented case of brucellosis transmission between buffalo and domestic cattle under natural conditions. In Grand Teton National Park, where vaccinated cattle and brucellosis exposed buffalo have been commingling for decades, no transmission has ever occurred. The chances of transmission between wild buffalo and vaccinated domestic cattle have been characterized as "very low".

Issues: A number of factors including the incidence and transmissibility of brucellosis in buffalo, the distribution of cattle in the Greater Yellowstone Area, and the regulatory structure in place for brucellosis relate to the current situation that has led to the death of nearly 4,000 buffalo since 1985.

1. Testing methods: There are currently two methods to test buffalo for brucellosis exposure and infection; serology and culture. Serologic testing involves drawing blood from live animals to determine if long-term antibodies for brucellosis are present. Buffalo that test positive are considered infected and sent to slaughter. Approximately 45 percent of Yellowstone buffalo test sero-positive on the CARD test, the one most commonly used by the agencies. Culture testing involves tissue sampling from slaughtered buffalo to determine if actual bacteria are present. Culture testing is considered to be the "gold standard" in determining infection. Drastic differences between sero-positive and culture positive buffalo indicate that many buffalo are being slaughtered simply because they have developed immunity to brucellosis and are not actually infected. A combination of test results indicate that only between 2 and 20 percent of buffalo actually have brucellosis bacteria in their bodies at any given time.

2. Transmissibility: The most likely method of transmission between species is ingestion of infected birthing materials from an aborted fetus. Buffalo bulls, calves, yearlings and non-pregnant females do not pose a significant risk of shedding infected materials in the environment. When a female buffalo is infected with brucellosis, she will pass the bacteria in her first pregnancy. After the first calving, the uterus will "superprotect" itself from brucellosis preventing infected material from being shed in subsequent calving even if she is re-exposed. Therefore, only pregnant female buffalo in the first calving cycle after exposure have the possibility of shedding infected material in the environment. Brucellosis related abortions, even among infected females, are extremely rare in Yellowstone buffalo. Given the very small segment of the population that can even potentially transmit brucellosis combined with the low probability of transmission occurring in natural settings, the real chances of brucellosis transmission are extremely low. Additionally, brucellosis bacteria will not survive in warm weather and direct exposure to sunlight, and the activity of predators/scavengers all but guarantee that fetuses or infected birthing material will not persist in the environment beyond mid-May.

3. Distribution of Cattle: Relatively few cattle graze in the GYA at any time of the year, particularly in the winter and spring months when transmission is even a possibility. In the Western Boundary Area, no cattle are present within 45 miles of Yellowstone National Park in winter and spring. Cattle are typically only in the area between mid-June and mid-October, a period when there is no possibility of brucellosis transmission. The vast majority of cattle that graze in the summer in the Western Boundary Area are imported from Idaho and are already subjected to brucellosis vaccination and testing. In the Northern Boundary Area, there are never any cattle on the west side of the Yellowstone River between Gardiner and Yankee Jim Canyon. One producer grazes about 25 cows on the east side of the Yellowstone River approximately 4 miles north of Gardiner on Rt. 89. This same producer brings his cattle to private land adjacent to the Eagle Creek Special Management Area in the spring months. Untested buffalo are allowed to be in the Eagle Creek SMA as well and no transmission of brucellosis has ever occurred. One additional producer grazes cattle on the east side of Yellowstone River north of Gardiner. Both of these ranchers have publically stated that they

welcome wild bison on their properties and are not concerned about a brucellosis transmission.

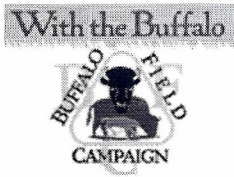
4. Regulatory issues: Montana is currently certified brucellosis class free. Class free status allows producers to transport reproductive cattle across state lines without brucellosis testing. The United States is not certified brucellosis free by the OIE, the international regulatory body. Therefore, brucellosis testing is required to transport reproductive cattle across international boundaries. In order for the US to be certified brucellosis free by the OIE, no livestock in the country can have been vaccinated for three years.

Conclusion: Only a relatively small percentage of Yellowstone buffalo are actually infected with brucellosis. Brucellosis does not have any significant impact on the health of the Yellowstone buffalo. The risk of transmission from wild buffalo to cattle is infinitesimally low. Relatively few susceptible cattle graze in the GYA and most are not present when transmission is even a possibility. Herd management plans that adjust stocking dates could be developed to insure that transmission does not occur. Montana can easily comply with the National Brucellosis Eradication Program to insure that brucellosis class free status is preserved. The GYA could be exempted from the OIE certification process and allow the rest of the country to enjoy international brucellosis free status. Montana can develop risk management strategies for domestic cattle to allow for wild, free roaming population of buffalo in GYA and beyond.

[Top of page](#)

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			Legislative	Science	Legal
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Total Yellowstone Buffalo Killed Since 1985
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(past counts)

About Buffalo	About BFC	FAQ	Support the Buffalo	Media	Legislative	Science	Le
-------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------	-------------------------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------------	-------------------------	--------------------

[Home](#)

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[Solutions](#)

About Buffalo

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[Yellowstone Buffalo History](#)

[Buffalo & Native Americans](#)

[Yellowstone Buffalo Slaughter History](#)

[Buffalo Bill of Rights](#)

[Buffalo & Brucellosis](#)

[Interagency Bison Management Plan](#)

[Wild Buffalo vs. Domestic Buffalo](#)

[Buffalo or Bison?](#)

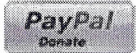
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Short Term:

Buffalo must be recognized in Montana as a valued and recovered native wildlife species.

Trained wildlife professionals without conflict of interest should manage wild buffalo; they should not be managed by the state livestock agency.

Buffalo must be given full access to all suitable habitat in Montana within the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA) at all times of the year.

The Montana Department of Livestock must develop brucellosis-proof management plans for all domestic cattle that continue to graze in the GYA including the provision of wildlife proof fencing if necessary.

Governor Schweitzer, together with the governors of Idaho and Wyoming, must petition USDA-APHIS to modify the federal brucellosis classification system to allow more flexible management of wildlife and cattle in the GYA.

Ranchers outside of the GYA should not be threatened because those within the area choose to raise susceptible cattle near brucellosis-exposed wildlife without taking adequate precaution.

Native American tribes – especially those with a cultural, historical, and spiritual connection to the buffalo – must be included in all decisions relating to the management and recovery efforts of wild buffalo in Montana.

LONG TERM:

State and Federal authorities should develop an effective vaccine against brucellosis for cattle and mandate use within the GYA.

Public lands currently designated for livestock grazing should be reclassified to give priority to native wildlife species, including wild buffalo.

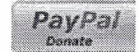
The current property tax structure in Montana encourages livestock production by providing tax breaks for agricultural use. Landowners who allow wild buffalo to access their land should be provided with similar incentives through the Habitat Montana program.

Underpass or overpass systems that allow wildlife to cross roads and highways should be developed to lessen the chance of collisions with automobiles.

Wildlife migration corridors must be created through a process of creative cooperation between public land managers and private landowners, to allow wild buffalo and other migratory species to migrate within the GYA, and eventually, outside of the region.

The difficult controversy over buffalo management today is a direct result of the transmission of brucellosis from domestic cattle housed within Yellowstone National Park to the native wild buffalo at the turn of the last century. Livestock producers and public administrators should ensure that cattle will not transmit diseases to native flora and fauna.

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