**JULIA PAGE, Gardiner resident for 27 years and Northern Plains Resource Council and Bear Creek Council Board Member**

Sold rafting business one year ago, Northern Plains Resource Council board member, local affiliate is Bear Creek Council. Mission statement: We organize Montana citizens to protect clean air and water, family farms and ranches and unique quality of life…involved in bison management.

Our engagement with the bison issue and I’m very lucky that current president is Carolyn Duckworth work in park, good writer, naturalist and very interested in bison issues.

We started in 1997 so a while ago when the EIS (environmental impact statement) was being finalized, that seemed to take forever. Sometimes you don’t like the management plan that comes out of it…very much an ongoing issue. Decided as a group work on the (fact that) bison are wildlife and should be managed by appropriate wildlife agencies and because of that we want to get more winter range for the bison, that seems to be one of the key things. We also wanted to send good information about brucellosis and advocate non-lethal means of preserving bison. That bison mission statement of free-ranging animals managed by a wildlife agency has stayed the same for over 10 years now and it guides us. When we look at the options that come up in bison management and stuff, we’ll go back to this and see if a question being posed to the group fits in that position statement. As simple as that position statement is, it’s really telling because one of the biggest issues is the bison going to be allowed to roam anywhere out of the park. We certainly feel there are thousands of acres here on the north side where bison could roam and pose no threat to cattle because there aren’t many cattle out here.

Brucellosis there’s been tons of misinformation about brucellosis and some of it’s starting to fade away. Ungulent fever is a threat to humans remains, but it is much better understood that we know now, vets and people in the field know to look out for it. If they expect they’ve been exposed to the materials that are going to expose them to brucellosis you can be treated. You don’t need to get ungulent fever and keep it forever. Those kind of things can be managed better. Ten years ago it was cast as this huge danger to people. I don’t think that’s accurate so we’ve tried to counter that. These lone bull bison that come out of the park are subject to management action and hazing. The lone bull bison is not going to speed brucellosis. That remains as an issue. I don’t understand what drives the Department of Livestock, but they still seem attracted to these lone bull bison and let’s manage them and let’s get them back in the park where they belong and they pose no threat.

As a local person, for example, I own a really nice piece of land about five miles outside of town on the river and I got a call from neighbor – I don’t have a house on it now – and I got a call from my neighbor this winter. Hey Julia, I thought you’d be interested; the Department of Livestock is out there trying to haze a bull off your land. I jumped in my car and went out there. There were two guys on horseback plus a state vet and the guy who’s the head of the board of livestock, who’s a citizen, who is actually a Northern Plains member so I know him. He called me right after Bill called me. I so oh Christian, I’m so glad you let me know, I’ll be right out. There as a private land owner you go out but as engaged in this issue, it was pretty much entertaining all the way around because the Buffalo Field Campaign was there. Mike Meese was there. Hey Julia, do you need any help? Don’t let them intimidate you. I said no, Mike, I know Christian McKay, he’s a good guy. Guys…I say, what kind of rights do I have here Christian, do I have to let you guys herd this bull off my property? What are you doing? Why are you doing this? So we had a conversation.

After a while, the guys on horseback stomped off, they could see they weren’t going to have a role here any longer. I think they had their trailer somewhere else. They went up that road and went away. The bull’s wringing his tail and mad down in a corner. It’s funny, what the Department of Livestock told me, among other things, is they were worried about wildlife on the road. I said you’re kidding me. There’s one slow bull bison by the river. This was during a period when we were routinely driving back and forth to Livingston. I’m not sure what it was, but they were all over the road for a couple week period…One slow bull bison – and they are dark, they are hard to see, you have to look very carefully – you need to make note when you see a bison out. I said we deal with the bison on the road all the time so what are you guys doing down here with the president of the board of livestock and the state vet and a couple guys on horseback and you’re herding this one bull who doesn’t want to go – I rather cynically said – across the river so you can capture him and kill him? This is part. This incident is a funny one and it happened to me. This is a part of why we’re active. I would say as people living in this community we see things happening because we’re close to it. Many of our members work for the park service, and because we care. At my house, I look across at the park so I can see bison. Early in the year it’s kind of nice to see bison from you house, it’s really great. Then when they started capturing them, and most you knew were going to go to slaughter, it was a little depressing. Here comes this wildlife, see them walking out there, absolutely beautiful, and they’re being smart coming out looking for food and you know they’re going to get caught and sent to slaughter under a management plan, that in that respect makes no sense. That is part of what motivates us here, a big part.

(20:49) Later on, this winter when they had killed so many bison and the numbers killed were starting to be significant enough, they stopped shipping them off to slaughter. For a period of about a month there were bison all over. It was pretty wild. I live right here in town. I had a bison in my yard. I have a 40 by 100 foot lot. My house sits on part of it. I have a little shed and driveway. So a bull bison takes up a really large percentage of the rest of your lot, believe me. A bull bison in your backyard is something to pay attention to; you can’t just waltz out there. Sometimes I went out the front door and not the back door (21:49) because the bull was right there. But it was really neat because for that little moment in time, it came about because of an extreme situation, but little moment in time, the bison were allowed to roam much more as wildlife. They would watch and not let them go beyond. They tried to keep them off the Church Universal and Triumphant didn’t really welcome them. Two escapees got all the way through Yankee Jim’s Canyon. They did kill those.

I was driving to town one day and there’s a big bison plop in the middle of the road and I’m thinking what’s it doing down here. They’d just been moving. Every night they’re coming out of the park and moving. During the day they’d get hazed back in. But it was kind of fun to have buffalo around and see them and see them more as wildlife. Of course it was in the turmoil. They couldn’t and they’re not going to let them go down forever. Our experience is so tied with seeing these animals and that I think is really the basic thing. We’re an entirely volunteer organization, so actually trying to influence what foes on here is partly influenced by our ability to go to meetings to read voluminous reports and comment on them. In the past we’ve done quite a bit of that. We’ve had a committee that’s worked on things and you detail out. There’s one member, Dave Bell, he’s very good at reading reports and making something out of them. Carolyn’s also good at that. We all have different skills. We have one member that’s much more motivated to be in the field like the Buffalo Field Campaign. We sponsor him to the extent we compensate him for some of his gas in the winter. What he does is follow bison around all day and help the field campaign look at things. That is really helpful, early 2000, 2002 time frame, George did a lot of talking with individual land owners, talking to them, people who had livestock, horses mostly, are you having trouble with your fences? Can we help you understand how to deal with bison when they come by? Some people live up on the Jardine Road, which is over here. Jardine is a suburb of Gardiner, five miles up a dirt road. Bison routinely. It’s one of their corridors they travel Yellowstone River…travel through there and there’s some issues with fences and George was trying to see if he could help them with a specific issue with a fence…Just trying to talk to people, these are wildlife, they’re different, they’re big, if they get pushed, certainly they will go through fences. Sometimes they go through fences, otherwise if they’re in a hurry they can go through any fence without jumping over it and that has happened at times. That’s been an issue when the Department of Livestock came and herded them off your place and the animals go through a fence because they were rushed, because they were pushed. We don’t like that so we try and work with the community to make those things not as onerous on the land owner because it’s always back on the wildlife. In this case it’s the bison. When bad encounters happen, wildlife are seen as the perpetrators.

**(Charlie)** Do you receive any kind of compensation for broken down fences because other organizations drive the bison back?

**(Julia)** I’m not sure. It hasn’t happened to me. My fences are up. I know Greater Yellowstone Coalition was thinking of doing some small grant-type thing to help with fences. I don’t know if they still are. But it’s annoying when the department comes on and pushes bison through your fence. If you as a land owner, I know of another, Hank Graff, said we don’t want you to do that and if it happens anyway then well, darn, why’d you do that. It’s a hard thing. Chartered Yellowstone Association buses for the day. Members get in, sign up. Want to do the capture facility at Stephen’s Creek and Rick Wallin, I think it was, met us there. Talked to us about the facility, talked to us a lot about how much they’ve learned for instance in managing bison, how quiet you need to be. The animals do not react well to being pushed, they don’t react well it seems to me, especially when they’re confined, to seeing people. They’ve been learning more quietly they can go about moving them and managing them, the better it is, it works better to move and they’re less riled up. They don’t do well in the confined spaces, hook each other with horns and do damage…It was really interesting getting to see these facilities and walking around. These weren’t bison in there at the time and then we drove over to the quarantine facility and got a tour. Whole issue of the quarantine, whole protocol, what they’re doing there, we don’t like it much. I think we’ve not taken a position either in favor or opposed to the quarantine, we’ve said we don’t like what’s going on there but it’s perhaps a way of working through these protocols to better understand the disease and how it manifests itself. All animals go out there, test negative and keep them through at least one calving cycle. I think part of the theory is to see if the stress of having the calf, does the disease come out and manifest itself then we need more and better science in this whole issue. In that sense we support what’s going on there. There are some problems with it. But it was great to actually go talk to the guys managing that facility and to hear from them and for us who have all these questions to go there. There’s no substitution for getting on the ground and talking with the guys who are managing.

Don’t have as direct ties to cattle procedures in Paradise Valley…brucellosis status Bridge Herd had a relationship Bruce Malcolm herd. We don’t go and talk to Bruce Malcolm and that is something perhaps a weakness in our coming about issue. Have a member Hank…who has cattle. He’s a surveyor to support his cattle…Gov. threw out suggestion let’s get rid of all cattle.

Talking about management plan, the parks service buying out Church Universal and Triumphant leases.

If making that agreement gets up to move forward and opens that management plan up there’s step, stuck on one, need to get to 3. Government split state status, 2 separate management zones, Cattleman’s Association supported. Livestock Growers opposed. Government let it drop.

Talking about brucellosis incidences led to Montana losing its brucellosis free status. Korentje cattle from Mexico.

7 infected cattle in Bridger. Only kept samples from one of the animals. They just slaughtered (37:18) but didn’t take tissue samples. Why wasn’t Animal and Plant Health Services all over it?

-Do you suspect conspiracy?

**Julia-** I’m not much of a conspiracy theorist nut incompetence. I mean, that’s stupid. This is a big, very serious incident. Why did they mishandle that? That’s stupid.

Other guy had only one cow. Interestingly had a management plan for his herd. This is one of the ways try to be proactive on the disease. Bison don’t get down there.

Escapes almost made it out. It’s sad I almost have this thinking, “Free Willie,” bison get away. They’re just too big and that’s not going to happen right now. They got shot.

Not sure what caused it, had herd plan been vaccinated… That’s not bad, he’s managing his herd for the disease and he still got it.

Discussing elk connection…changes dynamics and politics of whole thing when you start including elk in the discussion.

questions she has for ranchers. What do they mean by devastating?

Northern Plains members are a little nervous around us, they’re not nervous, that’s the wrong way to say that. They don’t agree with us on our desire to see buffalo, bison as free ranging wildlife. We’re undeterred. We want to see buffalo as free-ranging wildlife and that remains our goal.

media and legislature interaction, talk to governor’s office.

-Legislator support-

No

-How hard do you go lobby?

You know it’s only so much fun to go bang your herd against a brick wall. We don’t very much. There was a call to go up there and try to change that bison are wildlife and will be managed by Fish Wildlife and Parks. That came up 4 years ago. It may come up this year. If it does, we’ll go up and lobby for it. I’ve been up in Helena a fair amount lobbying. The legislature isn’t real open to this idea.

Northern Plains Resource Council lobbies for clean water issues. We are always butting up against the Montana Stock growers. I don’t know why, but they side with miners and mining interiors at the legislature.

Coalition? Professional lobbyist or group?

In a way we have. When we went up there 4 years ago it was some groups up in Bozeman. I don’t know if you would get more out of hiring a lobbyist than getting?? Very good lobbyist. She’s very effective.

We just don’t have the threshold of power. We need a different legislature is what I think. So much of the state is rural Montana cattle producers. Montana Stockgrowers pretty persuasive organization.

Tim and Julia discussing legislative efforts

John- ripe court cases there- judicial side/ private property

Julia- We haven’t seen a path that works. (Rachel asks is brucellosis issue seems conventional).

This whole management plan doesn’t quite hang together as a sensible thing.

Discussion with John about beyond brucellosis

Discussion with Charlie- absurd coalition with cattlemen.

Wyoming at least a few bison getting out of park on the east side in Shoshone Forest. I think they stay mostly up high. Wyoming bison, some animals out there. It was just never made the big deal that it was here Montana. I’m not sure about Idaho.

Tim talking about

(14:29) I think again the only solution for this is going to be through the legislature. The legislature moves slowly. You introduce something this year, it may not go anywhere, but the idea and the word gets out there. You bring it back again and again and pretty soon it starts to make sense to more people after they’ve heard it 3 or 4 times.

(17:48) The concept that there are lots of people who really care about bison and want to see bison survive in some kind of semblance of wild animal. Certainly Native American people have cultural ties to the bison that are very deep.

Tim- what is the value of bison to your state? Symbolism here?

Julia- There’s a lot of symbolism. Isn’t that what we have on out state quarter and our state license plate and here we shoot them at the boundary. It doesn’t seem to win the argument in Helena though, it doesn’t yet