

Governor Steve Bullock  
P.O. Box 200801  
Helena, MT 59620-0801

October 15, 2019

Dear Governor Bullock,

For openers, I thank you for your previous decision to allow expansion of bison as a year-round component of wildlife populations north of Yellowstone Park. That decision was a step forward in wildlife conservation supporting the principle that buffalo are wildlife managed by the state as a public trust. That action was four years ago and in that interim, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks appears to have terminated the effort to promote wild buffalo in other places, like the C. M. Russell Wildlife Refuge.

Montana is not a casual bystander in the saga of the bison. In 1872 Granville and James Stuart tried to extend protection by legislating a closed season on bison and other big game animals. Unfortunately there wasn't enough law enforcement capacity to stem the commercial slaughter. In 1876, as America celebrated its first centennial, 80,000 buffalo hides were shipped down the Missouri River from Fort Benton, it was their record year. That same year: Custer and the 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry died on the Little Big Horn. Eight years later, the buffalo hide shipments from Fort Benton fell to zero. A rancher reported having made a journey of 1,000 miles across northern Montana and was "*never out of site of a dead buffalo and never in sight of a live one.*" Two years after that, the U.S. Cavalry rode into Yellowstone to protect that tattered remnant from total commercial extinction.

The buffalo of Yellowstone recovered. Today, they are probably the most '*officially*' harassed game animal in North America. We herd and harass them back behind lines drawn on maps and, annually ship a bunch to slaughter. The buffalo's image has been on the seal of the U.S. Department of Interior since 1912 - the agency most responsible for past and current treatment of wild and semi-wild buffalo. While we struggle to meet our moral and ecological responsibility to the buffalo, in another ironic twist, the U.S. Congress passed the National Bison Legacy Act in 2016 making the buffalo America's official mammal.

It is time to make space for this exceptional animal and no better place than Montana where America's national wildlife restoration ethic was born. We have restored a remarkable array of wild things, including grizzly bears, in our backcountry and now stand one step short of the wildlife restoration summit. It is now time to include the buffalo and restore them as free ranging wildlife out on the Great Plains where they just simply belong. A proverb says, "*the longest journey begins with the first step.*" Perhaps, in a coming spring season out on the Great Northern Plains of Montana, a wild newborn buffalo calf will wobble to its feet midst a lush June green-up of prairie grass and – be home! We can make it happen – not for us – not for the Department of Interior or the even the U.S Congress, but – for them! A proper legacy to add to your exceptional career, and only you can take that step.

Sincerely,

Jim Posewitz,  
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