

For Immediate Release

Contact: Jim Horsley, (701) 212-0353, [jamesahorsley@gmail.com](mailto:jamesahorsley@gmail.com)

For full text of petition and background information see <http://www.buffalopeople.org>

### **Petition seeks to protect from extinction rare mountain bison found only in Yellowstone**

Mountain bison, a species that once inhabited much of Yellowstone National Park, still inhabit a remote region of the park and deserve protection from extinction, according to a petition filed this week with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under provisions of the Endangered Species Act.

The 329-page petition was filed March 2, 2015, by James Horsley, the author of a prior petition filed in 1999 to also protect the park's wild bison. That petition was the subject of a 90-day finding in 2007 by the FWS, which found that the herd in the park was a "distinct population segment," that is, a unique subspecies, but determined it did not need protection because it was under the management of the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP).

"However, it is that very agency supposedly formed to help protect wild bison in the park that is now contributing to its extinction," Horsley said.

The new petition claims there are two different species in the park, *Bison bison bison*, which are plains bison and migrate over level land, once filling the plains in the 1800s, and mountain bison, also called wood bison, *Bison bison athabasca*, which in the park engage in altitudinal migration, traveling down from the high regions to escape harsh winters and obtain forage at lower elevations. The petition seeks to list both wild species in the park as endangered.

Migrating bison are being targeted by a posse of various government agencies, which herd bison coming down from the mountains into a capture facility at Stephens Creek, which is inside the park and just south of Gardiner, Montana, near the north entrance of the park. This is being done under a court-authorized government agency coalition that has the right to haze roaming bison back into the park or remove them lethally.

The posse consists of agents of the Montana Department of Livestock and park rangers mounted on horses and riding on snowmobiles and ATVs, as well as in pickups, squad cars and helicopters. Once trapped in the facility, they are processed through ever-narrowing chutes into livestock trailers and shipped to a slaughter house.

So far this winter over 700 migratory bison have been killed out of a herd population of 4,900.

The rationale behind keeping wild bison virtually under house arrest in the park is that such actions are necessary to keep bison from getting near about 1,000 cattle that graze on the park's borders, according to the IBMP. This separation is deemed necessary because bison have brucellosis, a disease that can be transmitted to cattle, causing cattle to abort.

“However, elk pose an even greater risk for transmission of that disease, yet they are allowed to migrate. This is lousy epidemiology,” Horsley said. “The only solution is to ban cattle from the environs of the park. This would also save \$3 million annually, for that is how much it costs to finance this posse and slaughter operation.”

“Park officials claim mountain bison no longer exist, but no studies have been conducted to determine that,” Horsley said. “Some biologists believe mountain bison have interbred with plains bison that were introduced into the park in the early 1900s. Others claim that the original bison in Yellowstone were merely plains bison that ran to Yellowstone for protection from the great bison destruction in the late 1800s.

“However, studies have shown there are two distinct herds in the park with different genetics and disease resistance: the north herd, which inhabits more remote sections of the park, often at higher elevations, and the central herd, which prefers the lower valleys.”

“Several years ago I talked with a former park ranger who said that mountain bison exist in the most remote regions of the park,” Horsley said. “But the Fish and Wildlife Service denies this. In response to my original petition, the FWS in 2007 stated that “This controversy has since been resolved, and YNP staff now considers the remnant population, as well as the introduced bison, as being of plains bison origin.”

“That no mountain bison inhabit the park is a rumor generated by the park staff that has no basis in fact. Although no studies have ever been conducted to settle this question, there is abundant historical and archeological evidence of their existence in Yellowstone. The ‘remnant population’ includes a herd of mountain bison,” Horsley claims.

Speaking of mountain bison in the park, renowned park biologist Mary Meagher said, “Historical accounts generally agree that, compared with the plains bison, these mountain animals were more hardy, fleet and wary, and had darker, finer, curlier hair.”

“If they were there in the past, they are there now,” Horsley said. “What is troubling is that neither the park nor any other government organization knows the genetic composition of those bison that attempt to migrate. Those that are slaughtered could be either plains bison or mountain bison, because members of both herds migrate.”

Not only is the IBMP virtually domesticating wild bison by weeding out all those that have the wild instinct to migrate, Horsley pointed out, but by its lethal removal policy it is also engaging in activity that could forever wipe out mountain bison in the park.

“Outside the park, there are no other mountain or wood bison in the United States,” Horsley said.

To restore a balance of nature and to control overpopulation of wild bison, instead of massive government slaughter of migrating bison, the petition recommends regulated public hunting of bison that roam outside the park and encouraging wolf predation, which would entail banning wolf hunting from the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

The agencies originally composing the IBMP beginning in 2000 are National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP), Montana Department of Livestock (DOL), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). Added to those agencies in 2009 were the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), Inter Tribal Buffalo Council (ITBC), and Nez Perce Tribe (NPT).

Horsley has worked as a college English instructor, speechwriter and news reporter.

For full text of 2015 petition and background information see: <http://www.buffalopeople.org>