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Comments: Include Wild Bison in Forest Management Plan Revision

Dear Supervisor Erickson

I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the Custer-Gallatin National Forest Plan Revision, and offer these comments for your consideration:

Please use the best available science to ensure a place for migratory buffalo on America's National Forests.

Adopt standards to manage habitat on America's National Forests to support viable populations and genetic diversity of migratory buffalo.

Assess local, traditional, and scientific knowledge of how migratory buffalo use America's National Forests. Biologists view buffalo as a keystone grassland species whose presence on the land enhances animal and plant diversity. In Hebgen Basin, buffalo seek out fire burned lodgepole pine forest and help restore fire-dependent habitats. Buffalo don't linger near water sources, making a positive contribution to watershed recovery.

Assess using migratory buffalo as an indicator species for grassland recovery, animal and plant diversity, and watershed restoration.

Update your long-term habitat plan to include a keystone wildlife species that has made their presence known on America's National Forests: America's last wild buffalo.

The National Forest Management Act requires the Custer-Gallatin National Forest to "provide for diversity of plant and animal communities based on the suitability and capability of the specific land area in order to meet overall multiple-use objectives." 16 U.S.C. 1604(g)(3)(B).

As a driver of biological diversity, the health of grasslands and watersheds, the buffalo are well suited to indicate whether key conditions on the forest are declining or improving based on the natural distribution and migrations of this native keystone species.

It's up to you to see that migratory buffalo have a place and a secure future on America's National Forests. Thank you for your consideration. Please keep me posted as this process moves forward.

Rhonda D. Wright, MD

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