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Comments: Please Include Wild Bison in Forest Management Plan Revision

June 1, 2016

Mary Erickson, Forest Supervisor  
Custer Gallatin National Forest  
P.O. Box 130  
10 East Babcock Ave.  
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Re: Please Include Wild Bison in Forest Management Plan Revision

Ms. Erickson,

As an American citizen who has a stake in the preservation of our nation's endangered species, I am submitting my comments on the Custer-Gallatin National Forest Plan Revision, which will guide the agency in decision-making that affects the forest.

I strongly urge the Custer-Gallatin National Forest to include provisions to manage habitat for native migratory buffalo in the revised forest plan.

The old outdated forest plan has been in effect for 29 years but makes no reference to wild buffalo. Under this plan, the Gallatin National Forest authorized the Montana Department of Livestock to set up traps on the forest to capture hundreds of buffalo who were then shipped to cruel and senseless slaughter. It is time for a change.

Native wild bison now occupy their historic lands, as is their right and, as such, there must be a concerted effort to allow for the presence and restoration of this critical keystone species to restore themselves to their proper place in the ecosystem. The best available science reveals that wild buffalo are a wildlife indicator species for animal and plant diversity, grassland recovery and watershed restoration. Their very presence enhances the landscape. In fact, Hebgen Basin, wild buffalo seek out fire burned lodgepole pine forest and they help restore fire-dependent habitats. These migratory animals also do not linger near water source, so they make positive contribution to watershed recovery as well.

As a propeller of biological diversity, watersheds and the health of grasslands, wild buffalo are perfectly adapted to signal the improvement or decline of forest conditions based on their natural distribution and migrations as an essential indicator species. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to promote healthy, viable, genetically diverse populations of America's last wild buffalos, especially considering the perilously low numbers of this most crucial species, which continue to plummet due to mismanagement, hunting and slaughter.

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).

Moreover, the U.S. Congress recently passed the National Bison Legacy Act designating buffalo as the national mammal, therefore, it is only fitting that space be designated to ensure this iconic species has a secure future on America's National Forests for generations to come.

Please help ensure the future survival of this majestic and highly valued species by ensuring a place for migratory wild buffalo on America's National Forests.

Thank you for your serious consideration of my comments on this most important issue.

Sincerely,

Eileen Hennessy  
39 Berwick St.  
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