

Room to Roam

Gaining Ground for Yellowstone's Bison

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Western Icon Confined

Yellowstone National Park is home to the largest continuously wild, genetically pure bison herd in North America. When snow blankets Yellowstone each winter, bison and other wildlife begin their ancient migrations out of the park's high country and into surrounding valleys seeking food for survival. While elk, moose, and other wildlife pass freely between Yellowstone and the snow-free lands outside the park, bison have historically been captured and shipped to slaughter by the thousands, or hazed back into Yellowstone's unforgiving high country.

Why Are Bison Treated Differently?

The presence of domestic livestock immediately adjacent to the park – and the consequent concern that bison might mingle with livestock and transmit the disease brucellosis to cattle – has been the primary reason bison have not been allowed to roam outside of Yellowstone National Park's borders.

However, there has never been a known transmission of brucellosis from bison to cattle in the wild, and other free-roaming wildlife like elk are known to carry

brucellosis as well. So the treatment of bison remains a confusing double standard.

What's the solution?

National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) and its partners have crafted a solution which protects Yellowstone's bison while addressing the concerns of the livestock industry. The key to resolving the bison controversy is establishing areas outside of Yellowstone where bison – like other wildlife – can migrate at critical times of the year. Components of this solution include:

- Leasing or retiring a small number of livestock grazing allotments, mostly on public land and a few on private land.
- Amending the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) to allow bison to roam outside the park in locations where mingling with livestock is no longer a risk.
- Working with the few remaining small livestock producers on fencing or other approaches to ensure separation between bison and livestock.



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Gaining Ground

Over the past year, NPCA has made significant strides in its plan to safeguard Yellowstone's bison. In April 2011, bison habitat was expanded north of Yellowstone into Montana's Gardiner Basin. An additional 75,000 acres of national park service, national forest service, state and private land is now available for bison to roam.

What's Next?

There is more work to be done to ensure a healthy future for Yellowstone's bison. NPCA continues to work with the park service, wildlife managers and federal agencies, citizens, and other conservation organizations to establish other bison friendly areas outside of Yellowstone, and focuses efforts towards on-the-ground solutions to ensure bison and landowners can co-exist.

Establishing areas where bison can roam outside Yellowstone National Park is a critical step toward maintaining bison populations within the park. NPCA will continue to work with land managers to find additional public and tribal lands where Yellowstone's bison can roam.

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By the Numbers

3,500 animals in
Yellowstone's bison
population – Spring 2010

1,600 bison slaughtered
in 2007/2008

5 agencies involved in the
management of
Yellowstone's bison

0 transmissions of
brucellosis from bison to
cattle

75,000 new acres of
winter range for
Yellowstone's bison in
2011



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