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Slaughter in the Sanctuary

More than 800 Yellowstone buffalo have been killed so far. When will the killing end?

THE BUFFALO is one of the living symbols of America. As I write this column, however, dozens of American buffalo are being killed each day in Yellowstone National Park—a place specifically set aside to protect them and other wildlife. This outrage is being perpetrated by representatives of the U.S. government and the state of Montana who are sacrificing buffalo to “protect” subsidized cattle grazing on public land.

Millions of buffalo once dominated the Western plains, but by the turn of the century human blindness and greed had reduced them to an isolated remnant. As the buffalo teetered close to extinction, Americans stood up, took action, and demanded an end to the killing. Because of them, the buffalo was saved from destruction.

While we may have saved the buffalo from extinction, we can never fully restore its true nature—the freedom to roam as instinct and environment dictate. Today, most buffalo are held on ranches or in zoos.

It is only in Yellowstone National Park that a vestige of those vast herds still roams free.

Some of the herd is infected with a disease called brucellosis. In domestic cattle, the disease causes cows to abort, and the Department of Agriculture has made eradication of brucellosis a top priority. Montana is classified by the Agriculture Department as brucellosis-free and has argued that in order to retain this status it must kill any buffalo that cross into the state in search of winter forage. The



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Agriculture Department, through an agency called the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), has abetted the killing by insisting on a “zero tolerance” policy for brucellosis. The agency takes this position despite the fact that there is no evidence that

brucellosis has ever been transmitted from buffalo to cattle in the wild. This collision of intransigent bureaucracies has had deadly consequences.

Yellowstone is in the middle of an unusually harsh winter, and buffalo are moving out of the park in record numbers. They are also being killed in record numbers—more than 800 so far (the herd size is estimated to be 3,400). The buffalo cannot survive this killing rate for long.

It is my fervent hope that by the time you read this, NPCA's efforts in Washington, and public outrage across the country, will have forced an end to the slaughter. Even if an emergency compromise is reached, however, we will face this problem again and again until a long-term solution is found.

The president and the Montana governor must hear from you. Solutions exist that can protect everyone's interests. Tell the president and the governor to end the killing fields of Yellowstone. Write to: President Clinton, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, DC 20500 and Governor Marc Racicot, Capitol Building, Helena, MT 59620. (See story, page 12.)

Paul C. Pritchard