

January 7, 2015

To: Interested Parties

From: Ben Tulchin, Ben Krompak, and Kiel Brunner; Tulchin Research

Re: **Poll Finds Strong Support for Protecting Bison in Montana**

Tulchin Research recently conducted a survey among 500 registered voters in the state of Montana on behalf of Defenders of Wildlife in order to assess public attitudes toward bison and various public policy approaches to their management and restoration. Our research finds that Montana voters overwhelmingly support managing bison as wildlife, back state efforts to restore wild bison populations in the state, and strongly reject anti-bison bills being considered by the Montana Legislature.

Montana Voters Hold Highly Favorable Views of Bison

Our polling finds that Montana voters hold bison in high esteem. Bison are viewed favorably by more than eight in ten Montana voters (81%) – including a majority (51%) who view them very favorably – while just 4 percent of voters hold unfavorable views of bison.

Voters See Bison as Wildlife and Strongly Support Managing Them Like Other Wildlife

Voters overwhelmingly view bison as wildlife rather than as livestock and support managing them as wildlife. Asked whether they think of bison as wildlife or as livestock, over two-thirds of voters (68%) say they view them as wildlife to just 15 percent who view them as livestock and 15 percent who say both. And by a 3-to-1 margin, voters believe that “wild bison should be managed like deer, elk and other wildlife,” with 72 percent of voters saying they agree with this statement to just 24 percent who disagree.

Voters Overwhelming Back State Bison Restoration Efforts

Efforts by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to restore wild bison populations in the state find strong, broad-based support from voters. Nearly eight in ten voters support restoring wild bison populations on public lands (76% support) and on tribal lands (78% support). Additionally, two-thirds of voters (67%) say they support efforts to relocate bison from Yellowstone National Park to start herds in other parts of the state.

<u>Voters Support Bison Restoration Efforts in Montana</u>		
<i>“Would you support or oppose...?”</i>	Total Support	Total Oppose
The Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Department restoring wild bison on some of Montana’s public lands	76%	21%
Efforts of tribes to restore wild bison populations on tribal lands	78%	17%
Efforts to relocate disease-free bison from Yellowstone to start new herds in other parts of Montana	67%	26%

In line with voter support for protecting bison and managing them as wildlife, a large majority of Montana voters agree that “wildlife management decisions regarding native wild bison should be made by biologists at Montana’s Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks and not by county politicians.” When presented with this statement making the case for a consistent statewide approach to bison management, nearly three quarters of voters (74%) indicated they found the statement to be convincing.

Voters Decisively Reject Anti-Bison Legislative Proposals

Proposals aimed at reducing Montana’s bison population or restricting restoration efforts are met with strong opposition from voters in the state. Specifically, voters overwhelmingly reject proposals to reclassify all wild bison as livestock (76% opposed, including 51% *strongly* opposed) and to prohibit the establishment of any wild bison in the state (63% opposed). Voters oppose allowing private landowners to shoot bison that enter onto private land (60% opposed) and oppose establishing a year-round hunting season for bison (59% opposed).

<i>Voters Reject Anti-Bison Legislative Proposals by Wide Margins</i>		
<i>“Now I’d like to read you some different policy proposals relating to bison that are being considered this year by state lawmakers. Please tell me if you would support or oppose each.”</i>	Total Support	Total Oppose
Reclassify all wild bison in Montana as livestock so they are managed as livestock instead of as wildlife	18%	78%
Prohibit the establishment of any wild bison population in the state of Montana	29%	63%
Allow private landowners to shoot any wild bison that enter onto private land	35%	60%
Establish a year-round hunting season for bison in Montana	34%	59%

Conclusion

In conclusion, our research finds that Montana voters greatly value bison in their state and strongly support efforts to restore them in the wild. Voters believe that bison should be managed like other wildlife, back efforts to restore bison populations to public lands and tribal lands, and support relocating bison from Yellowstone to establish new herds in the state. Additionally, voters overwhelmingly reject proposals currently before the Montana Legislature that would treat all bison as livestock rather than wildlife and that would otherwise undermine Montana FWP and tribal efforts to restore bison populations.

Survey Methodology: From December 17-21, 2014, Tulchin Research conducted a telephone survey using professional interviewers calling both landlines and cell phones among 500 registered voters in Montana. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 4.38 percentage points.