



March 9, 2018

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

Legislative and
Public Affairs

Freedom of
Information

4700 River Road
Unit 50
Riverdale, MD
20737-1232

Darrell Geist
Buffalo Field Campaign
P.O. Box 957
West Yellowstone, MT 59758
z@wildrockies.org

Dear Mr. Geist:

This letter is in partial response to your October 11, 2017, request under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, as amended. Your request was received on October 12, 2017, and assigned FOIA Case number 2018-APHIS-00286-F. You requested the following items concerning the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's (APHIS) study Evaluation of GonaCon:

1. All publications, studies, reports, memos, and communications (emails, faxes, letters).
2. All animal welfare monitoring, including inspections, reports, evaluations, appointment books, and notes related to injury, abandonment, and death of bison.
3. Bison abortions and birth.
4. Removal and disposition of genetic material from bison.
5. Number and status of bison, held for study, incinerated, landfill buried, distributed to food banks and other activities resulting in removal.

On or about October 13, 2017, your request was forwarded to the APHIS, Office of Veterinary Services (VS) and the pertinent employees commenced a search for records starting on October 20, 2017. The search for records is ongoing, and APHIS intends to also undertake a centralized email search for additional employees who may have responsive records. We are continuing to review responsive records that have already been provided to us by VS and intend to continue to provide additional partial responses and produce these records to you on a rolling basis. We anticipate being able to produce a larger volume of records in partial responses moving forward.

In this partial response, the records released consist of 692 pages that are responsive to **Item 1** of your request. Of the 692 pages, approximately 582 pages are being released in full and 110 pages contain redactions pursuant to Exemption 6, 5 U.S.C. §552 (b) (6). The chart attached shows the page number for exemptions applied to records in this interim response. Please note that a total of 2 pages at Bates Numbers (000210-000211) were removed as non-responsive and were not part of the Evaluation of GonaCon study.



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Exemption 6

Information has been withheld under Exemption 6, 5 U.S.C. 552 (b)(6). Exemption 6, permits the government to withhold from “personnel and medical files and similar files” information about individuals when the disclosure of such information “would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.” We have determined that these records meet the definition of “similar” files, because they contain information pertaining to individuals.

In order to determine whether a document may be withheld under Exemption 6, an agency must undertake a three-step analysis. First, the agency must determine whether a significant privacy interest would be compromised by the disclosure of the record. Second, the agency must determine whether the release of the document would further the public interest by shedding light on the operations and activities of the Government. Third, the agency must balance the identified privacy interests against the public interest in disclosure.

APHIS is withholding the personal home addresses, telephone numbers and facial depictions of APHIS employees. Release of this type of information could subject them to unwanted personal contact. We have determined that there is no public interest in releasing the identified personal information about APHIS employees and please note that we have released the names of employees involved in the VS mission work. Releasing employees’ personal contact information and photos would not reveal anything about government activities and therefore the privacy interests of the individuals outweighs the nonexistent public interest.

We note that this FOIA request is currently the subject of litigation, *Buffalo Field Campaign v. APHIS*, Case No. 9:18-cv-00031-DC. Accordingly, any inquiries regarding this matter should be directed to Assistant United States Attorney Mark Smith, U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Montana, on (406) 247-4667.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tonya H. Woods".

Tonya Woods
Director
Freedom of Information & Privacy Act
Legislative and Public Affairs

Enclosures