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Comments:

I'm writing to comment on the DEIS regarding the future management plans for American bison in the Custer Gallatin National Forest. I support strengthening Alternative D and listing the American bison as a species of conservation concern. For too long the Am. bison have been mismanaged under the Interagency Bison Management Plan. Under this plan, bison numbers have dramatically declined. According to the National Park Service biologists, the number of Central herd buffalo declined 3,531 in 2006 to only 847 in 2017. It's outrageous that this decline in Central herd numbers happened at a time when more habitat was available in the National Forest in State "tolerance zones." Remember, we're talking about a native species, and the last of the original American buffalo that once numbered in the millions that is now relegated to "tolerance" zones that have been arbitrarily designated by the state of Montana. Why aren't the natural migratory patterns of these bison even considered?

It's apparent that the Custer Gallatin refuses to even recognize scientific information about the genetically distinct sub-populations of American bison in the Northern and Central herds. The IABMP is plagued by other problems such as a lack of transparency and accountability. The IABMP has no long-term vision on which to base their regulation of American bison. Even though our First Nations consider these animals to be sacred, the IABMP treats them as if they were a nuisance that needs to be trapped, quarantined, or more often just slaughtered. The IABMP has failed to change its methods of managing buffalo in favor of natural regulation of buffalo despite the significant changes in brucellosis rules benefitting cattle ranchers in the tri-state region.

Finally, in order to strengthen Alt. D, the following conditions need to be met:

1. Conserving American bison viability and diversity needs to be a forest wide standard.
2. Am.bison need to be free to roam the Custer Gallatin as they once were accustomed to.
3. Connectivity to habitat for American bison needs to be restored.
4. To restore connectivity, the Custer Gallatin needs to adopt a standard that doesn't permit cattle grazing allotments in the American bison range.

I appreciate this opportunity to comment on a DEIS which will either benefit or harm a native species --the American bison/buffalo--who deserves to be managed wisely so that the herds will grow and not be constantly culled in order to appease certain folks.

Sincerely, Barbara Trypaluk