Deep snow in Yellowstone National Park is once again forcing bison to seek out winter range at lower elevation. In their search for exposed forage, bison naturally wander to snow-free lands outside of the park. Unfortunately for the bison, once they leave the park they are killed by the Montana Dept. of Livestock ostensibly in the name of brucellosis control.

Even worse, the National Park Service is participating in this slaughter of native wildlife. Hundreds of bison were herded into corrals INSIDE Yellowstone National Park where it was anticipated that at least some of them were be killed.

The bison slaughter is done to appease the intractable and unreasonable demands of Montana’s livestock industry which has zero tolerance for native bison on Montana soil. All of this is justified in the name of controlling brucellosis, a disease that can cause domestic livestock to abort their first calf.

Such a slaughter would be bad enough if Montana’s stockgrowers were paying for it out of their own pockets, but both the state and federal agencies involved in this slaughter program are taxpayer funded. If the livestock industry had to pay for these machinations themselves, it is doubtful there would be a brucellosis eradication program, much less an active harass, capture and slaughter program.

Thus far this winter more than 200 bison have been killed, and more are likely to die unless policies are changed. In the winter of 2006/2007 more than 1600 bison were killed. And since the first bison was killed in 1985, nearly 6800 wild bison have been slaughtered outside of the park.

No reasonable solution is possible as long as the livestock industry is in charge, in part, because disease control is not the real issue—rather the slaughter of bison is as much about keeping wildlife bottled up in Yellowstone Park and off other public lands as anything to do with protecting Montana’s livestock from disease.
Continued from Page 1

**Reasons for Brucellosis Control**

The on-going slaughter of Yellowstone National Park bison is justified on the basis of disease control—namely trying to prevent transmission of brucellosis from bison to cattle. While the potential economic impact of brucellosis is real, the likelihood is extremely rare.

There are two major reasons for eliminating brucellosis from livestock. The first is that the bacteria, Brucella abortus, can cause cattle to abort their calves.

Beyond this obvious loss of a calf to the rancher, current government policy also requires any herd found to contain infected animals to be quarantined and eventually slaughtered, representing another loss to any ranching operation which has invested in building a reputation based on a quality herd.

Also, livestock producers in states that are brucellosis-free can avoid mandatory testing of animals shipped across state lines; however, both of these last regulations could be altered.

For instance, there is no reason why an entire state should lose its brucellosis-free status simply because one cow or even a few herds in the state test positive for brucellosis. This is a self-created problem that could easily be solved by modest modification in regulations. The problem isn’t with bison and brucellosis, rather the USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), the government agency in charge of brucellosis control has been largely inflexible in its approach to dealing with brucellosis. APHIS has used the threat of a loss of state-wide brucellosis-free status as a club to maintain management control over public wildlife like bison. APHIS is a tax funded arm of industrial agriculture whose main constituency is the livestock industry, not the public interest.

**Background on Brucellosis**

Though mandatory vaccination would help to reduce the brucellosis transmission fears, there are a host of reasons why the brucellosis scare is likely a smoke screen for motives other than a genuine concern about disease. A little background on the disease is worth discussing.

Recall from above that the main concern of livestock producers is that brucellosis can cause a cow to abort its fetus. That would represent an economic loss to the rancher. That’s an understandable concern to any rancher who might lose a few calves, but why is the federal government involved in brucellosis control? The answer has to do with history.

Back in the 1930s the federal government launched its brucellosis containment program to control Bang’s Disease, the name given to the ailment in livestock. Tax payer support was justified on the basis of public health because Bang’s Disease can cause what is known as Undulant Fever in humans for the undulating fever it causes, along with muscular pain.

The main source for human infection was consumption of unpasteurized milk and/or having contact with infected meat, but with the widespread adoption of pasteurization, the disease has not been a public health threat since WWII.

Once the program was started and had benefits for the livestock industry, it was impossible to eliminate the public funding of the program. Since the 1930s the government has spent millions of taxpayer funds to eradicate the disease—largely to benefit the pocketbook of cattle producers.

**Bison are not the Only Animals with Brucellosis**

A glaring inconsistency in the treatment of Yellowstone’s bison herd is the fact that elk also carry brucellosis. There are far more elk in the ecosystem than bison, and furthermore, they are more widespread and difficult to control than bison. Indeed, all the known cases of wildlife to livestock brucellosis transmission in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem have involved elk, not bison; and even if it were possible to remove brucellosis from bison, as long as elk remain active carriers of the disease reinfection of wild bison is likely.

There are approximately 100,000 elk in the ecosystem that wander freely among livestock operations without being harassed, captured, and slaughtered. One may reasonably ask why bison are singled out for slaughter, while elk are permitted to move freely throughout the ecosystem.

There are two reasons; one is that elk have a big constituency comprised of hunters and outfitters. The livestock industry has so far avoided antagonizing these people by not raising the issue of elk. However, there are some in the livestock industry that believe elk should be captured, tested, and those with positive reactors, slaughtered as well.

The second reason is perhaps less obvious, but if disease were the primary motivation for killing bison, it would make sense to capture and slaughter elk. I believe a good deal of the motivation for killing bison is to prevent bison recolonization of public lands. The livestock industry recognizes bison restoration as a direct threat. If bison became widespread on public lands, competition for forage would arise, and likely lead to reductions in public lands grazing by private livestock.
The Current Bison Policy Amplifies Genetic Mutation

New research suggests that on-going slaughter is amplifying the presence of deleterious genes in bison created by past genetic bottlenecks. The original wild herd of bison in Yellowstone had a limited founding population and unnatural selection over the years that have compounded the occurrence of these mutations.

Symptoms of the disease can include fatigue while running, lactic acid buildup in the blood and ragged red muscle fibers. The bison do not die at birth but may get tired while running, succumb to prolonged winter cold, get fatigued brushing snow aside for feeding, lose out in breeding competition or fall to predators. In fossil evidence, only 5% of the bison had the mutation, while 81% of bison today are found to have these mutations. Continued culling by the Montana Dept of Livestock amplifies these genetic problems further.

Vaccination

Several vaccines that offer some resistant to brucellosis infection have been developed. Although not 100% effective they do reduce the likelihood of infection considerably and provide quite a bit of protection against brucellosis transmission. They cost $4 a shot to administer, but Montana does not require mandatory brucellosis vaccination. At present approximately 70% of the state’s cattle are voluntarily vaccinated against brucellosis.

In 2010 members of two of Montana’s largest livestock groups, the Montana Stockgrowers Association and Montana Farm Bureau Federation, have adopted policies officially opposing the vaccination of all sexually intact female calves because they think it’s unnecessary.

While vaccination is not a silver bullet offering complete protection against infection, it would go a long ways toward reducing exposure in any cattle herd, and reduce the presumed rationale for killing bison.

Why Brucellosis Transmission is Rare

Even without a mandatory vaccination of all livestock, brucellosis transmission between bison and cattle is rare in practice for a host of reasons.

An important point is that many bison do not carry the active disease. One of the distortions perpetuated by the livestock industry and amplified by the media are reports of field tests of bison showing a significant number test “sero positive” for brucellosis. Field tests for brucellosis only demonstrate the presence of anti bodies which are produced upon exposure to brucellosis: however the presence of anti bodies does not necessarily represent active cases. Thus, due to the limitations of the field test, something less than the number testing positive for brucellosis actually have an active infection and represent a potential source of infection for domestic animals.

To put this into perspective, I would test positive for polio because I was “exposed” to polio by vaccination as a youth, but I cannot transmit polio to anyone today. In the rare instances where more complete lab testing for active brucellosis has been done, the percentage of infected bison is always lower than the number reported as sero-positive in field tests.

The livestock industry often notes that 50% of all bison tested are positive for brucellosis without noting that only sexually mature female bison (usually two years or older) can possibly transfer the disease to domestic livestock. This is a much smaller subset of a bison herd—i.e. much less than 50% of a herd. Bison calves, bull bison, and young female bison are for all intents and purposes unable to infect domestic livestock. Thus the vast majority of bison which test positive and are subsequently slaughtered, including all bison calves and bulls that are killed, can in no way pass on the disease to domestic animals.

The primary route for disease transmission results when a bison or any other animal aborts its fetus and the dead fetus and/or birthing fluids are licked, nosed, or otherwise touched by another animal. The likelihood that this would occur between domestic cattle and wild bison is possible but exceedingly rare for a host of reasons.

Timing is critical. Brucellosis bacteria are very sensitive to temperature and moisture and die rapidly when expelled from a body, and any aborted fetus is a tempting meal for a passing coyote, raven and other scavengers. Thus, unless cattle and bison are actively mixing together, it is unlikely that any livestock will come upon an aborted bison fetus with live brucella bacteria.

Geographical Overlap

Bison abortions, if they occur tend to happen in the spring when most cattle are on the home ranch and long before any cattle are moved to summer pastures on public lands where they might encounter an aborted bison fetus.

Furthermore, few cattle are present over most of the area outside of Yellowstone where bison are currently being harassed and slaughtered. Nearly all public lands grazing allotments near West Yellowstone and north of Gardiner have been closed. Cattle on private lands in the West Yellowstone area are only there in summer. North of Yellowstone beyond Gardiner, there are some small cattle operations on private lands, however, most of these operations involve fenced livestock where mixing of bison and cattle is unlikely.
There is no legitimate reason why bison should not be permitted to wander out of Yellowstone in these areas and to occupy public lands. Suitable habitat exists on Gallatin National Forest lands in the Eagle Creek drainage and Dome Mountain areas north of Gardiner, as well as west around Horse Butte and north of Yellowstone Park on Gallatin National Forest lands in the Madison and Gallatin Ranges between Big Sky and West Yellowstone. This amounts to hundreds of thousands of acres of potential bison habitat outside of the park.

**“Disease Control” is a Smokescreen**

The disease is really a smoke screen for control of wildlife and to prevent the restoration of bison to public lands in the West. What the livestock industry really fears is a widespread demand by the public to have its public wildlife like bison given priority on public rangelands. Since bison eat essentially the same forage as domestic livestock, if bison herds were to be reestablished there would have to be a dramatic reduction in forage allotted for private livestock grazing public lands. That fact, far more than the exceedingly small risk of brucellosis transmission, is what has been driving bison brucellosis politics for decades and has resulted in the death of thousands of America’s wildlife, wild bison and the wasted expenditure of millions of taxpayer dollars.

I got a hint of the real reason for brucellosis politics decades ago when the first bison were killed when they wandered from Yellowstone NP. I was living in Livingston, Montana just north of the park at the time and doing research for a magazine article on the bison-brucellosis issue. I had put a call into the Montana State Veterinarian. For some reason when he got on the phone with me he automatically assumed that I was a rancher.

He said to me, “Where do you live?” I said “Livingston.” He immediately replied, “Hey you don’t have to worry about brucellosis because you live far enough from Yellowstone, it’s unlikely your animals will get the disease. Besides, the state won’t lose its brucellosis-free status even if a few herds got brucellosis.”

I was surprised by this last statement because he had repeatedly told the media that the biggest fear for Montana’s livestock industry was losing its brucellosis-free status. So I asked him to clarify.

“Why won’t the state lose its brucellosis free status?” I asked.

He replied, “Oh,” he said candidly, “If any limitations are imposed due to brucellosis status APHIS will restrict that to a few herds around Yellowstone.” I said thanks for the reassurances, and hung up.

Despite his assertion, the state continued to argue that loss of brucellosis status was a real threat, and has used the brucellosis card as a club to silence and distract the media and others from following the money. The big money for many ranchers is the potential loss of subsidized grazing on public rangelands if bison were permitted to reoccupy those lands and grazing allotments are closed and/or forage for domestic cattle reduced to accommodate bison herds.

**The Slaughter Affects More than Genetic Diversity**

Lest we forget, bison are herd animals that have complex social organization based upon familial ties. The testing and slaughtering of animals continuously reshuffles and breaks these family ties. Cultural knowledge about migration routes, how to defend against predators, and other information critical to the long term health of the herd are lost and/disrupted by present management. The most important thing to remember about bison—they are not domestic livestock—and we should treat them for what they are, wild creatures that deserve respect rather than the contempt shown by Montana’s government agencies.

**Real Solutions**

To summarize in order for disease transmission to occur a whole litany of events must transpire. First, the bison has to have the disease. It has to be a sexually mature female bison who then aborts her fetus. The aborted fetus has to be undetected by coyotes, ravens and other scavengers which would quickly consume it. All during this time, the bacteria must remain alive. Finally, a domestic animal has to physically lick or otherwise come in contact with the aborted fetus before the bacteria dies.

The fact that less than a thousand and perhaps as few as 200 cattle occupy the zone of current overlap between bison and livestock makes it easy to establish a buffer zone around the park where all cattle should be vaccinated, and tested regularly for brucellosis. Isolating the test requirements to those animals immediately in the zone of overlap would not create an undue burden on the rest of the livestock industry. This would be a far less expensive solution for taxpayers—who are after all footing the bill—than the current test and slaughter of wildlife.

**Saving Bison from Genetic Diseases**

Bison have suffered tremendously from the artificial management that has afflicted the species for more than a hundred years. All founding populations, including the bison in Yellowstone which at one time numbered less than 100 animals, have suffered genetic bottlenecks that have
amplified the occurrence of deleterious gene mutations. The first step in overcoming these harmful genetic loads is to permit natural selection to weed out the bison that are less fit. This can be accomplished in two ways. One by allowing natural selection in the form of winter starvation, predators like wolves, and other natural selective processes to continue to whittle away at less fit bison, removing them from the herds.

Second, we need to greatly expand wild bison numbers across the West. One way to enlarge bison herds and avoid future bottlenecks is to expand the public lands accessible to bison. There are significant acreages of land immediately surrounding Yellowstone where bison could recolonize in the Gallatin and Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forests without significant conflict with private livestock operations if reasonable preventative precautions are followed.

Bison could also find suitable habitat in the Union Gap/Upper Green River country north of Pinedale Wyoming as well as in the Green River Valley/Salt River, and Commissary Ridge areas of the Bridger Teton NF and BLM lands between Daniel and Kemmerer Wyoming.

In addition, to ensure maximum genetic diversity bison should be reintroduced on to other suitable public lands where extensive public holdings would minimize conflicts with private lands. Among these sites are the Charles M. Russell Wildlife Refuge and Missouri River Breaks National Monument in central Montana, the Red Desert and Big Horn Basin, and the Thunder Basin National Grassland areas of Wyoming, the Snake River Plain surrounding Craters of the Moon National Monument and the drier valleys between the Lost River, Lemhi and Beaverhead Mountains in Idaho, the Book Cliffs/Roan Cliffs region of Utah-Colorado, the Vermillion Basin and Brown Park NWR of NW Colorado and Dinosaur NM on the Colorado-Utah border, the Little Missouri National Grasslands and Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota, the Buffalo Gap National Grassland and Badlands National Park in South Dakota and the extensive parcels of BLM lands in southern New Mexico.

Brucellosis is a smoke screen. It’s time for citizens to challenge the livestock control of our public wildlife, and to demand that bison be given a bright future by ensuring the widespread restoration of these magnificent animals. Bison are part of America’s wildlife heritage that deserve better than the slaughter house.

George Wuerthner is a WWP Advisory Board Member, Photographer and Author. He lives in Richmond, Vermont.
Arizona update: Proposed decisions, missing permittees, and the BLM
by Greta Anderson

In August of 2008, WWP received a Notice of Proposed Decision for the Walker Butte allotment, a small BLM-administered allotment of 1,330 acres near Florence, Arizona. The Rangeland Health Assessment showed no departures from the ecological site description, the standards were met across the board, and the permit was recommended for renewal with no new terms and conditions. The proposed decision was based on a “Determination of NEPA Adequacy,” reflecting the agency’s belief that no changes had occurred since the Eastern Arizona Grazing EIS was completed in 1986. WWP, of course, was skeptical of these claims and set out to find the Walker Butte allotment.

It wasn’t so easy. The entire area was a grid of subdivisions and newly-built neighborhoods bustling with construction trucks and SUVs. The remaining open spaces had downed fences and ORV tracks, shooting sites, and a few straggling saguaros. Not a cow in sight. It seemed like maybe some things had changed since 1986. We sent in our protest.

A couple of years went by and we wondered what happened to the old proposed decision, as well as 46 other unresolved protests that we’ve filed on BLM grazing decisions since 2007. A bit of back and forth with the state office and we learned that the Walker Butte allotment was slated for a new decision in 2011, in order for the agency to reassess the supporting Rangeland Health Evaluation and the NEPA analysis.

In March, we received that proposed decision, for the “Cancellation of the Walker Butte allotment” because the BLM had not been able to contact the permittee since 2003 and because the base property has since been commercially developed and unable to serve as the base property. Notwithstanding any protests, the permit will be cancelled without further notice. WWP strongly supports this proposed decision.

This administrative change won’t make much of a difference for the lands and habitats at stake in this area; the development and recreational activities of the area have already fragmented the native landscape and habitats in irreversible ways. Still, if the Arizona BLM was prepared to issue a new 10-year grazing permit to a permittee that it hadn’t even corresponded with in over five years, based on a twenty two year old NEPA analysis of the impacts in an area that has seen it’s population grow 28 percent in the last decade, well… it just tells you what kind of oversight our public lands receive in Arizona.

You can read WWP’s protest of the 2008 proposed decision on our website: http://bit.ly/gfQWYc

Greta Anderson is WWPs Arizona Director. She lives in Tucson.

Above: Off-road vehicle tracks crossed the fenceline here and elsewhere on the allotment, with some wires actually cut and pulled back to facilitate access. Livestock management would be difficult in light of this recreational use.

Right: Unnatural Progression; from biodiverse desert to unregulated grazing to suburban sprawl.

photos © Greta Anderson
Big Creek, Utah: Inadequate Regulations or Spineless Bureaucrats?
by Jonathan Ratner

Big Creek is a classic example of a broken land management agency. For more than half a century the BLM has known about the habitat degradation occurring on Big Creek. In the mid 1970’s, the BLM rated nearly all streams on BLM lands in Rich County, Utah in poor condition. Overarching land management plans for the area have been written, amended and ignored. Habitat Management Plans have been written and ignored. Allotment Management Plans have been written and ignored. None of these actions have resulted in any improvement or recovery because of spineless decision-makers who value their promotions and the interests of permittees above the needs of the land.

Big Creek is home to a remnant population of Bonneville Cutthroat trout, a BLM Sensitive Species. The Sensitive Species Policy requires that the BLM take actions:

“To initiate proactive conservation measures that reduce or eliminate threats to Bureau sensitive species to minimize the likelihood of and need for listing of these species under the ESA.”

In 1970, the BLM constructed some small exclosures on Big Creek. These exclosures and areas adjacent to the exclosures were intensively studied by BLM researcher Don Duff and Forest Service researcher William Platts during the 1970’s and 1980’s resulting in some of the most widely cited riparian grazing research ever done.

Despite this research which found:

“The habitat inside the exclosure recovered significantly due to rest, while areas outside the exclosure continued to decline under continued livestock use.”

The BLM ignored these findings because they would inconvenience the permittees on the Big Creek allotment.

Fast forward a third of century and guess what…. the same severely degraded riparian areas are the rule. Dr. John Carter and I placed continuous temperature loggers above and below the exclosures to help determine what conditions these Bonneville Cutthroat trout have to survive.

Outside the exclosures, conditions similar to the first two photographs are the norm. Only 15 feet upstream within the exclosure there is overhanging vegetation as well as healthy woody species shading and cooling the water, a width-to-depth ratio 1/3 of that outside the exclosure and pools providing hiding habitat.

Consider these ‘nuked’ riparian areas ‘your tax dollars at work’. The land management agencies spend $144 million a year just in the direct costs of managing public lands livestock grazing and took in only $21 million. Budget-cutting congressmen concerned about this destructive waste of tax-dollars? I am sure this and a wide range of other wasteful and destructive spending will be ‘off the table’.

I am proud to be part of Western Watersheds Project because we are one of the few attacking the problem head on.

For details on just some of the issues I am working on in Wyoming, Utah, Colorado and South Dakota, go to www.westernwatersheds.org and click on your state at the bottom.

WWP members help me with their eyes and ears on the ground. Don’t hesitate to let me know your areas of concern. My job is to be an advocate for the needs of the land and the interests of our members.

Jonathan Ratner is Wyoming, Utah and Colorado Director for WWP. He lives in Sublette County Wyoming.
Big Creek has a remnant population of Bonneville Cutthroat trout surviving within a few small exclosures. Habitat conditions within and outside these exclosures have been studied for years by eminent researchers such as Dr. [name]. They agreed to come back to Big Creek to collect updated data and tour the streams with BLM decision makers this summer as part of WWP's project. These three photos were taken within 30 feet of each other while WWP installed temperature loggers to help monitor water temperatures in relation to state water quality standards and the habitat needs of Bonneville Cutthroat trout.

The Big Creek Allotment is in northern Utah, northeast of Ogden and not far from the Wyoming and Idaho borders. Maps ©Google

Outside the exclosure: Cattle-impacted, damaged waterways and banks imperil the native trout population. Cattle waste and damage increases the temperature of critical trout habitat.

Big Creek has a few small exclosures. Habitat conditions have been studied by eminent researchers who agreed to come back to collect updated data as part of WWP's project. These three photos were taken within 30 feet of each other while WWP installed temperature loggers to help monitor water temperatures in relation to state water quality standards and the habitat needs of Bonneville Cutthroat trout.
remnant population of Bonneville Cutthroat trout surviving within a few small exclosures have been studied for years by eminent researchers such as Dr. William Platts, and Don Duff. These researchers have agreed to come back to Big Creek to collect updated data and tour the streams with BLM decision makers this summer as part of WWP’s efforts to improve management of these important streams.

These three photos were taken within 30 feet of each other while WWP staff placed continuous temperature loggers to help monitor water temperatures in relation to state water quality standards and the habitat needs of Bonneville Cutthroat trout.

Inside the enclosure, recovering in the absence of cattle, this stream still needs monitoring. WWP’s Dr. John Carter assists in monitoring efforts.

Truth in Advertising?: in order for these statements to become fact, agencies need to do a much better job of monitoring and limiting cattle access to ravaged areas.

Inside the Enclosure; Recovering in the absence of cattle, this stream still needs monitoring. WWP’s Dr. John Carter assists in monitoring efforts.
Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf? Politics Trumps the Endangered Species Act
by Jon Marvel

The saga of wolf restoration in the Northern Rockies has reached a new low point.

Through the efforts of Senator Jon Tester, a Montana Democrat, and Congressman Mike Simpson, an Idaho Republican, and with the active acquiescence of Senate Leader Harry Reid of Nevada and President Obama wolves in Idaho, Montana and parts of Oregon, Washington and Utah have been removed from the protection of the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

On April 15, Obama signed the late-night, backroom deal into law, apparently more concerned about Senator Tester’s 2012 re-election than with the voice of the people and campaign promises of having science trump politics in environmental decisions. Tester, a farmer, is running against Congressman Denny Rehberg (MT-R), a rancher who prides himself in one-upping Tester’s anti-wolf rhetoric.

Never before has an ESA listed species been removed by Congress instead of by peer-reviewed science.

As you may know Western Watersheds Project and three allied groups opposed an effort by ten other conservation groups to make a last minute deal with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that asked U.S. District Court Judge Donald Molloy to vacate his August 5, 2010 decision relisting wolves in the Northern Rockies in favor of an ill-conceived partial settlement agreement. The other groups had a misperception that if Judge Molloy agreed Congress would not order the delisting of wolves.

As it turns out the test of what the settlement would accomplish never took place because Judge Molloy rejected the proposed settlement. Judge Molloy stated in his Order (available for downloading on the WWP web site) that he could not approve a settlement that was illegal or one that undermined the rights of non-settling plaintiffs including Western Watersheds Project.

The Congressional Wolf Rider ordered the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to reissue its 2009 decision delisting wolves within 60 days and also banned judicial review of their reissuance of the delisting rule. It is likely that Western Watersheds Project will initiate a court challenge to the new delisting Rule anyway as there are Constitutional issues of separation of powers that can be raised.

This unfortunate precedent of Congressional intervention to delist a protected species may start the ball rolling on other species that have been contentious and are disliked by corporate developers, ranchers, loggers and industrial agriculture. Some species that may be targeted include the Delta smelt in California, the grizzly bear in the Northern Rockies, and the Delphi...
Sands flower-loving fly also in California. The northwest’s iconic Chinook salmon may also be targeted.

In Idaho the anti-wolf effort has gone even further: on April 14th Idaho’s Governor C.L. “Butch” Otter signed into law the Wolf Disaster Emergency bill, which grants him broad powers, including marshalling all emergency workers in the state until perceived threats to Idahoans from gray wolves are “eliminated.” The new statute grants the Governor powers to suspend all laws and regulations, such as those that prevent poisoning and trapping of wolves.

Governor Otter signed the bill into law even after Congress ordered the delisting wolves within 60 days in Idaho, Montana and parts of Oregon, Washington and Utah.

It wasn’t science that removed protections for Northern Rocky Mountain wolves it was politics. What a shame for gray wolves and our American Democracy. Let’s hope the wolves can survive … at least through the next election cycle.

Jon Marvel is Executive Director of Western Watersheds Project. He lives in Hailey, Idaho.

Semester in The West

Every other year in the fall for the past ten years WWP has participated in a seminar in Elko County, Nevada with Whitman College students in the “Semester in the West” program.

Jon Marvel, Board President Kelley Weston and other representatives from Western Watersheds meet with students near Jackpot, Nevada to discuss current and long term negative impacts of livestock grazing on the Trout Creek watershed in Elko County.

Whitman College Semester in the West is an interdisciplinary field program in environmental studies, focusing on public lands conservation in the interior American West. Whitman College students venture out into the interior West for field meetings with a wide variety of leading figures in conservation, ecology, environmental writing and social justice. During the course of the semester, Students typically have the opportunity to visit with sixty or seventy such leaders. The program is organized and directed by Professor Phil Brick, head of the Department of Politics at Whitman.

Visit the Semester In The West Website at www.semesterinthewest.org

Above: WWP Executive Director Jon Marvel talks with Whitman College Semester in the West students at a cow-blasted part of Trout Creek on the Salmon River allotment near Jackpot, Nevada, October 2010.
Fighting For Bison In Montana
By Tom Woodbury

When Western Watersheds Project opened its office in Missoula, Montana in 2008, the very first objective discussed among WWP staff was the possibility of new litigation to stop unwarranted bison killing in Montana authorized under the archaic Interagency Bison Management Plan that catered to ranching interests at the expense of bison.

A little more than a year later in WWP’s Online Messenger #161 Western Watersheds Project announced the filing of a comprehensive lawsuit to stop the bison slaughter this way:

“Perhaps the most obvious example of the livestock industry’s attempt to control all wildlife use on public lands is the killing of native bison leaving Yellowstone National Park. Killing bison has little to do with disease risks to livestock and much to do with controlling public lands at the expense of wildlife.”

In the harsh winter season of 2008 before WWP opened its Montana office, 1447 Yellowstone National Park bison attempting to access their winter range on the Montana side of the border with Yellowstone were sent to slaughter by government agents, reducing the last wild population of bison in North America by over a third, and doubling the total number killed under the Interagency Bison Management Plan’s policy of “increasing tolerance.”

The winter of 2011 has been very similar to the harsh conditions of 2008, and once again bison started exiting the Park en masse in February to forage at lower elevations in the Paradise Valley, and once again the Park Service started rounding them up into holding pens for testing and slaughter or extended confinement.

This year with litigation underway, Western Watersheds Project and our allies at the Buffalo Field Campaign and the Gallatin Wildlife Association sought emergency injunctive relief to stop the senseless slaughter of bison trying to access an area where the only two fulltime cattle ranchers recently told the press they had no problem with free-roaming bison. The events triggered by that effort prove the power of litigation to shake up stagnant political paradigms.

WWP had no illusions about its chances of winning this litigation in the federal District Court of Montana. From the start, we have been positioning ourselves for an appeal, and we knew that our best chance of obtaining emergency relief was in the appeals court. In order to get there, however, WWP had to go through the lower court. Sure enough federal District Court Judge Charles Lovell’s response to WWP’s emergency motion was to issue a final ruling that slaughtering bison was a “time honored” tradition in Montana, and he wasn’t about to upset that status quo.

Remarkably the filing of a WWP’s motion for emergency relief to stop a repeat of the mass bison slaughter of ’08 struck a responsive chord in the media and with the public, and suddenly the profile of the Montana bison issue took a quantum leap. Reporters were calling from all around the world including New Zealand, Canada, Japan and exotic American locales like Houston, and the Montana Governor’s office was bombarded by sympathetic pleas for him to take action to protect bison.

The day after Judge Lovell’s terse Valentine’s Day denial of legal relief, Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer surprised everyone by issuing an emergency order preventing the shipment of bison in Montana for slaughter. Echoing significant legal points of the WWP litigation, the Governor called the Interagency Bison Management Plan a broken plan that needed to be fixed to avoid mass slaughters every time we have a harsh winter. Suddenly, the political paradigm shifted dramatically.

Behind the scenes, negotiations ensued between the Governor’s office, the Montana Department of Livestock (the stockgrower’s best friend in Montana), Yellowstone National Park’s new Superintendent, and the Gallatin National Forest. Governor Schweitzer called for a new buffer zone on the north end of Yellowstone Park of about 25,000 acres where bison...
would continue to be hunted, but with freedom to roam over a much broader area. This is closer to an ethical hunt than the kind of canned hunt we have seen in recent years.

Governor Schweitzer also called for a second buffer zone in the Madison River Valley, stretching west about 20 miles from the National Park border to Quake Lake. This change would mean that the headquarters of Western Watersheds Project’s ally and long-time bison advocates Buffalo Field Campaign would have free roaming bison on their property. It would also end the ridiculous hazing of bison on Horse Butte every summer during calving season – an area where there are no cattle and where residents overwhelmingly want bison to be left alone.

New Yellowstone National Park Superintendent Daniel Wenk and representatives of the Forest Service said they embraced the plan to allow bison more room to roam in the Gardiner Basin. In fact, Forest Service spokeswoman Marna Daley commented as follows on the negotiations for room to roam: “We’re thrilled they’re considering it.”

I am reminded of a theory in physics that I learned in college and which has often been a source of hope in my environmental advocacy over the past three decades. According to Dr. Ilya Prigogine’s theory of dissipative structures, for which he was awarded a Nobel Prize, the way organic and inorganic systems alike work is that entropy increases until the chaos of the system reaches a critical breaking point, at which point some small, seemingly innocuous catalyst is introduced into the system and the whole instantaneously assumes a previously unseen, higher order.

In other words, sometimes the only way to achieve a higher level of order is to wait till things could be no worse, then find a catalyst. In political conflict including the bison management fight, that catalyst can often be a well-timed lawsuit. The WWP litigation coupled with the hard work of WWP’s Montana allies the Buffalo Field Campaign, the Gallatin Wildlife Association, Indian Tribes and individuals on the ground have enabled this welcome change in bison management in Montana.

Of course, the conflict over bison in Montana is far from over, and even on public lands the long-entrenched and politically influential Montana livestock organizations are still unwilling to accept bison; but Western Watersheds Project has already made a significant difference in how bison are perceived and managed in Montana.

Tom Woodbury is WWP’s Montana Director
He lives in Missoula

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Western Watersheds Project
2010 Annual Financial Report

Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memberships and Contributions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Events and Earned Income</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Income</strong></td>
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Expense

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Bank Charges</td>
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<td>Conferences &amp; Meetings</td>
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<td><strong>Total Expenses</strong></td>
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Net Ordinary Income: **$201,400.00**
Net Income: **$201,400.00**
Transfers from Capital Assets: **$258,000.00**
Year End Balance: **$56,600.00**

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(All Figures Rounded)
WWP extends special thanks to the following supporters, each of whom contributed $100 or more to our efforts since the last newsletter. This generous assistance helps to preserve and restore habitat for many species.


Wild Horses In Winds of Change

Library Journal calls the award winning film, “beautifully rendered and very persuasive” and the DCFilm Festival called it “extraordinary!” According to Jonathan Ratner, Western Watersheds Project Wyoming Director, the film is a “wake up call in understanding the root cause of all problems for wild horses; the livestock industry and its private profit from our public lands.”

This is currently the only film about wild horses that carries an ecological message. It is now available to use as a fund-raiser or public relations screening. Visit wildhorsesinwindsofchange.com to learn how you can use this film to help the cause of your choice.
All readers of the Watersheds Messenger can keep up on the activities of Western Watersheds Project by signing up for WWP’s Online Messenger.

To join WWP’s Online Messenger, send an email to wwp@westernwatersheds.org with the word subscribe in the subject line.

Contemplative Sage Grouse Hen reflects upon Cow Pie, Clark County, Idaho April 2011

photo ©Michael Crist
“Even worse, the National Park Service is participating in this slaughter of native wildlife. Hundreds of bison were herded into corrals INSIDE Yellowstone National Park where it was anticipated that at least some of them were be killed.” - Page 1