



## Support Efforts to Restore Wild Bison

*Oppose HB 318 (Sponsored by Representative Kenneth Holund): Clarify Definition of Bison. This bill threatens bison restoration in Montana*

- Currently, bison in Montana can be legally defined as livestock or wildlife. The current legal definition of a wild bison is one “that has not been reduced to captivity and is not owned by a person.” This bill amends the definition to limit “wild” bison legally to those that have *never* been “reduced to captivity” or subject to the per capita fee for livestock. This makes the definition much more restrictive, so that it would be extremely challenging, if not impossible, for bison to qualify as “wild” in Montana. It is likely that Yellowstone bison could no longer be considered wild if this bill is passed.
- While the bill may appear innocuous, amending this definition would limit bison restoration efforts in Montana. **Because bison that have ever been in captivity or managed as livestock could not be considered wild under Montana law, bison from conservation herds in private ownership could not be transferred to state ownership and classified and managed as wildlife in Montana.** It also may mean any bison from Tribal or public herds, such as those in Yellowstone National Park, that would be “reduced to captivity” for disease testing or quarantine (or potentially even simply for transfer), also would not qualify as “wild bison” even after being released from captivity. **The ability to transfer bison from private ownership or from other public herds to public lands is an essential part of bison restoration.**
- Polling shows that Montanans overwhelmingly support bison restoration and therefore the ability to manage bison as wildlife. **This bill is not in the best interest of Montanans, and it is an attack on efforts to restore bison in our state.**

### A History of Conflict

In the 1800s, the US government and western settlers all but eradicated bison in the United States. This was done in part for sport and to harvest and trade their hides, but it was also a significant part of the strategy to colonize the US. Since then, efforts to bring back the bison have been underway, especially in Yellowstone National Park where the herd there reached numbers of around 3000. Tribes have historical, cultural, spiritual, and traditional connection to bison and have been actively working to restore bison to their historical prairie habitat on reservation land and on federal public land. Many organizations and individuals have also advocated for restoration of bison as part of the public trust on state and federal lands in Montana. These efforts as a whole have been faced with long-standing opposition. This is due in large part to conflicts between livestock owners and stated concerns over brucellosis, a disease that originated in livestock, and has spread to elk and bison. It can cause reduced milk production in cattle, and sometimes spontaneous abortion of a first calf. It is not, however, fatal to either livestock or bison. The risk of spread from wild bison to domestic cattle is exceedingly small, and basic management practices can eliminate the risk altogether. But bills like HB 318 and HB 302: “Require County Approval to Relocate Bison” are direct threats to these efforts.

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See the [current bill text](#) to learn more & check out our [citizen lobbying resources](#).

For more information about our legislative work, contact Caitlin Piserchia at [caitlin.piserchia@sierraclub.org](mailto:caitlin.piserchia@sierraclub.org).