

# Kriss Worthington

Councilmember, City of Berkeley, District 7 2180 Milvia Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Berkeley, CA 94704 PHONE 510-981-7170 FAX 510-981-7177 kworthington@ci.berkeley.ca.us

CONSENT CALENDAR
December 17, 2013

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Kriss Worthington

Subject: Letter to Director of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to Support Option B

for Montana's Plan to Protect the Nation's Last Native Bison in

Yellowstone Park

#### RECOMMENDATION

Send a letter to the Director of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to support option B in the Joint Environmental Assessment for Year-Round Habitat for Yellowstone Bison, which is supported by the Yellowstone Bison Citizens Working Group, the National Wildlife Federation, the Sierra Club, and various Native American tribes such as the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.

### **BACKGROUND**

Yellowstone National Park has the last 3,700 genetically pure bison left in the United States, as well as one of only three free-roaming bison herds left in the country. Their traditional roaming routes along waterways extend outside the boundaries of the park's borders. Every year when they wander in their natural habitat outside park boundaries, they are hazed back into the park, into holding facilities, or sometimes shot or slaughtered when they venture out of "tolerance" zones. The Interagency Bison Management Plan spends \$3 million on annual hazing activities that could be spent on wildlife-friendly bison fencing that is built along borders that more closely resemble longstanding bison habitat instead of artificial park boundaries.

Ranching interests have supported 14 anti-bison legislation bills in Montana in the past year, and the governor has vetoed many of them. In response to public pressure to protect the bison, the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) agency and Department of Livestock (MDL) have drafted a Joint Environmental Assessment for Year-Round Habitat for Yellowstone Bison. In early 2014, the MFWP and MDL directors will announce their decision on which of the six options presented in the assessment will be implemented in Montana before a more comprehensive plan is adopted in 2015. Option B in the assessment, supported by the National Resources Defense Council, will set aside 421,821 acres of U.S. Forest Service and wilderness lands adjoining Yellowstone Park for bison roaming, and implement a series of surveying and monitoring activities to establish baseline and ongoing data about bison behavior and habitat. This option provides the most year-round habitat for bison of all the options in the assessment. Its principles are supported by the Yellowstone Bison

Citizens Working Group, the National Wildlife Federation, the Sierra Club, and various Native American tribes such as the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.

The City Council should write letters to the directors of MFWP and DOL in support of Option B in the Joint Environmental Assessment in order to protect one of our last free-roaming bison herds. Protecting the bison and their natural habitat will also protect some of our country's most treasured natural ecosystems.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

## **CONTACT PERSON**

Councilmember Kriss Worthington 510-981-7170 Christine Cherdboonmuang 510-981-7170

#### Attachments:

- 1. Letter to Jeff Hagener, Director of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks agency
- 2. Letter to Christian Mackay, Executive Officer of the Montana Department of Livestock

Jeff Hagener, Director Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks 1420 East Sixth Avenue P.O. Box 200701 Helena, MT 59620-0701

Dear Jeff Hagener,

The Berkeley City Council supports Alternative B of the Joint Environmental Assessment for Year-Round Habitat for Yellowstone Bison, and encourages you to choose this option to implement in 2014. This option provides the most year-round habitat for bison of all the options in the assessment, setting aside 421,821 acres of U.S. Forest Service and wilderness lands adjoining Yellowstone Park for bison roaming. It provides access to both bulls and cows, instead of only bulls. It also contains important measures for long-term sustainable bison management through survey activities to establish baseline and ongoing data about bison behavior and habitat. The data produced will help inform the drafting of the upcoming comprehensive bison habitat plan in 2015.

Currently, the Interagency Bison Management Plan spends \$3 million on annual hazing activities to herd the bison back into the park, and kill many bison in the process when they venture out of "tolerance" zones. Thus, current bison management strategies do not protect the species and their natural habitats. They use money that can be more effectively used for wildlife-friendly bison fencing around centuries-old bison habitat and migration routes. In the climate of strong anti-bison sentiment from special interests that have supported the drafting of 14 anti-bison legislation bills in the last year, we encourage the State of Montana to take decisive action with Option B of the Joint Environmental Assessment. Doing so will put Montana on the path to more sustainable bison management strategies that will protect one of our last free-roaming bison herds in the nation—and thus also protect the state's most treasured natural ecosystems, economy and cultural heritage. Thank you for your consideration and your leadership.

Sincerely,

Berkeley City Council

Christian Mackay, Executive Officer Montana Department of Livestock P.O. Box 202001 Helena, MT 59620-2001

Dear Christian Mackay,

The Berkeley City Council supports Alternative B of the Joint Environmental Assessment for Year-Round Habitat for Yellowstone Bison, and encourages you to choose this option to implement in 2014. This option provides the most year-round habitat for bison of all the options in the assessment. It sets aside 421,821 acres of U.S. Forest Service and wilderness lands adjoining Yellowstone Park for bison roaming. It provides access to both bulls and cows, instead of only bulls. It also contains important measures for long-term sustainable bison management through survey activities to establish baseline and ongoing data about bison behavior and habitat. The data produced will help inform the drafting of the upcoming comprehensive bison habitat plan in 2015.

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Berkeley City Council