Perspectives and Initiatives Pertaining to Bison within Montana by Nongovernmental Organizations

Bison and their management draw varied and often opposing perspectives from the organizations that represent diverse stakeholder groups. FWP feels that it is important for the citizens of Montana to know the varied position statements of these organizations. The following is a brief overview of the goals, programs, perspectives, and resolutions of some of these organizations. It is important to recognize that the following information may change and is representative of the various organizations as it stands during the publication of this background document in spring 2011.

The views and perspectives within this section are not those of FWP. Questions and concerns pertaining to the following opinions and initiatives should be directed to the respective organizations. Each organization was invited to provide information for this background document; therefore the summaries vary in length based on the extent of information that was provided. Every effort was made to contact organizations that are either involved with or potentially affected by bison, though it is important to recognize that if a group is not listed below it does not mean that they do not have a perspective to offer. The following organizations were contacted, but either did not have a bison-specific resolution or perspective, or had not offered a response prior to publication: Alliance for the Wild Rockies, American Wildlands, Buffalo Allies of Bozeman, Montana Outfitters and Guides Association, Montana Bison Association, Montana Cattleman's Association, Montana Stock Growers Association, National Bison Association, Safari Club International, Sierra Club, Sonoran Institute, Yukon to Yellowstone Conservation Initiative.

A number of regional organizations are opposed to or have passed resolutions opposing free-ranging bison and/or the movement of bison within Montana. Many of these organizations offer the perspective that free-ranging bison could be a threat to the agricultural industry due to concerns over disease, competition for forage, and threats to infrastructure such as fencing. Many of the organizations have also cited concern over public safety and potential damage to private property as reasons for opposition. Other organizations have recommended that within Montana the management of bison should fall under the direction of the Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL).

A number of national, international, and regional nongovernment conservation organizations have made the preservation of bison and restoration of wild bison a priority. These organizations are working within Montana and neighboring regions of the West on a number of initiatives. These efforts range from the restoration of bison as native grazers to increasing the available habitat for bison. There is an initiative from a number of the organizations to work toward allowing a year-round presence of bison in the regions around Yellowstone National Park. There are ongoing initiatives by organizations to increase the scientific knowledge used to manage bison and to reduce the occurrence of reportable disease within private herds through testing and culling.

A number of organizations note that is important to recognize the contributions that the private sector makes to the conservation of bison. Gates et al. (2010) distinguishes the conservation efforts of the private sector into two nonexclusive groups: 1) "private citizens interested primarily in commercial production and secondarily in bison conservation; and 2) private conservation groups interested in conserving bison as wildlife" (pp. 64).

The American Prairie Foundation

The American Prairie Reserve is a project led by the American Prairie Foundation (APF). The APF's mission is to create and manage a prairie-based wildlife reserve that, when combined with public lands already devoted to wildlife, will protect a unique natural habitat, provide lasting economic benefits, and improve public access to and enjoyment of the prairie landscape. APF has an international board of directors, and has staff located throughout Montana.

Bison on the American Prairie Reserve.
PHOTO CREDIT: S. GERRITY; COURTESY APF

The APF currently owns approximately 38,000 private acres and leases an additional 83,000 acres of public land within northeastern Montana. APF has a goal to eventually assemble 3.5 million acres using approximately 500,000 purchased, deeded acres to connect three million acres of various public lands managed by the BLM, USFWS and State of Montana. APF states that it strongly promotes public access on its private lands. The organization works closely with land and resource management agencies to ensure compliance with all regulations pertaining to the lands owned and leased by APF.

The APF also works closely with other groups to augment the science behind bison restoration, and reintroduced a captive herd of 16 bison to their lands in 2005. The herd has continued to grow through reintroduction of more bison and through natural reproduction, and as of spring 2010 comprised 215 bison.

The Buffalo Field Campaign

The Buffalo Field Campaign (BFC) is a nonprofit conservation organization based in West Yellowstone, Montana. BFC states that it works to stop the slaughter and harassment of wild bison that migrate out of Yellowstone National Park, protect the natural habitat of native wildlife, and work with First Nations to honor the sacredness of wild bison. BFC's primary goal is to create year-round protection for bison and their habitats and to foster respect for the

BFC members protesting in Helena.
COURTESY BFC

migration of this species.

BFC organizes daily field patrols within bison migration corridors and core habitat areas along the Yellowstone National Park boundary. Patrols document every interaction with the bison and encourage a wide range of activities designed to protect the YNP herd.

The organization notes that it employs planned strategies to protect wild bison through grassroots action, policy work, and litigation. BFC is working toward having bison classified as native wildlife under the management of FWP. BFC emphasizes that the focus should be on creating better brucellosis management plans and practices for cattle, and not on eradicating the disease within wildlife. The organization states that it seeks a scientifically based, ecological, and humane approach to bison management that respects and permanently protects wild bison and their migration between Yellowstone National Park and habitat outside the park.

BFC volunteer records hazing operations. COURTESY BFC

Defenders of Wildlife

Defenders of Wildlife (Defenders) is a national conservation organization with a Rocky Mountain Region Office in Bozeman and a regional field office in Missoula. Defenders' bison conservation priorities in Montana are to promote the restoration of wild bison to suitable regions of the state, create a greater tolerance for YNP bison to migrate beyond the boundaries of the park, and help Native American tribes expand their bison programs.

Defenders is assisting the Assiniboine and Sioux tribes of the Fort Peck Reservation and the Assiniboine and Gros Ventre tribes of the Fort Belknap Reservation with their respective bison restoration programs. Defenders has raised more than $70,000 in recent years to assist the two reservations with their efforts to acquire tribal grazing allotments in order to expand their bison pastures, build bison fencing, and inform tribal

R. Magnan surveying the Fort Peck bison pasture. COURTESY DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE

members about the bison programs. Defenders supported the transfer of quarantined bison to Turner Enterprises Inc.'s Green Ranch, and recommends allocating the remaining quarantined bison and the bison returned from Turner Enterprises between the Fort Peck and Fort Belknap Reservations and at least one public herd.

Defenders supports changing the bison management plan in Montana on the edge of Yellowstone National Park in order to increase tolerance of free-roaming bison on a larger landscape that includes regional public lands, such as a larger portion of the Gallatin National Forest. Defenders notes that additional land must be made available to maintain a significant YNP bison population and to allow bison to be managed in a manner compatible with other wildlife species. While Defenders recognizes the use of "fair chase" hunting as a management tool, they recognize that the current limited ability for bison to utilize land outside of the park does not allow for these goals. Defenders has helped other conservation organizations to retire grazing allotments in key areas of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem by providing limited funding. Defenders is hoping to implement a new coexistence program to help fund projects to reduce conflicts between bison and landowners in the Greater Yellowstone area.

Defenders is calling for the end of slaughter as a management tool. They advocate having the limited livestock that are managed within the region surrounding the park either enclosed in fencing or converted to a bison-friendly alternative, such as steers only, rather than prevent bison from entering the state. In an effort to bring attention to the ongoing bison slaughter, Defenders is actively seeking public support for its programs. The organization recently generated over 100,000 comments to Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar to stop the slaughter and create a formal stakeholder group that represents all interests in order to work toward identifying solutions and advising public agencies on the management of YNP bison.

In addition, Defenders strongly supports efforts to restore bison as a wildlife species to other suitable locations in Montana. The organization is submitting comments on the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan, requesting that the USFWS work to reintroduce bison as wildlife, and are encouraging their membership to do the same.

The Gallatin Wildlife Association

The Gallatin Wildlife Association (GWA) is a regional conservation organization that represents hunters and anglers in southwest Montana. GWA promotes the sustainable management of fish and wildlife populations through "fair chase" hunting and fishing opportunities in order to ensure that these resources will be preserved for the future. The GWA's goal is to establish viable year-round populations of free-ranging bison in Montana that would be conserved and managed through public hunting. To achieve this goal, the GWA is working to identify potential regions of both public and private land where landowner tolerance would allow for free-ranging bison populations.

The GWA is opposed to the current Interagency Bison Management Plan, which they claim focuses on hazing, capture, confinement and slaughter of bison attempting to enter Montana from Yellowstone National Park. GWA instead promotes restoration and management of wild bison populations similar to elk. In the interim, GWA continues to suggest improvements to the IBMP that would better protect private property rights and livestock, and manage a year-round bison population as valued and viable native wildlife on suitable habitat in southwestern Montana.

Bison in the Upper Gallatin. PHOTO CREDIT: J. WISMAN; COURTESY GWA

The GWA has drafted and introduced legislation in three previous legislative sessions to have bison recognized as a "valued, native wildlife in the state of Montana." GWA also introduced legislation in the 2011 session. The Montana Wild Buffalo Recovery and Conservation Act of 2011 would restore FWP as the primary agency responsible for wild bison; would ensure that property rights and livestock are protected by creating an advisory role for the MDOL; and would protect private property rights by preventing the government from entering private property without permission.

The Greater Yellowstone Coalition

The Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GYC) is a regional conservation group headquartered in Bozeman. The organization states that since 1983 it has advocated science-based protection for the lands, waters, and wildlife of the 20-million-acre Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The GYC's goals for bison are twofold: (1) to create opportunities for them to roam freely on appropriate public and private lands within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, and (2) to advocate for appropriate outlets for restoring YNP bison to other suitable habitats in North America as population levels permit. GYC notes that the tools it has applied to achieve these goals include the purchase of federal grazing allotments from willing sellers, negotiations with landowners, and participation in policy discussions with state and federal agencies.

Bison on private land in West Yellowstone. PHOTO CREDIT: GYC

The organization sees the compensation of willing stock growers, through the buyout of their public land grazing allotments, as a means to

mitigate conflict between livestock and wildlife. GYC has participated in a number of buyouts within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. In 2008 the GYC and partner conservation groups worked with FWP, Yellowstone National Park, and the Royal Teton Ranch to support an agreement allowing YNP bison the freedom to roam 9 miles north of the park along the Yellowstone River to suitable public lands. GYC has also partnered with the National Wildlife Federation to purchase grazing allotments on the Gallatin National Forest. GYC notes that it advocates expanding available habitat for bison within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem through policy decisions of relevant managing agencies, and seeks opportunities for making YNP bison available for bison restoration outside of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, including state and federal wildlife refuges and tribal lands. The GYC feels that moving bison to suitable habitat elsewhere around the West will mitigate the need to slaughter YNP bison.

Montana Association of Conservation Districts

The Montana Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) is an association made up of conservation districts, which are units of local government designed to help citizens conserve their soil, water, and other renewable natural resources. The conservation districts are political subdivisions of the state, and are governed by a board of five supervisors elected by local voters in a general election.

In 2009, MACD passed the following resolution pertaining to bison: Resolution 09-07 Opposing Efforts To Create A Multi-Million Acre Wildlife Reserve With Bison In North Central Montana. WHEREAS, the planned conversion of millions of acres by the American Prairie Foundation from cattle ranching to a prairie wildlife reserve featuring bison will have a significant effect on the customs, culture, environment and economy of local communities in north central Montana; and WHEREAS, brucellosis affects a substantial number of bison and elk in the state of Montana and poses a health threat to area cattle; and WHEREAS, the conversion of State and Federal grazing permits from cattle to bison that are managed as part of a wildlife reserve and not a traditional livestock operation will threaten the sustainability of local ranches and the local economy; and WHEREAS, the natural migration of bison may create containment issues and threaten public safety; and

WHEREAS, an assessment of the cumulative impact that a multi-million acre wildlife reserve would have on the natural resources, economy, and communities of north central Montana has not been conducted. THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Montana Association of Conservation Districts pursues and supports a temporary moratorium on the conversion of State and Federal grazing leases from cattle to bison. BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that based on a study and assessment, a uniform guidance be developed on how to proceed with bison restoration efforts and grazing conversions in Montana. NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Montana Association of Conservation Districts stands opposed to the conversion of millions of acres in north central Montana to a wildlife reserve with bison until a study of the social acceptability and an assessment that studies the cumulative impacts of a multi-million acre wildlife reserve on the natural resources, economy, and communities are completed.

Some of the individual conservation districts, such as Cascade County, Garfield County, Hill County, Phillips, McCone, Meagher County, Lower Musselshell, and Yellowstone have also indicated opposition to free-ranging bison out of concern over the threat of private property damage and disease, and the potential impact to the agricultural industry.

The Montana Association of Counties

The Montana Association of Counties (MACo) is an organization for counties of Montana that seeks to further good government and the protection of county interests. MACo is made up of representatives that have been designated by each member county's Board of County Commissioners. The organization seeks to foster cooperation and promote resource sharing among counties, provide services and resources to counties, and study problems and methods for improving the efficiency of county government. The organization also interacts with other government entities of the state and seeks to limit the activities of those entities by, for, or on behalf of government entities of the state of Montana.

MACo has issued the following policy statement pertaining to public lands: "if bison are introduced into areas of the state not currently populated with domestic livestock MACo supports that they be managed by the MDOL."

The MACo Resolution & Legislative Committee drafts legislation based on resolutions, and then works to secure sponsorship for the legislation. MACo adopted two 2011–2013 resolutions pertaining to bison. The first is Resolution 2010-01, amending the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP). The intent of this resolution is "to seek amendments to the Inter-Agency Bison Management Plan that would allow the Counties adjacent to Yellowstone National Park to be a signatory to any agreement involving bison management in the state of Montana" (MACo, n.d., pp. 19). MACo states that IBMP partner agencies "wish to allow wild bison to migrate outside the recognized boundaries of Yellowstone National Park" (MACo, n.d., pp. 19). MACo also states that the IBMP was signed "prior to the current testing protocol for cattle operations in counties adjacent to Yellowstone National Park" and that "wild bison are known to carry the disease Brucellosis, which can be transmitted to other species" (MACo, n.d., pp. 19). MACo notes that local governments were not signatories to the IBMP, and that "local governments are charged with protecting the health and safety of their citizens," and that "counties adjacent to Yellowstone National Park have the legal jurisdiction and management responsibility for all county roads within their counties" (MACo, n.d., pp. 19). Therefore, MACo feels that local governments should be allowed to comment on management plans, and that the management decisions consider the health, safety, and economic well-being of citizens in counties adjacent to the park.

The second resolution that pertains to bison is Resolution 2010-14, Movement of Bison Across County Lines. The intent of this resolution is "to support requiring movement

of bison before crossing county lines to be regulated by the Department of Livestock" (MACo, n.d., pp. 22). MACo notes that bison may currently be moved across county lines without inspection of owner identification. MACo feels that the MDOL is the best agency to manage identification, and therefore should be responsible for regulating bison movement across county lines.

Montana CattleWomen

The mission of the Montana CattleWomen is to "support the livestock industry and its environment though communication, education, and legislative activities" (Montana CattleWomen, 2011). The organization notes that it is opposed to free-ranging bison, and states that its reasoning for opposition is based on concerns over disease and the fact that it feels that bison cannot be controlled. The organization states that "we fence our fields and streams and hay stacks for a reason and feel we would lose a lot if they were free roaming and that is a taking of our property rights" (V. Olson, Montana CattleWomen, personal communication).

Montana Farm Bureau Federation

The Montana Farm Bureau Federation (MFBF) is a regional organization that represents over 16,000 member families, including farmers and ranchers throughout Montana. The MFBF is "adamantly opposed to the establishment of wild or free roaming bison in Montana" (J. Cummins, Montana Farm Bureau Federation, personal communication). The organization cites two main reasons for opposition. The first is that its "members are property owners, they are very concerned that the bison would not be contained to a specific area and when they escape, the bison would be very likely to cause property damage (i.e., tearing down fences, ruining water tanks and reservoirs, disrupting crops, eating grass and hay needed to feed the landowner's livestock, etc.)" (J. Cummins, personal communication).

The second reason for opposition is the concern over the risk of brucellosis transmission. The organization states that "our members believe that all bison outside Yellowstone National Park and the National Bison Range in Moiese should be classified as livestock and subject to regulation by the Montana Department of Livestock since they are a species that is known to carry the disease brucellosis at a very high rate" (J. Cummins, personal communication). The organization notes that if cattle were to become infected with brucellosis, it would be devastating to the industry.

Montana Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife

The Montana Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife's (SFW) mission is to "preserve, protect, and enhance Montana's fish and wildlife resources and outdoor opportunities, and to ensure our American heritage of hunting and trapping through hands-on conservation

efforts and responsible predator management by Montana sportsmen" (SFW, 2011). SFW notes that it does not oppose "bison hunting in Montana for the areas we may already hunt, but we are opposed to introduction of free-roaming bison, relocation, translocation, or expansion of FWP's management of bison" (B. Merrill, SFW, personal communication). The organization cites concern over cost/risk with regard to private property issues, conflicts with the cattle/wool industry, and management problems posed to FWP as the basis for opposition (B. Merrill, personal communication).

Montana Wildlife Federation

The Montana Wildlife Federation (MWF) is a regional conservation organization headquartered in Helena. With more than 7,000 members and 23 affiliate clubs, MWF is the oldest and largest hunter and angler conservation organization in Montana. MWF notes that it is an "organization of conservation minded people who share a mission to protect and enhance Montana's public wildlife, lands, waters, and fair chase hunting and fishing heritage." MWF states that it has made the restoration of huntable populations of free-ranging bison managed by FWP a priority.

MWF has passed two resolutions pertaining to bison management in recent years. Part of MWF's current position on bison management is expressed in a resolution titled Wild Bison Restoration in Montana, which was passed in 2004. This resolution documents MWF's position "for the restoration and expansion of native, wild bison herds in Montana beyond the current limited zone 2 within the Greater Yellowstone Area as identified in the IBMP." The resolution also notes that MWF "insists that recovery and conservation of wild bison follow the successful North American model for wildlife management under the complete and sole supervision and authority of the FWP." MWF's board of directors renewed its commitment to bison restoration through the unanimous passing of a resolution in December 2010 stating that "Montana Wildlife Federation supports the development of the statewide bison management program by FWP . . ." and ". . . that MWF supports the establishment of free-ranging wild populations of bison in Montana."

MWF states that all wild bison in Montana should continue to be classified as "game animals," and the organization opposes any efforts to give other state agencies the authority to manage wildlife species and/or remove this authority from FWP. MWF states that it advocates for the management of free-ranging populations of bison in accordance with the North American Wildlife Conservation Model, and thus should be managed by FWP through recreational "fair chase" hunting.

MWF advocates that agencies and groups that are involved with brucellosis management in bison and livestock focus on the treatment of brucellosis in livestock rather than on brucellosis control in wild bison. MWF states that it supports the management of bison as a public trust resource, and therefore opposes the privatization of public bison. MWF believes that Montana's bison quarantine program has produced genetically pure bison that are free of reportable diseases of concern, and so represent a significant investment to sportsmen and the general public. The organization emphasizes that

quarantine bison and their offspring should be retained in public ownership and could be used to establish new herds to eventually be hunted by Montana sportsmen.

Montana Women Involved in Farm Economics

The Montana Women Involved in Farm Economics is (MTWIFE) "dedicated to improving profitability in production agriculture through educational, legislative, communicative, and cooperative efforts" (WIFE, 2011). The organization has an interim policy in opposition to free-ranging bison within Montana (D. Gillespie, Montana Women Involved in Farm Economics, personal communication)

National Park Conservation Alliance

Winter bison in Yellowstone National Park.
PHOTO CREDIT: D. BLANK

The National Park Conservation Alliance (NPCA) is a national conservation organization with a Northern Rockies Regional/Yellowstone Office in Bozeman and a Glacier Field Office in Whitefish. The NPCA states that it supports the migration of YNP bison into suitable habitat within Montana. The organization is making the identification of suitable habitat and facilitation of the acceptance of bison a priority. NPCA contributed funding and was a member of the working group that facilitated the Royal Teton Ranch allotment buyout. NPCA is working with the Gallatin National Forest to identify and prioritize allotments for potential future buyout or retirement. The organization states that it would support a reevaluation of the IBMP and transfer of the management of YNP bison in Montana from the MDOL to FWP.

NPCA states that it supports the restoration of populations of free-ranging bison elsewhere within Montana. The organization advocates the establishment of a bison management plan for the state of Montana, and opposes legislation that would limit the movement of bison within the state. NPCA would like to see the management of bison in Montana returned to FWP, and supports using "fair chase" hunting as a tool to manage restored herds. NPCA also supports the movement of quarantine bison to a suitable location within Montana, and is working to procure funding to facilitate the transfer of quarantine bison to one of the Native American reservations or another suitable location.

The National Wildlife Federation

Male bison during the rut. PHOTO CREDIT: R. POOLE; COURTESY NWF

The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) is a national conservation organization whose Northern Rockies and Prairies Regional Center has been based in Missoula since 1981. The NWF is the nation's largest conservation organization with over four million members and supporters. NWF states that its mission for bison in Montana is to restore a wild, huntable population to the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge (CMR) and surrounding public lands, and to secure wintering habitat for YNP bison outside of the park. Its work toward that mission includes cooperative partnerships with the American Prairie Foundation and private landowners. NWF notes that it has implemented programs to complement these efforts, and so far has retired three key grazing allotments within the region, totaling over 50,000 acres. NWF has also worked to secure key habitat outside of Yellowstone National Park for wintering bison through its Wildlife Conflict Resolution Program by retiring grazing allotments. As of 2010, NWF has worked with partners to retire 32 allotments totaling more than 566,120 acres of habitat in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Some of the key retirements have included Horse Butte, two allotments in the Taylor Fork, and an agreement with the Royal Teton Ranch to develop a corridor for bison and transfer livestock from the region. In addition, NWF's Tribal Lands Program is working to secure transfer of YNP quarantine bison to tribal reservations in Montana. MWF states that it recognizes that sportsmen played a lead role in saving bison from extinction, and feels that this interest group can now be a leader in the effort to restore bison. NWF is working to organize state and national sportsmen's organizations to influence key bison planning efforts.

Bull Bison. PHOTO CREDIT: R. POOLE; COURTESY NWF

The Natural Resources Defense Council

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is a national conservation organization with a regional office in Livingston. The NRDC states that it is focused on the protection and preservation of YNP bison, as well as the restoration of wild free-roaming bison populations elsewhere in the West. NRDC supports the restoration of bison as a native wildlife species that is not fenced, aggressively managed, or culled. NRDC states that it would like to see the restoration of a wild, free-ranging population of bison in Montana, one that is managed by FWP like other wildlife species such as elk, deer, and pronghorn. To protect bison as a wildlife species, NRDC advocates for a major revision of the IBMP. The

organization also supports a greater acceptance of bison outside Yellowstone National Park in regions of Montana with private landowner tolerance, including maintaining a year-round bison presence in the Horse Butte area. NRDC is working with conservation partners, hunting groups, government agencies, congressional offices, and Native Americans on this effort. NRDC notes that it believes that the restoration of wild herds and the increase of tribal herds will maintain and increase the ecological, economic, cultural, spiritual, and historical values of wild bison.

Herd in Yellowstone National Park. PHOTO CREDIT: DANA LEONARD; COURTESY NRDC

The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy (Conservancy) is a national conservation organization that works to preserve the diversity of species through the conservation of land and water. While the Conservancy does not have stated goals for bison in Montana, the organization notes that it has worked to conserve more then 800,000 acres of wildlife habitat within the state. The Conservancy is currently working to preserve land on the northern Montana prairies, the Yellowstone River, a vast region of southwest Montana around Yellowstone, and the "Crown of the Continent," which consists of over 18 million acres in northwest Montana and Canada. None of these project call for the reintroduction of bison at this time.

The Conservancy does manage conservation bison herds on eight of their preserves that are located in other states. As of 2010 the combined herds totaled approximately 4,845 head of bison. Bison are used as a grasslands management tool on these preserves. The Conservancy is working to increase the genetic purity of its herds through the testing and removal of bison that show introgression of cattle genes.

Turner Enterprises Inc.

With the development of production herds that consist of over 50,000 head of bison on 14 large ranches, Turner Enterprises Inc. is the largest bison producer in the United States (Gates et al., 2010; Turner Enterprises Inc., 2010). The mission statement of Turner Enterprises Inc. is "to manage Turner Lands in an economically sustainable and ecologically sensitive manner while promoting the conservation of native species" (Turner Enterprises Inc., 2010). Turner Enterprises Inc. manages their bison with "low management inputs similar to many public conservation herds" (Gates et al., 2010, pp. 64).

Turner Enterprises Inc. owns four ranches in Montana: the 22,129-acre Bar None Ranch on the southern end of the Big Belt Mountains, the 13,343-acre Snowcrest Ranch

along the Ruby River in Madison County, the 4,878-acre Red Rock Ranch along the Red Rock River in Beaverhead County, and the 113,613-acre Flying D Ranch near Bozeman (Turner Enterprises Inc., 2010)

In 2009, 87 bison from the FWP and APHIS quarantine facility were transferred to Turner Enterprises Inc. to complete five years of post-quarantine monitoring (B. Frey, personal communication). Turner Enterprises Inc. has assumed management responsibility for the quarantined bison and will "return the original (quarantine) bison and 25 percent of their offspring to FWP. Turner Enterprises Inc. will retain the remaining offspring" (FWP, 2010b).

The bison were transferred to Turner Enterprises Inc.'s Flying D Ranch, which consists of 113,613 acres in southwest Montana, near Bozeman (Turner Enterprises Inc., 2010). The herd is separated from other animals on the ranch and rotated through 14 parcels, which range from 300 to 3,000 acres each (FWP, 2010b). The ranch has the capacity to manage the original bison and their offspring (an estimated 340 bison) for the five-year period, and therefore hunting will not be needed as a population management tool (FWP, 2010b).

The Wildlife Conservation Society

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) is an international conservation group based in New York City. Its North American Program office is located in Bozeman, but the WCS conducts conservation projects and programs across the United States and Canada. WCS states that it emphasizes site-based conservation that is focused on landscapes and species. The organization identifies bison as a keystone species and necessary for sustaining prairie ecosystems. Due to bison's significant effect on their habitat and important functional relationship to other prairie species, the WCS states that it advocates for restoration of wild free-roaming bison on a large scale in representative habitats across North America. WCS notes that it encourages ecological restoration programs that support human livelihoods, sustain human cultures, and connect people to nature. The organization states that it recognizes the importance of the preservation of genetics, diversity, and integrity within wood and plains bison populations throughout North America.

The WCS relaunched the American Bison Society (ABS) in 2005 at its 100th anniversary, and with this initiative came a renewed focus on preserving ecologically functional bison populations. The ABS initiative is working to build a network of bison experts including ranchers; local, national, and international governments; Native American nations; scientists; and nongovernmental organizations from western states, Mexico, and Canada with the purpose of securing an ecological future for bison in North America. The WCS states that it works on researching and promoting scientific resolutions to obstacles that hinder the ecological restoration of bison. The ABS initiative supports federal agencies' efforts to better coordinate the management of bison across federal lands (USDI, 2008), and is working with Canada and Mexico to develop cross-border management.

The World Wildlife Fund

Bison on the American Prairie Reserve. PHOTO CREDIT: S. GERRITY; COURTESY APF

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) is an international conservation organization whose Northern Great Plains Program is based in Bozeman. The WWF notes that it has made the restoration of bison within Montana and throughout the Northern Great Plains (North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska, Alberta, and Saskatchewan) one of its highest priorities. In pursuing its conservation initiatives, WWF states that it engages the wisdom and perspective of tribes, sportsmen, recreationists, scientists, conservationists, landowners, and industry.

The long-term goal of WWF is the recovery of endangered and keystone species and natural processes within the Northern Great Plains. As part of this effort, WWF is focused on the large-scale restoration of wild bison, with the aim of establishing three to four herds that each consist of 5,000 or more animals. To achieve this goal, WWF is working with the American Prairie Foundation (APF) to establish and maintain a herd of bison on the American Prairie Reserve (APR). WWF has provided the scientific underpinnings of bison genetics, disease control, wildlife-friendly fencing, and management on the APR.

The WWF states that it supports the efforts of others aiming to rebuild populations of bison. WWF also supports the work of the North American Bison Specialist group of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, which is a collection of experts from government, private business, academia, and tribal and nonprofit communities in North America who have called for major efforts to conserve bison throughout North America. WWF states that it believes that national parks, national wildlife refuges, and other federal lands are an appropriate place to form the core of bison habitat, and supports the efforts being led by government agencies to better manage and conserve bison. The organization supports the work being done by private bison producers to develop best management practices and genetic management guidelines that provide potential opportunities for private bison herds to contribute to the ecological restoration of bison.

WWF states that it supports the evaluation that is currently being conducted by FWP to examine the potential for populations of wild, huntable bison. WWF believes that the greatest challenge to the recovery of bison is not biological, but rather overcoming the common perception that bison, which have had a profound influence on human history and grasslands ecosystems for over 10,000 years, no longer belong on the landscape. WWF believes that the key to the ecological recovery of bison is the recognition that it is a wildlife species and should be conserved and managed as wildlife.