# [***FINAL AGREEMENT FOR YELLOWSTONE BUFFALO WILL MEAN THEY CAN RETURN TO TRIBES***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5SKF-8DJ1-DYTH-G31K-00000-00&context=1516831)

States News Service

June 14, 2018 Thursday

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**Length:** 819 words

**Byline:** States News Service

**Dateline:** WASHINGTON

**Body**

The following information was ***released by Defenders of Wildlife***:

After many years of political wrangling to achieve a plan to divert Yellowstone buffalo from slaughter and be relocated to tribal and public lands to augment or start conservation herds outside of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE), the Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux ***Tribes*** and their conservation partners remain steadfast that the next stepan actual program agreementmust be completed.

Secretary Zinke said we will get our buffalo and Superintendent Wenk also assured us a plan would be coming now that the park Environmental Assessment has been signed, said Robbie Magnan, Fort Pecks buffalo manager. They said we would see buffalo come to Fort Peck this fall, and I have a list of other ***tribes*** in the region waiting to also receive the animals. Fort Peck is dedicated to helping other ***tribes*** also augment their herds with Yellowstone plains buffalo that have been designated brucellosis disease-free.

An Environmental Assessment for buffalo quarantine and transfer to Fort Peck was signed last month by the Department of Interior (DOI), following extensive discussions between Secretary Zinke and representatives of DOI, the Fort Peck ***Tribes***, Yellowstone National Park, USDA-APHIS and the State of Montana. But what remains to be completed is a memorandum of agreement (MOA) required to implement the program, which will involve buffalo testing negative for the bovine disease brucellosis to then be available for transport to Fort Peck. While the ***tribes*** and the conservation partners remain encouraged Secretary Zinke will honor his commitment, DOIs move to either reassign or accelerate retirement of Superintendent Wenk creates uncertainty at a critical time.

The secretary and superintendent do see eye to eye on buffalo relocation to Fort Peck, and thanks to their negotiations with the USDA-APHIS the next step is for APHIS to provide an assessment on when animals can leave the park, said Chamois Andersen, senior representative with Defenders of Wildlife. While we remain hopeful an MOA is forthcoming, it would make the most sense for Superintendent Wenk to remain in his role to help finalize the program agreement this summer. We believe the superintendent should be allowed to complete this important pending task; if he leaves his post we are not certain the ***tribes*** will see the buffalo promised to them come fall, she said.

The NGO conservation partnersDefenders of Wildlife, World Wildlife Fund and National Wildlife Federation have been working in support of this effort, meeting often with state and federal officials, and the councils of Fort Peck and Fort Belknap. All agree the cooperative plan must be initiated for a long-term solution to buffalo management; this will ensure more disease-free buffalo are allowed to be restored to tribal and public lands rather than being sent to slaughter.

We have reached a turning point for the future of Yellowstone buffalo, explains Garrit Voggesser, director of Tribal Partnerships for the National Wildlife Federation. In the last year, tribal, federal, state, and conservation entities have come together like never before, and solutions have been identified that offer a direct path to expanded buffalo conservation across the West. Now is the time to pull up our bootstraps and get it done.

The conservation partners, with a shared vision for buffalo restoration, have long supported on-the-ground efforts of tribal buffalo programs in Montana, South Dakota and Wyoming. Yellowstone buffalo are critical for tribal cultural buffalo programs. Saving Yellowstone buffalo from slaughter and sending them to Fort Peck would ensure that more ***tribes*** as well as public land herds benefit from this valuable wildlife resource for restoration.

Yellowstone Superintendent Dan Wenk has been instrumental in the important political negotiations allowing buffalo to return to tribal lands.

Fort Peck has invested $500,000 in its own holding facility, which has undergone state and federal inspections as a quarantine facility, including a final inspection by APHIS last week that received full approval. This facility will be used to conduct the final stage of disease testing before the animals can be translocated to other ***tribes*** with cultural buffalo programs. Yellowstone buffalo are highly valued for their wild genetics and are considered important for restoring the species to tribal and public lands within its historic range.

Defenders of Wildlife is dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural communities. With over 1.8 million members and activists, Defenders of Wildlife is a leading advocate for innovative solutions to safeguard our wildlife heritage for generations to come. For more information, visit Newsroom.Defenders.org and follow us on Twitter @DefendersNews.

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**Classification**

**Language:** ENGLISH

**Publication-Type:** Newswire

**Subject:** AGREEMENTS (90%); BRUCELLOSIS (90%); CONSERVATION (90%); ENVIRONMENTAL & WILDLIFE ORGANIZATIONS (90%); ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (90%); LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT (90%); MAMMALS (90%); NATIONAL PARKS (90%); PUBLIC LANDS (90%); WILDLIFE CONSERVATION (90%); FOOD INSPECTION (89%); WILDLIFE (89%); ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES (78%); NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (78%); PARKS & PLAYGROUNDS (78%); ANIMAL QUARANTINE (77%); RELOCATIONS (77%); MANAGERS & SUPERVISORS (76%); PUBLIC OFFICIALS (74%)

**Organization:** DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE (84%)

**Industry:** LIVESTOCK DISEASE (90%); NATIONAL PARKS (90%); FOOD INSPECTION (89%); BUFFALO & BISON PRODUCTION (78%); PARKS & PLAYGROUNDS (78%)

**Person:** RYAN ZINKE (92%)

**Geographic:** MONTANA, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (79%)

**Load-Date:** June 18, 2018

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