# [***Final Agreement for Yellowstone Buffalo Means Buffalo Can Go to Tribes***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5SJT-H981-JC11-12JD-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

The ***Defenders of Wildlife issued*** the following news release:

The Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux ***Tribes*** along with their conservation partners remain steadfast that a program agreement to divert Yellowstone buffalo from slaughter and relocate them to tribal and public lands must be completed. Many years of political wrangling has so far stalled efforts to start and augment conservation herds of Yellowstone buffalo outside the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

But a key component to the successful transfer of Yellowstone buffalo may be the continued involvement of Yellowstone Superintendent Dan Wenk. Wenk has been instrumental in the important political negotiations allowing buffalo to go to tribal lands. While the ***tribes*** and the conservation partners remain encouraged DOI Secretary Ryan Zinke will honor his commitment, Wenk's continued involvement is uncertain, given DOI's move to either reassign him to D.C. or accelerate his retirement.

"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 Peck's 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 are 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 a required memorandum of agreement (MOA) to implement the program remains incomplete. The MOA which will allow buffalo testing negative for the bovine disease brucellosis to be transported to Fort Peck Reservation.

"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."

The NGO conservation partners--Defenders of Wildlife, World Wildlife Fund and National Wildlife Federation-- have been supporting 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 can 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 local 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*** public land herds benefit from this valuable wildlife resource.

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.

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