# [***HISTORIC DECISION TO RETURN GENETICALLY PURE BISON TO TRIBES PAVES WAY FOR CONSERVATION MONTANA WILDLIFE COMMISSION APPROVES TRANSFER OF 68 YELLOWSTONE BISON TO FORT PECK AND FORT BELKNAP RESERVATIONS***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:54FJ-1BY1-JCBF-S1C0-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

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

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission approved a land-mark plan today to move 68 bison from a quarantine facility near Yellowstone National Park to the Fort Peck and Fort Belknap Indian Reservations.

The following is a statement from Jonathan Proctor, Rocky Mountain representative for Defenders of Wildlife:

This is a significant milestone for the restoration of genetically pure bison and a critical step forward for returning these animals which migrated out of Yellowstone Park to parts of their historic range across the Great Plains. The ***tribes*** of Fort Peck and Fort Belknap Reservations have repeatedly offered to welcome the bison back. For this we owe these ***tribes*** and the Commission our sincere gratitude.

Returning these animals to tribal lands will allow at least some of Yellowstone's bison to escape the government-led slaughter that has occurred in the past decade when bison have migrated out of the Park in winter in search of forage. Additional innovative strategies need to be developed as an alternative to slaughter and as a way to restore genetically pure bison to the wild beyond the confines of the park. These are the most genetically important bison in the United States and should not be killed needlessly, especially when there is plenty of suitable habitat available.

Governor Schweitzer has played an instrumental role in exploring new avenues for bison conservation and deserves credit for moving this plan forward. We are honored to have been able to help the Assiniboine, Sioux and Gros Ventre ***tribes*** by contributing funds for their efforts to secure grazing permits and build the required fencing in preparation for the return of bison. We look forward to continuing to support this project now that the plan has been approved.

Background:

Millions of bison thundered across the Great Plains for thousands of years. But by the end of the 1800s, those vast herds had been virtually eliminated due to unregulated shooting. Today, wild bison are making a small comeback in places like Yellowstone National Park, but they need more room to roam. Defenders has been a leading proponent of returning Yellowstone bison to tribal lands, and we've worked closely with tribal wildlife managers for years at the Fort Peck and Fort Belknap Indian Reservations. We've invested more than $84,000 so far for bison restoration at both reservations and will be making additional contributions for fencing and for purchasing adjacent grazing allotments. Though relatively small in area (4,800 acres at Fort Peck and 22,000 acres at Fort Belknap), these new bison reserves have potential for expansion and will also lead by example for tribal and public land managers elsewhere.

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