# [***Montana Agrees to Let Bison Roam Outside Yellowstone***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:52MR-TJ01-JC11-119R-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

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

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks is introducing a breakthrough plan today that will allow bison in Yellowstone National Park to travel north into Montana's Gardiner Basin during winter months. The plan would likely end the annual capture and shipping to slaughter of many of the bison that leave the park each winter in search of food and may help set the stage for restoring the animals to other parts of the state. The eight partners of the Interagency Bison Management Plan are hosting an open house to discuss changes to the plan tonight at 5 p.m. in Gardiner, Mont.

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

"The agreement reached between state, federal and tribal wildlife managers to allow wild bison to roam Montana's Gardiner Basin outside Yellowstone National Park is an important step forward. For decades, pressure has been building in Montana and around the country for an alternative to slaughtering bison that leave the park in search of food during harsh winters. Increasing tolerance for bison to roam outside the park in winter is a key part of the solution.

"Ultimately, we believe that wild bison should be free to roam like all other wildlife, and this plan gets us closer to that goal. We don't shoot bears or elk simply for crossing the park boundary, so we shouldn't shoot bison for doing the same. The difference between managing animals as wildlife and keeping animals in a zoo is giving them the room to roam and survive on their own.

"Ranchers' concerns about potential conflicts with cattle do not justify the mismanagement of bison that has been going on for years. Those are workable issues, and with a little extra effort we can help protect cattle without confining bison to Yellowstone National Park. This plan provides a path forward that will help demonstrate that it is possible to live with bison outside of the park."

"Governor Schweitzer is well positioned to be the first governor in the history of the country to restore bison as wildlife in a meaningful way. We thank Governor Schweitzer for his leadership and all the state, federal and tribal agencies involved for their efforts to create some space for wild bison in Montana. We also encourage the state to work with the ***tribes*** of Fort Peck and Fort Belknap Reservations who have expressed interest in restoring wild Yellowstone bison to their tribal lands."

Background:

The proposed bison plan will open 75,000 acres in southern Montana, just north of Yellowstone National Park, to bison during winter months. A cattle guard has already been installed to prevent bison from traveling beyond Yankee Jim Canyon--a narrow spot at the north end of the basin. A short fence is soon to be built. The plan also includes a provision to allow expanded public bison hunting as an alternative to sending the animals to slaughter. Defenders of Wildlife has committed at least $50,000 for fencing and other related costs for projects to help restore bison to tribal lands and Montana's Gardiner Basin.

Over the past two decades, thousands of bison have been sent to slaughter after migrating beyond the park boundaries. This year, however, when hundreds of bison began leaving the park in search of food, Gov. Schweitzer issued an executive order that effectively prohibited the shipping of bison to slaughter through May 15. Since then, 600 bison are being kept in a capture facility and are expected to be released into the park later this spring.

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