

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 8, 2023

Charles F. Sams III
Director
National Park Service
1849 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Director Sams,

In recent weeks, my office has heard concerns from constituents regarding potential issues with the National Park Service (NPS) and the Interior Department's 2023 Bison Management Plan at Yellowstone National Park. These constituents have raised three major issues with the plan, which estimates a sustainable bison population of 10,000 during the summer and 6,500 during the winter.

The first issue pertains to the quality and quantity of available forage. Under the plan, NPS scientists appear to have disregarded the desirability of the forage being produced through bison grazing. Instead, they seem to have focused solely on the overall increase in production. It has been pointed out that overgrazing has led to the growth of plants that are unpalatable to bison.

The second issue is that while scientists claim the regrowth is higher in protein, there are concerns that overgrazing could eventually lead to the destruction of all native plants, leaving behind only weeds and undesirable plants incapable of nourishing bison, resisting drought, or providing adequate water infiltration.

The third issue is that when inappropriately large numbers of bison congregate, the riparian systems cease to thrive and degrade as seen in the Lamar Valley and Hayden Valley rangelands. This degradation has significant downstream consequences, including exacerbating floods, silt erosion, harm to the fishing and recreation industry, and water shortages for downstream users later in the season. With these major issues in mind, I request answers to the following questions:

Specifically:

- Did the NPS seek input from outside experienced range technicians while creating this plan? If not, could you please provide an explanation for this decision?
- Does the NPS believe that the issues mentioned were adequately considered when creating this plan?
- How much influence did Department of Interior or Bureau of Land Management officials have in the creation of this plan? Could you specify which DOI or BLM officials were involved in the development of this plan?
- Was anyone involved in the planning process aware of the study published on February 15, 2023¹, which found that the influence of bison on the Northern Range leads to biotic impoverishment and a loss of ecosystem services provided by native plant life? If not, please explain why this study was not considered in the planning process.

¹ <https://doi.org/10.1002/ecs2.4406>

- Would the NPS be willing to consider allowing input from outside experts for future plan development?
- How does the NPS believe that the reintroduction of bison aligns with their stated goal to "preserve unimpaired the natural...resources of the national park system"?

This is a topic that greatly affects concerned landowners in the area surrounding Yellowstone National Park. I look forward to your answers and respectfully request a response to them by November 22, 2023.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew M. Rosendale, Sr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Matthew M. Rosendale, Sr.
Member of Congress