

For Immediate Release: Wednesday, April 23, 2008
Contact: Bob Jackson (641) 874-5794; Carol Goldberg (202) 265-7337

WHY NATIVE YELLOWSTONE BISON STAY IN THE PARK
Elusive Mountain Bison Fear Humans but Face More Intrusion on Shrinking Range

Washington, DC - The original, native bison in Yellowstone National Park shun human contact and never migrate beyond their remote backcountry range. As record numbers of their introduced Plains Bison cousins are slaughtered this year for leaving park boundaries, the Mountain Bison face a quieter threat of human incursion deep into their sanctuaries, according to an analysis released today by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER).

Despite recognition in the historic annals of Yellowstone that Mountain Bison are distinct, the park itself recognizes no such difference. Bob Jackson, a 30-year backcountry ranger at Yellowstone National Park and a recognized bison behavioral expert, argues that the park's "all buffaloes are alike" attitude is endangering the park's original bison population, now numbering around 300 animals:

- The range of the Mountain Bison between Pelican Valley in winter and Mirror Plateau in summer has been cut in half by human encroachment;
- The Mountain Bison run from human contact yet the park has placed horse camps inside their summer range;
- The park does not put any lands off-limits to shelter Mountain Bison from unwanted human intrusion.

"Yellowstone Park shows no curiosity about why and how the Mountain Bison are different," Jackson said, noting that park fears the legal consequences of recognizing differences. "Yellowstone's Mountain Bison of Pelican Valley need to be recognized for what they are - a unique herd that is worth saving."

The Mountain Bison are thought to be the direct descendants of Yellowstone's prehistoric buffalo. Unlike the Plains Bison, the Mountain Bison do not tolerate the presence of humans and stay deep within their forested haunts in the park's rugged upper elevations.

This year, Yellowstone has sent a record number of the park's Plains Bison, almost one-third of the park's total buffalo population, to slaughter. Overall, more than half of Yellowstone's bison have perished in the just the past several months. In late March, a highly critical Government Accountability Office report blasted Yellowstone's failure to monitor the consequences of its management actions on the park's bison. On April 7, PEER called on National Park Service Director Mary Bomar to convene a panel of outside experts to evaluate the park's bison management program but has yet to hear a reply.

"Yellowstone's 'one-size-fits-all' myopia about the Mountain Bison is symptomatic of a leaderless wildlife management program," stated PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch. "Yellowstone has lost sight of the fact that the park is supposed to serve the wildlife, not vice versa."

###