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Representative Alan Dick

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Sponsor Statement

HJR 32: Wood Bison

A Resolution urging The United States Congress to remove wood bison from protection under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 and to grant control of wood bison in Alaska to the state.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) has been working to re-introduce wood bison into Alaska for many years. Wood bison are listed as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act. The introduction of an endangered species into the wild brings with it significant restrictions on resource development and felony charges if they are harmed or hunted.

Under certain circumstances waivers of some of these restrictions are available and ADF&G has worked hard to negotiate such waivers. Last year they successfully concluded negotiations with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and were preparing to release them into the wild when FWS notified them that a lawsuit had been filed challenging whether or not a protected species could ever be hunted. FWS notified ADF&G that it was willing to proceed with the rest of the negotiated agreement but not the hunting provision. ADF&G wisely elected not to proceed until such assurances are guaranteed.

In recent years numerous lawsuits, and petitions for injunctive relief, have been filed seeking to overturn already negotiated agreements or prevent new waivers from being approved. An ever increasing number of these petitions or suits have been successful - which removes the assurance that the waivers are intended to offer.

If wood bison are reintroduced into the wild while they remain on the protected list hundreds of thousands of acres (if not more) of interior Alaska could be added to the

over 200 million acres of coastal Alaska that have recently been locked-up by the addition to the list of polar bears and beluga whales alone.

As a result there are only three reasonable responses to the current situation.

1. Work to facilitate their removal from the ESA by asking congress to intervene and remove them from the list as they did recently with the grey wolves in the Lower-48 states.
2. Release them onto an island and allow them to proliferate there until they are removed from protection at which time they could safely be reintroduced onto previously occupied lands.
3. Do not reintroduce wood bison into the wild in Alaska, even with negotiated agreements, as long as they remain on the ESA's threatened or endangered list.

HJR 32 addresses the first response.