

## **Linda Hay**

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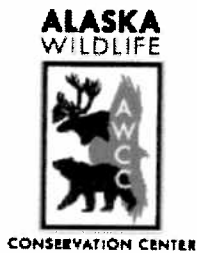
**From:** Heather Rabinovitch [heatherr@msialaska.com]  
**Sent:** Friday, April 08, 2011 9:23 AM  
**To:** Rep. Eric Feige  
**Subject:** AWCC position on wood bison release  
**Attachments:** 2011.4 wood bison letter.docx

**Categories:** Linda, Mike

Representative Feige,

Attached please find the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center's comments on HB 186. We believe that the rhetoric has outpaced reason on the subject of wood bison release, and that we should be working together on a mutually beneficial solution. Thank you for your consideration. If you have questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to give me a call.

Mike Miller  
Executive Director



April 6, 2011

Re: Opposition to House Bill 186

Alaska has the unique opportunity to return to the wilds an extirpated species – the wood bison. We can release these magnificent animals into their traditional habitat in a way that protects the interests of our state, our residents, our nation and the animals themselves. This is truly a win-win situation for everyone – and an opportunity to correct a mistake mankind made almost a century ago.

Wood bison disappeared from Alaska about 100 years ago, probably as a result of over-hunting. Canada found a small herd of the animals in the 1960s, moved them to a protected area and let them multiply to the point they could be reintroduced into their historical range. Canada presently has six large, wild herds of wood bison that coexist with the nation's aboriginal inhabitants, its mining interests, its tourism business and its large oil and gas industry.

The project to reintroduce wood bison in Alaska dates back more than a decade. After extensive consultations and planning, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) asked the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center (AWCC) to support the animals until they could be released. The first bison arrived in 2006 from the Yukon Territory and another 50 arrived in 2008. Today, the herd numbers 86.

It has been our privilege to care for the bison at our nonprofit facility near Portage. AWCC does not charge the state for the care of the bison, or for the use of the land and our facilities. This has been our contribution to this project. But now it is time to begin returning the bison to their traditional home.

Wood bison are listed as an endangered species under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA). The state, in cooperation with the Fish and Wildlife Service, has determined that the best way to address concerns is to establish a special federal rule to designate the bison as a “nonessential experimental population.” The special rule – called 10(j) - removes many of the regulatory requirements that normally apply to endangered species and allows state management of the animals.

These 10(j) rules have proven to be highly effective in about two dozen cases and Alaska's wood bison meet the legal requirements for such a designation perfectly. ADF&G has repeatedly said it will not release wood bison into the wild until the final rule is in place and provides sufficient protection for other existing and future land uses. We support this approach.

Alaskans throughout the state want the bison released. The people of the lower Yukon and Innoko area support restoration. The GASH Fish and Game Advisory Committee, the Western Interior Regional Subsistence Advisory Council, the

Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center  
PO Box 949 • Mile 79 Seward Highway • Portage, Alaska 99587  
[www.alaskawildlife.org](http://www.alaskawildlife.org)

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Mid Yukon Kuskokwim Soil and Water Conservation District and the Tanana Chiefs Conference Lower Yukon Sub-region have adopted letters or resolutions of support.

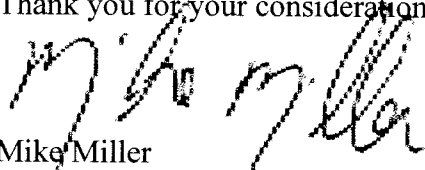
Public meetings to discuss the project have attracted advocates from sport hunting groups, Native subsistence groups and watchable wildlife groups. It is rare that these diverse groups work so harmoniously on a mutually beneficial project.

Financial support has been as broad-based and has included the Safari Club, the Rasmuson Foundation, Teck-Cominco Ltd., UAF School of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences, Pope & Young Club, Wildlife Conservation Society, Ted Turner Foundation, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, UA Local 367, Greer Tank, Carlile Transportation Systems, the Anchorage Soil and Water Conservation District and Alyeska Resort.

The AWCC strongly opposes HB186 and instead encourages the Legislature to seek ways to help ADF&G move as expeditiously as possible to restore wood bison in the lower Yukon and Innoko areas.

We also would like you to stop by our facility and see these amazing animals up close.

Thank you for your consideration.

  
Mike Miller  
AWCC Founder/Executive Director  
907-301-7942 cell

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Td1a3VWWXZk&feature=player\\_embedded#at=15](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Td1a3VWWXZk&feature=player_embedded#at=15)