

The straight dope right from the buffalo's mouth

You're surprised that a Yellowstone National Park buffalo is writing an opinion column in a newspaper?

You imagine buffaloes have no opinions?

I can be shaggy and just dictate this column to my bud at the Chronicle, Ray Ring, who's helping out because the standard keyboard isn't set up for typing with nine-inch hooves.

You may have already spotted me on the TV news or in the newspapers — I've been the subject of too much coverage.

I thought you'd appreciate the straight story, firsthand from the front lines, from the one who's most directly affected.

That's right, I'm the lone bull wandering outside the park boundaries this winter. I left thousands of my fellow buffalo behind in the park and now I'm on my own, out here along the Madison River, just hanging out in the willow brush, deww-dee-doo.

Of course, that's not good enough for some people. They can't leave well enough alone. So the government has to come way out here and hassle me —



Ed Buffalo

Chronicle Columnist

state and federal agents trying to scare me across the invisible line and back into the park, because I might be carrying some tiny little bacteria called brucellosis.

Like I care where the line is drawn on the maps. The line is nothing on the ground — it doesn't really exist, understand?

They call it hazing. They use snowmobiles to buzz and spew smoke clouds around me, they make more loud noises firing cracker shells at me from shotguns, they do yells intended to intimidate me, such as, "Yip-ai-yip-yip! Git! Git!"

Whoa. I'm shaking.

It's just childish cowboy stuff, you know what I'm saying?

Next they'll be aiming boom-boxes at me, playing 120 decibels of Spice Girls or Grand Funk Railroad or Kid Rock, so much for the tranquility of the wilderness. If that doesn't work, I bet they'll try accordions.

Then the animal activists come around — the guys and gals that call themselves the Buffalo Field Campaign, like they're descended from General Patton or Robert E. Lee on some great modern field of battle. They're also called the Buffalo Hippies, but that's not accurate either.

I'm here to tell you, I know some real buffalo hippies, and the ones in this campaign aren't. Real buffalo hippies, the four-legged kind, are hanging much

looser, smoking algae and lichen, abusing every natural substance, and growing their beards. Real buffalo hippies just don't give a damn.

These two-legged buffalo hippies are just wannabes. But they're out here, hurling themselves between the government agents and me, like I need rescuing.

How condescending.

Ever have friends who like you a little too much?

My aunt Sophie, who likes to hang out by park headquarters buildings, listening in the windows, says she's heard the government and the activists are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars this winter just to haze or not haze me.

All I'm doing is pushing my head into the snow to chomp some old brown grass left from last summer, what's the big deal?

Brucellosis? Look inward, folks, what kind of bad germs are you carrying around right now in your gut

(More on **Buffalo**, page 18)

March 1, 2000

Buffalo/from page 17

and bloodstream? Ever hear of staph, strep, a thousand other kinds of viruses, flesh-eating bacteria? Each and every one of you has a sicker stew brewing inside you 24 hours a day than I could ever achieve, which only the thin workings of your own immune system keeps under control.

But is anyone firing cracker shells at you trying to keep you penned up inside your house? Anyone declaring you to be a campaign?

I live in a national park, day in, day out. So when I need a break from the ruts I'm in most of the time, when I need a little vacation, a change of scenery, where am I supposed to go? *Outside* the park — get it? Is that so hard to comprehend?

The park isn't as nice as you might imagine, either. Ever have a geyser erupt under your tail?

And the rest of my fellow buffalo, sometimes I need a break from them too. They're not the brightest

bunch. The herd concept isn't that interesting, is it?

And I happen to have a poetic side that needs some space so I can do some soul-searching while I'm pounding down 50 pounds a day of spent grass just to get by.

Tell you what, it's not easy being the lone bull buffalo on the receiving end of a nation's attention. But I'll just keep hanging out whenever I feel like, if you don't mind and even if you do.