EXHIBIT 4
DATE 1-29-09
HB 253

January 29, 2009

Testimony in favor of HB 253,
The Montana Wild Buffalo Recovery and Conservation Act

Bear Creek Council endorses the concept of bison as free-ranging wildlife managed by appropriate wildlife agencies.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen of the House Committee on Fish, Wildlife and Parks. My name is Carolyn Duckworth, and I live in Gardiner, Montana. I am speaking on behalf of Bear Creek Council, which is a community-based group that works to conserve and protect the integrity of our environment and community. We have about 75 members, most of whom are year round residents of the Gardiner area. Our small town is located at the north entrance to Yellowstone National Park, which 3 million people visit each year from around the world. Our economy depends on this national park and these visitors.

Since 1997, Bear Creek Council has advocated for bison to be treated as wildlife. The Montana Wild Buffalo Recovery and Conservation Act will achieve this goal by returning bison management to the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks, which manages all other wildlife in Montana.

Gallatin County and Park County are directly affected by this bill. Representative Mike Phillips of Gallatin County is the bill's sponsor and we thank him for his leadership.

We urge Park County representative Joel Boniek to support this bill that will help the economy of our counties and help end the conflict over bison management.

The State has already taken steps toward treating bison like other wildlife by authorizing a well-planned winter hunt, which is operated by FWP. This hunt contributes to our economy and allows hunters to enjoy a unique experience.

FWP has also shown its expertise in managing the quarantine facility near Gardiner, which is testing a protocol for certifying disease-free bison that originated in the Yellowstone population. They operate this facility with APHIS, the federal Animal Plant Health Inspection Service.

Additional Benefits Include:

- The state of Montana will boost its reputation as a state that *values* its wildlife and will attract *positive* attention from people who value bison.
- Bison management will be controlled by an agency whose *mission* is stewardship of wildlife.
- DOL can redirect thousands of dollars and staff hours currently spent on bison management toward protecting livestock producers and their animals from *truly* high risk threats such as chronic-wasting disease.

Bear Creek Council includes members who raise livestock. We would not support this bill if we believed it would put their animals at risk. It won't. This bill simply places bison management in the appropriate wildlife agency.

Respectively submitted by
Carolyn Duckworth, President
Bear Creek Council
P.O. Box 448
Gardiner, MT 59030
406-223-0669; duckworth@wispwest.net