



Why we're fighting to stop The American Prairie Reserve

By Chuck Denowh

Parker Heinlein's recent column ("Fewer cowboys? Don't blame the American Prairie Reserve," Nov. 1) is a perfect example of the derisive attitude that has turned so many Montanans against the American Prairie Reserve (APR).

How could anyone object, Heinlein wonders, to APR creating an "American Serengeti" in north-central Montana? After all, jobs in cattle country are low paying and antiquated, so why won't these people just step aside and let the APR take over.

Apparently it will come as a surprise to Heinlein, but there are thousands of Montanans who live in the communities the APR wants to wipe off the map, and they'd rather not be displaced.

If Heinlein bothered to spend any time in eastern Montana, he'd find close-knit, thriving communities, with great schools, hard-working people, and an enviable lifestyle.

Those people shouldn't have to go anywhere just because a handful of billionaires have designs to create some sort theme park.

Heinlein got one key point wrong that warrants correcting. No one objects to what APR does on the property they own. The objection is to what APR wants to do on other people's property.

APR's ultimate objective is to create a free-roaming bison herd, which by definition means that neighboring landowners will be forced to have wild bison on their property as well.

APR also wants preferential treatment for the public grazing permits they control. They have requested to graze public land year-round, which no cattle or sheep operation has the freedom to do. Ranchers have cooperated for years with BLM and CMR to establish best practices for grazing—APR's plan would ignore those, which could do a great deal of damage to the public's land.

The APR is an existential threat to communities all over eastern Montana. The success of APR is contingent upon them successfully eradicating hundreds of family farms and ranches. APR cannot achieve their stated goal of a 3.5 million acre wildlife reserve without that happening.

APR has represented this area as virtually vacant. That's an obvious mistruth to anyone who's been through Eastern Montana. The economic repercussions of liquidating a significant part of Montana's agriculture economy will have ripple effects throughout Montana's economy. APR's promises of new tourism opportunities ring hollow.

APR is a well funded, well run non-profit NGO which derives virtually all of its support from outside Montana. They have been here for about 15 years, pretending to be new neighbors only wanting to blend in. Recently their gloves have begun to come off, and people are getting a clearer picture of what their success will mean.

That's sparked a grassroots movement in the communities APR wants to take over and eliminate. Signs with the message "Save the Cowboy, STOP American Prairie Reserve" are now ubiquitous throughout the area. Heinlein struggled to understand what that means, to stop APR. Let's make it simple so he can understand, our objective is to turn the tables and wipe the APR from the map.

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