

By its own admission, the National Park Service has a growing bison problem within the Grand Canyon National Park.

At issue is a burgeoning population of more than 600 bison that wander in and out of our nation's premiere landmark, where most experts believe the appropriate population should be around 250. During a Congressional hearing last summer, federal officials admitted that the herd must be reduced to alleviate damage the animals are causing inside Grand Canyon National Park.

Despite that admission, Arizona's sportsmen and women – who often wait a lifetime for the opportunity to be awarded a bison tag – are left to sit on the sidelines while the U.S. Department of Interior and National Park Service officials in Washington, D.C. complete a two-year study addressing the Park's overpopulation issue. This new study will only echo current data, outlining the severity of a long-studied problem.

The Arizona Game and Fish Department has managed bison in the House Rock Wildlife Area on the Kaibab National Forest north of the Grand Canyon since 1950. In the late 1990s, the herd began increasing their time inside the National Park, where the Department lacks jurisdiction and hunting is not allowed. There, the bison damage soils, unique plant communities, waterholes, archeological sites and other Park resources.

Fortunately, U.S. Sens. John McCain and Jeff Flake and U.S. Rep. Paul Gosar are each supporting the most-effective solution: providing hunters increased opportunities to harvest buffalo, feed their families, improve herd health and positively impact the entire habitat.

U.S. Senate Bill 782 and U.S. House Bill 1443 would require the U.S. Department of Interior and the Arizona Game and Fish Commission to coordinate on a plan allowing sportsmen with valid state-issued hunting licenses to manage the estimated 600 bison within the park through culling as well as nonlethal means. The bills would allow these volunteer hunters to remove the full bison harvested in the park.

Allowing bison hunting on the more remote areas of the park will also bolster the regional economy. Spending by Arizona's hunters and anglers exceeds \$1.2 billion per year, supports 18,200 jobs and pumps \$131 million in state and local taxes and another \$156 million in federal taxes annually.

Assisting the National Park, providing additional hunting opportunities and properly managing the bison population just makes sense: it supports efforts to alleviate damage to the Park, saves tax dollars and helps protect critical habitat for other wildlife, including the federally threatened Mexican spotted owl.

The National Park Service can't do this without placing financial burden on all taxpayers because it currently faces deferred maintenance of more than \$11.5 billion nationwide. This proposed bison hunt is a cost-effective solution and respects the North American Model, the world's best system of Wildlife Conservation.

Taxpayers and the National Park Service, already burdened with a growing list of ignored expenses, shouldn't be force-fed another expensive mandate, especially when common-sense economical solutions like hunting offer a better alternative.

It's time for the National Park Service to rely on the Arizona Game and Fish Department, our state's sportsmen and women and our hunting heritage to manage bison populations within the park. This is essential to preserve and strengthen the crown jewel of our National Park system.

Kurt Davis serves as chairman of the Arizona Game and Fish Commission.