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Used-clothing store aims to save free-range buffalo

■ Buffalo Exchange in Eugene will host a 'Buffalo Benefit' on Earth Day, selling all specially tagged items for \$1

By Caron Alarab for the Emerald

Shopping for quality used clothing while supporting the preservation of what was once the largest concentration of mammals ever to exist — what more could an environmentally motivated clotheshorse ask for?

On Earth Day, Buffalo Exchange will be offering bargains on selected merchandise in a nationwide effort to save wild buffalo during an event called the Buffalo Benefit. From 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on April 20, all specially tagged items will sell for \$1 each as a part of the company's annual Dollar Day Sale. The goal is to raise money for a cause that will support the environment and help an organization in need, Eugene store manager Mary Kolego said.

All proceeds from this year's sale will go to the Buffalo Field Campaign. Through direct action, videography, education and litigation, BFC volunteers make it the only nonprofit environmental activist group working year-round in the field to protect the last wild, free-roaming buffalo and their habitat in Yellowstone National Park, said Dan Brister.

Brister, a Buffalo Field Campaign board member and media coordinator, first came to the organization as a volunteer and only planned on staying in West Yellowstone for a week.

"Five years later, I'm still here," he said.

Part of Brister's dedication to the program is rooted in the importance of each effort made by BFC from day to day.

"Our patrols are with the buffalo from sunrise to sunset, document-

ing every move made against them and protecting them from the Department of Livestock," he said. "Our footage has been shown on the major television networks and used in countless documentaries."

According to the BFC Web site, since 1985, more than 3,000 free-roaming bison have been killed when they migrated out of Yellowstone National Park in search of food.

When he expresses his appreciation of the Buffalo Benefit, Brister speaks for BFC as a whole.

"We are very grateful to the Buffalo Exchange for hosting this event, which will help us to cover the costs of our campaign to gain lasting protection for the Yellowstone herd," Brister said. "They are helping to raise awareness of and financial support for our efforts on behalf of the last wild herd buffalo in the country."

The first Buffalo Exchange opened in 1974 in Tucson, Ariz. — now the company headquarters — and has grown to include 21 stores and six franchises in 11 states. Michelle Livingston is the company's marketing director and is in charge of advertising and public relations, including promotions such as the Earth Day Benefit, which has raised more than \$33,000 since the program's 1997 inception. She views this year's cause as not only support for a critical situation, but also as a symbol of what the company has come to represent, she said.

"Buffalo Exchange works to protect the environment by reusing and recycling clothing and through programs such as the Earth Day Benefit," Livingston said. "And I think that helping real, wild buffalo strengthens the authenticity of the company's name and what we stand for."

This year's Earth Day Benefit will be the third Livingston has co-

ordinated; she said she remembers when Buffalo Exchange first discovered BFC.

"We supported the Yellowstone bison for Earth Day 2000, when we did a fund-raiser for the National Wildlife Federation," she said. "This year we wanted to help these bison at a more grass-roots level and help the Buffalo Field Campaign."

The Eugene Buffalo Exchange opened just three years ago, Kolego said. At last year's Earth Day Benefit, the location raised close to \$500, out of the company-wide total of \$11,700, for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to benefit their National Shelter Outreach program.

"We expect more every year," she said.

Buffalo Exchange also donates to local nonprofit agencies in the community through the Tokens for Bags program, which has generated more than \$115,000 in donations to hundreds of nonprofit groups since 1994. Shoppers are encouraged to accept a token instead of a bag for purchases, and, in turn, Buffalo Exchange donates five cents to a charity of the customer's choice.

As far as this year's Buffalo Benefit, Kolego expressed how crucial the work of BFC has become and sees the Dollar Day Sale proceeds as a small part of what needs to be done to make a difference for the herds at Yellowstone.

"I think through education that situation may someday improve," Kolego said.

Information on the Buffalo Field Campaign is available at each Buffalo Exchange store, and besides taking advantage of the Dollar Day Sale, supporters can sign a petition to save the country's last wild herd of buffalo.

Caron Alarab is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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