

Summary Report from Interagency Bison Management Plan Meeting August 6-7, 2008

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The following summary report reflects activities at the August 6th and 7th meeting of the IBMP partners, carried out at the Region 3 offices of Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. This report comes from the notes and flip chart records of facilitator Scott Bischke. The report contains a *Facilitator's Draft* watermark to recognize that as presented the IBMP partners have not reviewed these notes and accepted the facilitator's recollection/interpretation of events. Attendees: IBMP partners Jerry Diemer (APHIS), Mary Erickson (GNF), Pat Flowers (MFWP), Suzanne Lewis (YNP), Christian Mackay (MBoL; Aug. 6 only), Marty Zaluski (MDoL); 15-20 staff members present from across organizations each day; 10-15 members of the public each day.

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PARTIAL LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AM—Adaptive management
- APHIS—Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
- CM—Christian Mackay
- GAO—Government Accountability Office
- GNF—Gallatin National Forest
- GP—Glenn Plumb
- GYA—Greater Yellowstone Area
- JD—Jerry Diemer
- MBoL—Montana Board of Livestock
- MDoL—Montana Department of Livestock
- ME—Mary Erickson
- MFWP—Montana Fish Wildlife and parks
- MZ—Marty Zaluski
- PF—Pat Flowers
- PIOs—Public Information Officers
- RoD—Record of Decision
- SL—Suzanne Lewis
- YNP—Yellowstone National Park



Rick Wallen's (YNP) August 7th presentation on bison population status.

Response to GAO recommendations; expected IBMP 15-month timeline

GAO RECOMMENDATION 3: DATA REPOSITORY

Steve Merritt (MDoL) presented beta version (posted, but not publicized) website—www.ibmp.info—conceived by all partner PIOs with web development completed by MDoL. Website will go to hard release by next meeting (see action item #6). All partners expressed great thanks to MDoL for their leadership. Notes/guidance from partners to staff on website:

- Goal is low maintenance.
- Website is a portal to all things IBMP.
- Data repository is for IBMP-direct documents and data only. Use links to existing sites where possible (i.e., do no repeat effort that has already been completed by one of the partners; instead just link to them).
- www.ibmp.info will not include
 - Contact info other than redirection to partner sites and option to contact webmaster to report broken links (interaction with public to be handled through each individual partner website, not www.ibmp.info)
 - Mass email-ing functionality
 - Links to outside organizations—use links only for partners materials
- Expect rotation (yearly?) of cost and maintenance of ibmp.info
- Expect ibmp.info to include daily operation reports with possibility of having daily report plus historical repository of reports
- Possible organization of information could include sections for meeting dates, planning documents, library of reports, science section (here likely many links—e.g., to Yellowstone Science Learning Center)
- Should include easy to find location for Annual Reports as this is method that partners will use to satisfy GAO recommendation #4 (see next item)

GAO RECOMMENDATION 4: CONGRESSIONAL REPORTING

Dol letter response to GAO stated that department will be responsive as appropriate. Partner discussion leads to decision to produce annual report on IBMP activities that will evaluate effectiveness versus objectives. Key will be to show clear objectives, measure, and outcomes. Report will be posted to www.ibmp.info. Upon report release each year, lead entity (see GAO Recommendation 5) will send out statement to applicable Congressional committees that report is available. Mechanics of reporting:

- Report release goal August 1 of each year
- Report will be completed by lead agency (rotating, see GAO Recommendation 5), with other partners in support, including by supplying personnel resources to two sub-committees
 - Public information officer sub-committee
 - Technical sub-committee (initial guess on makeup—Marty, Lisa, Becky, PJ, MFWP)

GAO RECOMMENDATION 5: LEAD ENTITY

Partners agreed to concept of lead entity to provide administration, coordination, and oversight of partner activities. They will do this on a yearly rotating basis. MDoL requests recognition that they have less staff resources than other groups and their ability to provide leadership (also staff Technical Committee noted under GAO Recommendation 4) might be more difficult. Partners recognized MDoL concern. YNP volunteers to lead year one, beginning Nov 1, 2008. Lead entity is responsible for driving completion of annual report.

APPROXIMATE TIMELINE FOR PARTNER ACTIVITIES IN FOLLOWING 15 MONTHS

The timeline below does not include the seven meetings scheduled by the IBMP partners to address the concerns called out by the GAO report.

1	1 Nov 08	YNP assumes lead entity role for IBMP partnership. Operational plan for winter 2008/9 activities signed by partners.
2	1 Nov 08 – 1 Jun 09	Winter 2008/9 partner risk management activities underway
3	1 Jun – 1 Aug 09	60 days for completion of IBMP annual report
4	1 Aug 09	Annual report from IBMP completed, posted to website, report made to Congress that report is available.
5	1 Aug – 1 Nov 09	90 days for partner discussions on adaptive management efforts (i.e., operational changes) to be made for winter 2009/10. These discussions lead to winter 2009/10 operational plan. Adaptive management discussions actually expected to go on year around as data on measures against objectives become available. However, it is reasonable to assume that adaptive management discussions will be most intense following the data collection and analysis activities required to create the annual report.
6	1 Nov 09	YNP hands over lead entity role IBMP partnership to ?? Operational plan for winter 2008/9 activities signed by partners.
7	...	Repeat steps 2-5 for winter 2009/10
8	...	And so on...

Action items identified

	Who	What (+ notes)	Complete by/for
1	CM	Report out on their data in format somewhat similar to YNP to enable comparisons (Christian notes that MDoL is currently revamping method of data analysis)	X present to partners at next meeting (actually done and handed out Aug 7 by MZ)
2	Marna (GNF) as lead to staff at all agencies	Question from ME, partners, to their staffs: What are the changed conditions since the IBMP plan onset in 2000? Compare and contrast landscape, cattle location, property ownership, cattle & bison populations, etc. 2000 versus 2008.	present to partners at next meeting (note request from partners for report to emphasize graphical presentation)
3	GP	Prepare reference document that pulls out specific guideline targets in RoD to serve as a tool (e.g., AM filter) for partners; MZ—some guidelines ambiguous; PF—recognize this as a tool but focus of meeting 2 and beyond should be on GAO recommendations (defining measurable objectives); JD—need this reference to get to GAO recommendations; ME—this reference would help partners with short- & long-term focus	By next meeting
4	JD, ME, PF, CM/MZ, SL (as assigned to staff)	Fill out matrix handed out by GNF or connect with Marna re: action item #2	X By end of Aug 7 meeting
5	Scott	Compile email list of all partner participants and email to all participants	X By Monday Aug 11
6	Steve Merritt (all agency PIOs in support)	Take www.ibmp.info live; beyond what was presented at the meeting, partners request that at launch include a search function and a frequently asked questions (FAQ) page	By next meeting

7	Scott	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete report on 2-day meeting and send to partners Provide electronic files (and list of missings to Steve M for the website) Send report to Institute for Conflict Resolution (Larry Fisher) 	X By Monday Aug 11
8	Partners	Handoff of hosting, agreement on date of next meeting	X By end of Aug 7 meeting
9	JD, ME, PF, CM/MZ, SL (as assigned to staff)	Provide briefing sheet to partners on what your agency currently monitors (i.e., disclose current monitoring capacity); use same format as operations report out for Aug 6/7 meeting; separate request for herd management practices bison versus cattle is expected to be covered under this action item by MBoI/MDoL/APHIS responses; after determining what is being measured, partners should be able to identify gaps in available measures as they create adaptive management plan	For next meeting
10	JD, ME, PF, CM/MZ, SL	Complete phone conference preceding next partner meeting (SL to provide conference call information to partners)	Phone conference call Monday Aug 18; 830 AM.
11	Mel Frost	Send missing electronic file to Steve Merritt for website posting (see section titled "Materials requested/received...")	X By next meeting

Lessons learned from 2007-2008 season

Group discussion based on report out by each agency for what worked and what did not in 2007-2008 season.

	Who	Management Activity	Lead Partners	Effectiveness & Outcome	Key Developments / Lessons Learned
1	PF	Negotiations about haze back policies at West	MDoL/NPS	Started May 14; all bison out in a few days	Communication management appeared to work well
2	GP	Brucellosis Sampling	APHIS/NPS	Thorough, complete sampling	Improved surveillance of brucellosis/genetics and other health issues
3	GP	Hazing	MDoL/NPS	Stepwise during late winter	Progressive and responsive to snow pack; helped minimize # of times that individuals or groups hazed
4	GP	Meat and carcass distribution	APHIS/MDoL	Fair and equitable distribution with minimal waste	Building network of recipients
5	GP	Montana hunt	MFWP	~3% of population harvested	Need to increase opportunities to harvest prime age females
6	GP, MZ	Vaccination	NPS	Limited vaccinations at Stephens Creek	Prevalence in wild life not decreasing; need to try and expand bison eligibility (both north and west)
7	SL	Quarantine	APHIS/FWP	Deliberate progress	Increased confidence that Yellowstone bison genetics can

					be available for species conservation
8	SL	Holding bison for longer than years previous on north side	NPS	Not desirable; late winter low bison #s thus started holding bison to meet IBMP	Key for adaptive management is late season (snow) weather prediction Lesson learned/unintended consequences: calves (wild) born in captivity with resulting potential for disease transfer
9	MZ	Bison counts at end of winter	NPS/MDoL	Difficulties not in the counts but interpreting the IBMP rules relative to counts; how do we set criteria for management, especially given abnormal winter seasons? Potential for adaptive management?	Need to determine if >100 outside of park tolerance for bison criteria is influence by total # of bison (i.e., does overall YNP bison # influence management on West side)

Notes on Rick Wallen bison population report

SL provided the following thoughts on the population status, which the partners provided general consensus, covered key issues resulting from Rick's report:

- (1) Report shows that we still have great uncertainties in understanding populations, movements, etc and this is why you do adaptive management (AM)—i.e., AM is the most stable place to exist in an uncertain world. A major concern for the public is how can we stop dramatic swings in populations (with large drop-offs having significant impacts from IBMP risk management activities).
- (2) Retrospective 2000 #s were appropriate to the time of the RoD being written but may not be now. Can we realistically rely on 2000 #s to guide 2008 AM efforts?
- (3) Monitoring is key to AM of bison/cattle/brucellosis. Recognition that bison management in the GYA is a long-term, on-going process, not an issue likely to have an endpoint.
- (4) AM plan must recognize that bison population is expected to increase ~12% /yr for the next 2-3 years at least; given that increase what are our vulnerabilities (need a vulnerability analysis)? What contingencies can we provide through AM to contend with these vulnerabilities?
- (5) Partners must come up with AM plan built around the 2300 bison population limit; major population impacts are hunting, risk management, winter kill, predation
- (6) Hunt currently focuses on males; slaughter focuses on prime age females; AM possibility—what about expanding hunt into prime age females?
 - a. MFWP notes that 100 added permits will be cow/calf
 - b. Possibility that tribes involved in treaty hunts might be willing to help with focused hunt on prime age females
- (7) AM plan must recognize significant 2008/9 potential of bison to move from Northern Range to Gardiner and beyond
- (8) Next meeting needs to begin building AM plan having objectives, measures, actions that partners agree on for 2008/9 winter
- (9) Need to fully integrate hunting into the IBMP (no longer simply an experimental program but one that can be a significant population control lever)
- (10) IBMP plan for 2008/9 must include analysis of where can bison go?

- a. Many tools, including potential for long-term use of quarantine facilities (likely not possible for 2008/9 but could be a direction to pursue); recognition that cost to graduate bison from quarantine facility is great and economic analysis is needed to determine if this is a viable population control mechanism
- b. Original EIS included many options (habitat increases, fencing, etc and should be reviewed); especially important now is short-term focus for this 2008/9 season

Facilitator recommended agendas for future meetings

POSSIBLE OUTLINE OF SEVEN MEETING SERIES

I am not sure if the partners sketched out an overview of the seven meeting series but here is one possibility of meeting goals based on what I learned over the past two weeks:

- (1) *Meeting 1*—background; GAO recommendations 3,4,5 (note that meetings 2-7 deal with GAO recommendations 1,2)
- (2) *Meeting 2*—create list of all possible objectives for adaptive management for 2008-2009 season
- (3) *Meeting 3*—create final (consensus) list of objectives for adaptive management for 2008-2009 season
- (4) *Meeting 4*—determine metric (trigger point for action) on each objective for 2008-2009 season; determine metric and required measurements needed to support each objective
- (5) *Meeting 5*—determine mechanics of how measurements will be taken (who, what, when, how, why, where, reporting timeline, reporting structure, etc)
- (6) *Meeting 6*—determine action alternatives and order of preference for implementation once measurements show we have stepped outside acceptable metric range
- (7) *Meeting 7*—complete adaptive management plan; publish; begin review of first data of winter season

Based on the results of the Aug 6,7 IBMP meeting the facilitator recommends the following possibilities to consider for meeting agenda outlines in the six, two-day meetings still to come before the end of 2008. Recommendations assume 8-hour meetings with hours 1-4 on day one, 5-8 on day two.

POSSIBLE OUTLINE OF REMAINING INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS

To consider for Aug 28,29 meeting

My recommendation for a strawman agenda follows (separately, though I did not include it in the strawman agenda below, the partners may want to consider using the Mammoth location as a reason to set up pre- or post-meeting opportunities to visit Stephens Creek facility, RTR, etc):

- *Hour 1*—**Welcome**, introductions, meeting logistics etc; Review of last meeting including discussion of Scott's Summary Report (acceptance by partners as accurate record or modifications needed?); review of action item #6—is website live?
- *Hour 2*—Science update: from staff (action item #2) presentation on **changed conditions on the ground 2008 versus 2000**
- *Hour 3*—Presentation on the **mechanics of adaptive management**
- *Hour 4*—Review list of **IBMP objectives** from 2000 RoD
- *Hour 5*—Presentation on **guideline targets in RoD** (action item #3 Glenn Plumb); discussion needed; several comments made in Aug 6,7 meetings that these targets are ambiguous; if so which ones? Also, which targets lend themselves to adaptive management and which do not (possible worksheet exercise)?
- *Hour 6*—Partners provide briefing statements on **what is measured now by each agency** (action item #9); identify gaps (in actual measurements taken, in spatial or temporal aspects of measurements, etc) in information that will likely be needed for creating 2008-2009 adaptive management plan

- *Hour 7*—Based on current RoD guideline targets and what is being measured, **brainstorm/revise current list of possible objectives for IBMP applicable now for 2008-2009 season**. This would (in my mind) be a big outcome for meeting 2. I recommend working toward a list but not consensus for a “final” list—which would be the focus of meeting 3.
- *Hour 8*—Public comment, split over two days

Meeting 3 would be greatly strengthened by a presentation highlighting a successful implementation of adaptive management (with the issue at hand having as much overlap with the IBMP issues as possible).

Template to consider for all meetings

- *Hour 1*—Welcome, Introductions, meeting logistics; review of last meeting including action item list and level of completion
- *Hour 2*—Science and/or policy review; these discussions—like Rick Wallen’s report—can be used to get the creative juices flowing, and (if placed at the beginning of the meeting) to bring people back into the shared space and challenges of IBMP planning. These talks will require guest speakers either from within or outside partner staff. Possible topics that have been mentioned by partners, staff, and public include discussions on:
 - 1) genetics and population #s needed to maintain bison genetic diversity; included could be discussion of how #s differ for wild bison herd and confined cattle herd (possibly Fred Allendorf at UM),
 - 2) ecological impacts of large-scale biomass removal from the GYA via sending bison to slaughter,
 - 3) current state of tribal relations, historical/spiritual/cultural meaning of bison to tribes, and potential to use tribal hunts as a tool of population control
 - 4) examples from other regions of how adaptive management has been successfully applied
 - 5) brucellosis life history, pathology, understanding multiple brucellosis species and methods of transfer among mammals (esp. cattle, bison)
 - 6) habitat analysis for bison in the GYA
 - 7) status of brucellosis vaccinations—in cattle? In bison?
 - 8) status of remote delivery of brucellosis vaccine
 - 9) brucellosis around the world—are we the only ones with this issue?
 - 10) Review of status of quarantine facility including results to date and potential for expansion
- *Hour 3*—Partner briefing sheet on some aspect (e.g., performance, measures, constituencies, agency’s driving objectives) of their work to engender better understanding between partners
- *Hour 4 thru 7*—discussion on adaptive management for 2008-2009 operating season
- *Hour 8*—Public comment, split over two days

Issues identified as potential topics for future meetings

	Who	What
1	SL	<p>Complete an analysis of all “hard and fast” rules of the IBMP and determine which rules have potential for adaptive management (e.g., spatial, temporal aspects); consider legal ramifications;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marty—“Is there tolerance for the outliers?” • Suzanne—If we recommend change, we need to be able to justify and we need to be able to define/show a measure of success. • Mary—For example is May 15 date up for adaptive management; Marty—yes but need to have targets and measures and justification for change

		Note a day later this item that was set aside essentially became action item #3.
2	Group following PF report out on FWP hunting	Suzanne—is adaptive management possible with respect to tribal hunt and their harvest goals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How were quotas for tribes determined—Pat: sharing goals modeled after Idaho salmon sharing agreements; FWP currently trying to have MOUs signed Request that partners review/are informed on status and content of MOUs Tribes consider that bison they receive from slaughter should not be part of 50/50 harvest agreement Draft EA on tribal hunt coming out in ?? months
3	PF/group	Current harvest numbers potentially conservative relative; do harvest numbers provide opportunity for adaptive management ?
4	SL	Tribal relations—need to expect tribes to request to join IBMP partners soon
5	SL	Request for partners to review short and long term status of quarantine operations with APHIS/Jerry
6	MZ	Need to revisit idea of ability to test unvaccinated animals (i.e., criteria of animals eligible for vaccination)
7	SL	Consider creating series of science lectures (e.g., minimum population to maintain genetic diversity) either within partner meetings or as adjunct to the meetings
8	ME, SL	Following completion of series of 7 meetings, partners need to determine method of responding to GAO request for improved accounting (i.e., expenditure tracking that captures essence of outcomes achieved per public \$s spent)

Materials requested/received from partners for Aug 6,7 meeting

What	Hard copy? / Electronic copy?				
	APHIS	MBoL / MDoL	GNF	MFWP	YNP
Briefing paper	Yes/yes	Yes/yes	Yes/yes	Yes/no	Yes/yes
Brief on 5 GAO recommendations					Yes/yes
Bison population status presentation					Yes/yes

Note that the electronic version of these documents (except with missings as noted) will be provided by facilitator to Steve Merritt at MDoL for website posting.

Selected comments from public

The following highlights from public comments (three minutes per person) come from Scott's notes and Scott's interpretation of the speaker's intent:

AUGUST 6TH

- Request for IBMP partners to allow wild bison to occupy Horse Butte; no public grazing allotment, lone ranch welcomes bison
- Concern over abandonment of public trust for wildlife (i.e., having wildlife being managed by non-FWP entities)
- Need to identify brucellosis to species; need to recognize brucellosis beyond bison/cattle/elk to sheep, moose, goats, etc

- Concern expressed that there is no fair chase hunt (not enough ground for bison to range freely)
- Did not like the new IBMP meeting format—does not meet GAO recommendation for transparency
- IBMP fundamentally flawed and should be replaced; not other species treated in such a manner
- Request for MDoL clarification of which dates are important for segregation
- Request to downgrade importance of brucellosis (i.e., ramifications for testing positive)
- Need more effective cattle vaccine
- Conflict free habitat (e.g., Horse Butte) exists today that bison are not allowed to utilize
- Request to FWP that no hunt occur until reproductive herd of bison exist outside of YNP
- Request to return to roundtable discussions that include public
- Appreciation to partners for open meetings and recognition of the difficulty inherent therein; also for committing to 14 days of meetings
- Appreciation that some focus shown today on what is on the ground today and not just what existed in 2000
- Ask partners to recognize that changes have occurred since 2000: new research, Horse Butte situation
- Request that focus change from last 8 years (transmission) to second part of IBMP (i.e., managing bison as wildlife)
- Large number of NGO members express distress over tragedy of slaughter this year
- Request to broaden scope to include the role of elk
- Stated that adaptive management principles apply operationally but request to look from higher, more strategic level (e.g., do goals of IBMP need to be adjusted?)
- Public involvement / GAO transparency should mean two-way communication (including Q&A)
- Recognition that what happens in Yellowstone is followed nationally and nation will be looking the work and results of the IBMP partners and this 7 meeting effort
- Adaptive change must reflect on the ground changes (evolving science, changing policies)
- Worry expressed about creating adaptive management plan by December
- Hunt is a park line shoot and not a real hunt
- Public land exists sufficiently today for free roaming bison population in GNF; once we allowed this to happen we could have hunters coming in from around the country spending big \$s for actual fair chase hunt

AUGUST 7TH

- We have a real opportunity to have bison on public lands now and year around; by allowing them on GNF we help YNP with their population management problem
- Bison should be managed by MFWP; MDoL and APHIS should not be involved
- Belief that solutions exist today that could be implemented tomorrow
- Belief that partners should follow GAO recommendation that the plan be dumped and a new plan developed and implemented
- Request that MFWP to map land available as winter and summer habitat
- Biggest threat to bison is IBMP risk management activities
- Request to partners to consider drafting petition for bison under Endangered Species Act
- Belief that partners have given the American public poor value for money spent
- Sorry to hear that partners reaction to increased bison populations is more hunting
- GNF must provide habitat
- Belief that bison are cognizant of the slaughter and reacting by having more offspring
- Appreciation (stated many times) to Rick Wallen for excellent presentation of interesting, valuable data on bison population status
- Frustration over 3 min time limit

- Belief that brucellosis is a treatable disease in humans, manageable in cattle, and that livestock industry is hurting American public on many levels (e.g., people's health, YNP bison, degraded ecosystems)
- Statement that cattle rights are superseding human rights
- Statement that MDoL recognizes that bison/cattle/brucellosis issue is more based on fear than reality
- Request for a full biological, social, political analysis of where bison can go with statement that partners have the ability to change management zones under adaptive management principles
- Request analysis of the biological and ecological implications of large biomass loss resulting for removal to slaughter of bison from the landscape
- Statement that Rick Wallen's data shows that bison killing programs are not changing infection rates
- Statement that bison are largely not shedding brucellosis
- Recommendation that we begin 3-state (MT, WY, ID) conversation on brucellosis
- Recommendation that partners bring in/schedule a presentation on successful adaptive management programs
- Need touchstone to frame the discussion—in this case the touchstone is the goal(s) of the IBMP
- Request that partners reframe the question from what are we going to do with excess bison to how are we going to provide free range for excess bison (don't default immediately to hunt and population control methods)
- Appreciation for thoughtful discussion
- Request to partners to start/turn the discussion focus to accessing/procuring habitat instead of controlling populations
- Statement that we need an analysis of what is the carrying capacity of the landscape for bison / habitat suitability analysis (especially on GNF)
- Statement that there is still lots of uncertainty (per Rick Wallen presentation) about genetic diversity needed to maintain viable bison population; request to partners that until we have this information well understood to please remain conservative in the minimum number of bison maintained in GYA
- Request for better communication so that public stakeholders are certain that they have the latest information from partners