

Briefing Statement

AGENCY: Department of Livestock
ISSUE: Recommended Adjustment to the Adaptive Management Plan for the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP)
DATE: June 3, 2013

Recommended Adjustment

Reduce the opportunity for bison to breach the tolerance zone boundaries by employing management actions at the most efficient trigger points in consideration of overall conditions and risks.

Management Objective 3.2: Prevent landowner conflicts and cattle/bison interactions in areas outside of Zone 2.

Management Action 3.2.e: Haze bison away from tolerance boundaries when conditions are conducive to breach.

Monitoring metrics:

1. Document the number of times and numbers of bison are successfully or unsuccessfully moved away from tolerance boundaries.
2. Document occurrences of bison entering non-tolerance areas.

Management Responses: If bison approach tolerance boundaries, then the State Veterinarian will evaluate the site-specific circumstances (e.g. number of bison, bison behavior, weather, snowpack, time of year, etc.) to determine what management actions are necessary to prevent the further movement of bison out of Zone 2 into Zone 3.

Background

In 2011, the IBMP administrating agencies agreed to adaptive management adjustments that expanded Zone 2 tolerance area for bison to the entirety of Gardner Basin. This newly designated area includes lands east of the river and north up to Yankee Jim Canyon. The northern boundary is demarcated by a heavy-duty “bison guard” on Hwy 89, and high topography east and west of Hwy 89. Bison are not allowed north of the hydrological divide (i.e., mountain ridge-tops) between Dome Mountain/Paradise Valley and the Gardiner basin on the east side of the Yellowstone River and Tom Miner basin and the Gardiner basin on the west side of the Yellowstone River.

The agencies committed to evaluate the effects of these adjustments and modify as necessary to prevent bison from occupying lands north of the hydrological divide and minimize the risk of transmission of brucellosis to livestock.

A reduction in the risk of brucellosis transmission from bison to cattle has been successful under the IBMP (White et al. 2011). To date, no documented transmission of brucellosis from Yellowstone National Park bison to cattle has occurred due, in part, to successful efforts by federal and state agencies to maintain separation.

Rationale for Adjustment

Currently, the risk of brucellosis transmission from bison to cattle in the northern management area is low because few cattle are in areas where bison are tolerated. However, Paradise Valley located north of the hydrological divide has numerous cattle operations. It is inevitable that under current management, bison will continue to travel up Joe Brown Gulch which will cause landowner conflict and possible interactions with cattle operations in Zone 3. A game damage hunt in this area is possible but sometimes may be difficult because the bison may inhabit remote areas which limits the number of hunters that could take advantage of the hunting opportunity on short notice.

During the spring of 2013, a bull likely used Joe Brown Gulch (east of Hwy 89 bison guard) to breach the perimeter of the tolerance area and travel into private and state property north of the hydrological divide. Likewise, a group of up to 42 bison used the same route reach the top of the hydrological divide. This area is not readily accessible. Operations to haze bison in this area present likely landowner conflicts, are resource intensive, and have a high chance of failure.

Maintaining and “actionable” zone to haze bison away from accessing the Joe Brown Gulch will better ensure success of the adaptive management changes adopted in 2011.

References

White, P. J., R. L. Wallen, C. Geremia, J. J. Treanor, and D. W. Blanton. 2011. Management of Yellowstone bison and brucellosis transmission risk – implications for conservation and restoration. *Biological Conservation* 144:1322-1334.