

Summary Report from the Interagency Bison Management Plan Meeting November 20, 2014



First draft presented 24 November 2014 by meeting facilitator Scott Bischke

The following summary report reflects activities at the November 20, 2014 meeting of the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) Partners, held at Chico Hot Springs in Pray MT. This report comes from the notes and flip chart records of facilitator Scott Bischke¹. The report will be marked “Draft” until formal Partner agreement at the start of their next meeting. The eight Partner attendees were Don Herriott (APHIS), Leonard Gray (CSKT), Ervin Carlson (ITBC), Martin Zaluski (MDOL), Sam Sheppard (MFWP), McCoy Oatman (NPT), David Hallac (NPS-YNP), and Mary Erickson (USFS-GNF). In addition to those at the deliberative table, ~20 staff members from across IBMP organizations and ~40 members of the public were present.

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Action items identified

Table 1.—Action items identified during this meeting

#	Who	What	By when
1	Scott Bischke	(1) Post April 2014 meeting notes to IBMP.info as final (2) Send action item list from the meeting to the Partners.	ASAP
2	Marty Zaluski	MZ to request from MDOL legal counsel whether the 2006 AM change still applies, then report response to Partners.	ASAP
3	Sam Sheppard	SS said that biologists from MFWP and NPS should meet to discuss future delegation of State licenses with regards to population management (e.g., moving from either sex to cow only opportunities). He agreed to set up the meeting. FWP is in agreement with the need to remove 900.	ASAP
4	All Partners, as described	<p>To complete the 2015 Winter Ops Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By Nov28—Partners supply comments to CSKT (StephanieG) on the current ver1 draft of the Winter Ops Plan. • By Dec2—CSKT incorporates edits into the Winter Ops Plan, as well as provides alternative numbers and scenarios for the hunt. This updated ver2 Winter Ops Plan, which will make clear that a decrease in population trend is the goal, is sent to Partners for review. The CSKT, on behalf of the NPT and ITBC, will develop alternative management plans (meaning alternatives to removing 900 bison as per the current removal plans that are in place), for example ideas like removing females only and triggers that would end their efforts to pick up bison for processing. • On Dec5—CSKT organizes a telecon at 10 AM Mountain/9 AM Pacific to discuss the ver2 Ops Plan. Partners will seek consensus on the Winter Ops Plan, or agree on changes to this plan that will complete the plan. The purpose of the call is to consider their alternatives, evaluate the likely effects of the alternative actions relative the current removal plan, and find a consensus for the best population management approach. • By Dec12—Comments are returned to CSKT on the ver2 Winter Ops Plan. CSKT creates the ver3, final Winter Ops Plan. • By Dec17—Stephanie works with the facilitator to set up the electronic signing procedure for the 2015 Winter Ops Plan. • By Dec 31—All Partner have signed the 2015 Winter Ops Plan. • By Jan 2—The facilitator publishes the signed 2015 Winter Ops Plan to ibmp.info. 	As noted
5	All Partners	<p>To complete 2014 Annual Report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit Ver2 input by Dec10 (principally MDOL) • Ver2 review (all Partners), final input required by Dec 20 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lead on each topic has final say ○ In some cases two different reports can be recorded 	As noted
6	Scott Bischke, Angela Sondenaa	<p>To complete 2014 Annual Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead Partner (Angela) has final say on disputes • No signature required per past precedence • As described in the Partner Protocols, the goal is to have the Annual Report completed and posted to IBMP.com by Dec31 	As noted

Agreeing to previous meeting minutes

The facilitator asked if there were any objections or changes to the draft meeting report from the July 2014 IBMP meeting. No objections were brought forth; thus the facilitator, per Partner Protocols, is to post the July 2014 meeting notes to IBMP.info as “final” (** action item 1).

Review of November 19th field trip

The NPT and USFS/GNF co-hosted a half-day field trip around the Gardner Basin on the day prior to the regular IBMP meeting. Field trip stops included Beattie Gulch, Eagle Creek, and Yankee Jim Canyon. The focus of the field trip was to discuss and consider bison management opportunities possible within the IBMP framework in the Gardiner Basin. Roughly 40 people, split between Partners, staff, and public, attended.

At each of the three stops, there was a short presentation by either the NPT (Angela Sondena) or GNF (Walt Allen, Rachel Feigley) about such topics as area history; past, present and potential future forage; and bison migration patterns. The speakers also described current issues—for example concentrated hunting in Beattie Gulch—then opened the discussion to all present to talk about possible solutions to those problems. Figure 1 provides a look at the some of the happenings during the field trip.

The facilitator made a list of the potential solutions that emerged from the discussion. These were collected in round robin, essentially brainstorming, discussions. The list, with brief descriptions of each proposed solution, follows:

- *Install gut pile dumpsters*—At Beattie Gulch put out dumpsters where hunters would be required to deposit their gut piles. This work could be done in conjunction with people running the Bear Aware project in Gardner.
- *Change focus*—Stop looking at gut piles as a negative but instead consider them a huge resource of materials both for scavenge and for educating people.
- *Move gut piles to the “bone pile” in YNP*—One way to get them away from landowners who live near Beattie Gulch.
- *Close Beattie Gulch to hunt*—Simply close Beattie Gulch to hunting via agreement of Treaty Tribe and State of Montana wildlife managers. Such a closure would stop the large-scale kill right at the Park border, plus allow the bison to disperse farther out into the new tolerance area before being hunted.
- *Open road behind Beattie Gulch*—The road is currently closed but if open could allow hunters access to an area farther away from local landowners, plus allow bison to move farther out of the Beattie Gulch area before being hunted. There was discussion that the easement wording would have to be changed for this area—that currently it requires the road to remain closed.
- *Allow Tribal hunting in the area north of Gardner*—A short discussion was held regarding the fact that tribal hunting inside of YNP would require an act of Congress due to the enabling legislation for the Park. A thought was put forward that the area of YNP north of Gardner and east of the Yellowstone River (i.e., including Stephens Creek and up to Beattie Gulch) was annexed to the Park under imminent domain and was not part of the enabling legislation. If so, could tribal entities hunt in this area thereby removing the pressure at Beattie Gulch, plus allowing for greater hunter harvest levels?
- *Transfer excess north side bison to the west side of YNP*—If there are too many bison on the north side, why not move them to the west side of YNP? Moving within the Park should be less complex if it eliminated the need to work with the state of Montana. Increased bison on the west side would be (a) a potential source for hunters if the bison moved outside the park, (b) available to move up into the Taylor Fork when that area becomes available under the State MEPA process, (c) help decrease the hunting pressure at Beattie Gulch, and (d) provide an alternative to ship and slaughter.
- *Transfer bison directly*—From the Stevens Creek facility to tribal lands.
- *Move Stephens Creek trap to Cutler Meadow*—Bison are herd animals and thus when bison are captured at Stephens Creek other bison will congregate outside the corrals and stay there and thus be unavailable to hunters. What about moving the Stephens Creek capture facility out to Cutler Meadow?

- *Recognize carrying capacity is limited*—If we really want more bison north of the Park in winter, then we need to decrease the number of other herbivores competing for the limited food supply. Perhaps we could use hunting to decrease the populations of deer, elk, pronghorns, and bighorn sheep.
- *Forage plant focus, not native plants*—We must recognize that native plants may not either provide the highest forage possible, nor be the easiest to establish. Thus if the goal is to provide more winter range feed for bison, the focus on habitat enhancement in the Gardiner Basin may need to switch away from a focus on native plant reestablishment.
- *Move bison to larger landscape*—Many attendees described the need to increase bison utilization of the new north side tolerance area. Along with some of the ideas already mentioned here, there was discussion about having (1) staggered hunts—e.g., one week on, one week off—with the break time allowing bison the opportunity to make their way further out into the landscape; and (2) don't always shoot or discourage the bison that are making exploratory pilgrimages out onto the landscape; that's how the herd will learn where it can move to each winter.
- *Consider a "swiss cheese" approach*—Eliminate tolerance zones. Instead allow bison on lands that are public or where private landowners accept them, and fence the bison out of private lands where they are not welcome.

The field trip closed in a cold, shadowed Yankee Jim Canyon, an ice-filled Yellowstone River flowing nearby, with Partners, staff, and the public expressing thanks to the NPT and GNF for their efforts in hosting the field trip. Also, while it was not needed, the IBMP Partners and community recognized and thanked the Church Universal and Triumphant for offering to host the event at their facilities in case of inclement weather.



Figure 1.—Images from the NPT and USFS/GNF hosted field trip around the Gardner Basin. Stops included Beattie Gulch, Eagle Creek, and Yankee Jim Canyon

Status of State of Montana programs

STATE OF MONTANA BISON MANAGEMENT PLAN (ARNIE DOOD OF MFWP)

Arnie reiterated from past presentations that the State of Montana Bison Management Plan exists separately from the IBMP, focusing on the rest of the state away from areas covered by the IBMP. The State received some 23,000 comments during public scoping on an EIS for a potential State Bison Management Plan. Arnie reminded the Partners a Lewistown Bison Group has met three times: in Lewistown in September 2013, in Billings in July 2014, and more recently in October in Great Falls.

At the Billings meeting the assembled group came up with five possible alternatives (these in addition to those developed in the public scoping) for a future environmental impact statement (MEPA analysis):

- (1) no action alternative;
- (2) Private landowners voluntarily allow bison on their land but the bison remain public;
- (3) Tribes voluntarily allow bison on their tribal lands but the bison remain public;
- (4) Bison are established on a large, conflict free area of say 50,000 acres; or
- (5) Place 50-100 animals in a mixed landscape where they will have little impact on rural issues.

In Great Falls, a goal was to get more input from the group regarding the proposed private/public partnerships. MFWP, Arnie said, is pursuing a programmatic EIS. Most likely the first attempt for any of these possibilities would be consider a trial or case study. One big question, regardless of the alternative selected, is the question of where?

As he regularly has done in the past, Arnie reminded those attending the IBMP meeting that regardless of the bumps and bounces of the State Bison Management Plan (or the IBMP, for that matter), that bison as an issue for the State of Montana is not going away. He noted that a number of issues are running parallel to the State Bison Management Plan and the IBMP, including:

- The IUCN is moving ahead with bison conservation work, including potentially listing the plains bison in Canada as threatened;
- BFC and others recently began litigation regarding listing bison in YELL under the ESA; and
- A new multi-party Tribal treaty has been signed. (EC noted that this treaty, signed by 11 tribes in September, came out of the common interest shared by the tribes to restore bison to buffalo country. The treaty is built upon the Innii Initiative, EC said, and more tribes may sign on.)

Outcomes of these three issues and others also have potential to impact future bison management in Montana

QUARANTINE BISON AT TURNER RANCHES (MFWP)

SS said that 139 animals from the quarantined bison at the Turner Ranch were sent to Fort Peck earlier in the month, as will be discussed later in the meeting.

UPDATE ON WEST SIDE ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS (MFWP, MDOL)

As of the IBMP meeting in July 2014, no decision document had been issued on the MEPA analysis. The MFWP Region 3 director, one of two decision entities, had signed off on the analysis. MBOL, the other decision entity, had not. At that meeting, CM noted in response to a question that the Governor is informed but has not weighed in on the EA yet.

In early November MFWP, acting under direction from the Governor's office, released an alternative G touted as a compromise between livestock and environmental interests. The new alternative combines parts of three of the original six alternatives. MZ said that to his understanding the decision is now about only Addendum G, and the other alternatives are off the table.

SS said public comment on the addendum will be accepted until December 11th, followed by a final decision. The EA will now go directly to the Governor at the end of the public comment period, and MBOL will no longer have decision authority.

MDOL FUTURE VACCINATION PLANS (MDOL)

MZ said that MDOL is currently evaluating the 2004 vaccination EA for update.

National Academy of Sciences Brucellosis in Wildlife in the GYA Study

Don Herriot described a new effort underway by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to better understand brucellosis in the Greater Yellowstone Area. The Secretary of the Interior asked the NAS to report on brucellosis in the GYA in the 1990s. APHIS has decided to update that review with new knowledge gained over the last 15+ years. The group will name a chair, and that leader will name an unbiased committee of experts to review the latest science. They expect to start the work this fall, with a completion date of 14-18 months. Don said that he expects that the chair will be receptive to input on possible committee members.

Among many questions the committee will seek to answer is why has there been an increase in brucellosis in non-feeding ground elk, what is the cost/benefit of vaccination, and what factors increase disease transmission.

In response to a question, Don said that he does expect that the work of the committee will be an open, transparent process.

Discussion and preparation of 2015 IBMP Winter Operations Plan

Stephanie Gillin of the CSKT presented the proposed 2015 revision to the IBMP Winter Operations Plan. Stephanie's proposal was based on Partner discussion during the July IBMP meeting, and in her role as biologist for the Lead Partner. Stephanie noted that the document did not need a great deal of rewrite and that she would be going over those items that she had modified or updated. The Partners had received the proposed version of the Winter Ops Plan several days prior to the meeting.

Section titled "Managing Bison Abundance and Brucellosis Prevalence".—A sticking point early in discussions was whether the goal of an overall harvest of 900 animals had been agreed to during the July meeting. Some said yes; others no. ME said that the meeting summary from the Partners' July meeting indicated no agreement. During the course of the discussion, NPS, MDOL, and MFWP noted their support for the 900 removal target.

DaveH said that NPS requested that the language in the Winter Ops Plan show that there will be some level of capture. Last year we worked hard, he said, and it seemed to work to allow animals through to hunt while capturing the number we needed. SS said that yes, overall, MFWP was happy with how last year went.

For the proposed text addition on page 4 of the draft document, DaveH reminded Partners that the Park's recommendation of a total of 900 animals removed was based on science and modeling. He said the Park much supported treaty hunting but needed to balance two needs: not only (a) allowing bison migration out of the Park for hunting, but also (b) selective capture and culling if the Partners were to achieve a decrease of 900 animals. That decrease of 900 animals, in turn, was shown via modeling to be required if the Partners are to drive the population back toward that mandated in the 2000 ROD. MZ concurred—it is critical to coordinate capture with the hunt, he said, but we cannot if the Winter Ops Plan says that we will only hunt. Instead we need to have a method to manage those upper population ranges.

In response to a question, DaveH said that there will be no operational quarantine this year, so that option for animal removal from the population is off the table for the winter of 2015.

Section titled "Bison Distribution".—MZ stated that the 2006 AM change referred to in the Winter Ops Plan may not still apply. He took the action item (****action item 2**) to work with MDOL legal counsel to determine if it still applied and then to provide the result of the analysis to the Partners.

Section titled "Hunting Bison".—Tribal interests expressed concern that not enough animals would be available for their hunts. In addition, EC noted that ITBC has a number of tribes who also want to exercise their right to hunt, meaning even more animals needed. SS said that the ShoBan are considering petitioning to have their treaty hunting rights recognized. Stephanie noted that for the CSKT hunting is the basis for subsistence, so the NPS model and the bison population in YNP are not the only factors weighing in the Tribe's decision.

For the NPT, MO noted that all seasons are open, and that they will not limit themselves if other tribe are not doing so. He also noted that the NPT would prefer to hunt in the fall, but are limited to when the opportunity exists.

Levander of the ShoBan noted that the Tribe hunts under their own treaty having nothing to do with the state of Montana. They hunt to sustain their needs (i.e., food, culture). Though the Tribe's take is small, they hunt year round and take males or females.

SS said that biologists from MFWP and NPS should meet to discuss future delegation of State licenses with regards to population management (e.g., moving from either-sex to cow-only opportunities). FWP is in agreement with the need to remove 900. He agreed to set up the meeting (**action item 3).

DaveH said that he wanted to be clear. Based on the Park's modeling efforts, it will likely not meet population goals without capture and slaughter and focus on females. And also, DaveH said, we don't "want" to remove 900 animals, it is simply what the models tell us we have to do to move toward meeting the population mandates of the 2000 ROD. Recall, he said, that we are creating this plan in the short term, for this winter, but the new EIS will allow for future reflection on population goals.

MZ reiterated a thought he had provided before: hunting inside the Park would allow for fair chase, a hunt in the fall, and to remove bison without border issues with land owners. PJ responded that those things could likewise happen if the state of Montana would allow bison to disperse to locations throughout the state.

TM stated his belief that the use of hunting for population control has not yet been maximized and that the Partners should endeavor to do anything they can to maximize hunting opportunities. Can we move bison inside the Park (e.g., north side to west side) to allow for a better chance for hunting? Could we herd animals for hunting? How about if we agree to hunt for females, as shown in the Park's models, but then stop that focus once a quota for females is met?

In response to a question, PJ said that the Park's models show that at an overall YELL bison population of ~3500 animals, hunting could serve as the primary method of population control. Regardless, he cautioned, the population is growing so fast that the removals need to recur year after year. Harvest consistency can be difficult, MZ pointed out, because out migration from the Park is variable (dependent on population, snow cover, and more).

TM stated that the CSKT agree to the concept of managing to a stable population. JH said, however, that they thought the removal goal might be closer to 600 (not 900), as stated in the May hunt managers' meeting. In response to a question on whether he was looking to put in an AM change request to manage to a population level other than as mandated in the 2000 ROD, JH responded no.

MR and ER noted that ITBC may soon seek to add other treaty hunting tribes. For ITBC, last year's hunt was successful recognizing the limits in time, space, and regulations that hunters operated under.

AngelaS noted that maintaining hunting opportunities should be a priority since precluding the hunt would disrupt native cultures. If we increase the hunt by 50% (i.e., from 600 last year to 900 this year) we may have fewer animals to hunt in the future.

Discussion summary.—ME noted that the Partners were talking about two sets of issues, some short term (associated with the 2015 Winter Ops Plan), some longer term (associated, for example, with the new Bison Management EIS which one Partner said, "Keeps open the door for all the possibilities discussed"). Likewise, Partners recognized that winter is coming. As such, and as stated in the Partner Protocols, the Winter Operations Plan is supposed to be signed by Dec31 of each year.

The Partners adjourned for a break, after which they returned and agreed upon the following set of actions for themselves (**action item 4):

- By Nov28—Partners supply comments to CSKT (StephanieG) on the current ver1 draft of the Winter Ops Plan.
- By Dec2—CSKT incorporates edits into the Winter Ops Plan, as well as provides alternative numbers and scenarios for the hunt. This updated ver2 Winter Ops Plan, which will make clear that a decrease in population trend is the goal, is sent to Partners for review.
- On Dec5—CSKT organizes a telecon at 10 AM Mountain/9 AM Pacific to discuss the ver2 Ops Plan. Partners will seek consensus on the Winter Ops Plan, or agree on changes to this plan that will complete the plan.

- By Dec12—Comments are returned to CSKT on the ver2 Winter Ops Plan. CSKT creates the ver3, final Winter Ops Plan.
- By Dec17—Stephanie works with the facilitator to set up the electronic signing procedure for the 2015 Winter Ops Plan.
- By Dec 31—All Partner have signed the 2015 Winter Ops Plan.
- By Jan 2—The facilitator publishes the signed 2015 Winter Ops Plan to ibmp.info.

Bison and the Nez Perce Tribe

Nakia Williamson, Cultural Resource Director for the Nez Perce Tribe, shared his perspective on the Tribe's history, including the important role that bison play in the NPT culture. Nokia began by describing that hunting is a way of life for the Tribe. We play basketball for recreation, he said, but hunting is our way of life. The Tribe does not see itself as separate from the landscape, nor does the tribe draw lines on the ground. He described "Indian Law", which he said is not written down. It is a law that describes the Tribe's relationship with the land and its way of life. To say to us manage your resources, is like saying to us manage yourselves because the tie is so close.



Figure 2.—Nokia Williamson, Cultural Resource Director for the NPT, speaking to the IBMP Partners. Nokia described the history of the Nez Perce Tribe, including their genesis story and their connection to the land and its creatures, with a focus on the importance of bison to the NPT culture.

Nakia described the Nez Perce origin story in which Coyote foresaw the coming of people. The Tribe sees Coyote, he said, as the chief of the animal people. Coyote is at the heart of many Tribal legends. These are not fanciful stories; instead many truisms come out from these stories. The stories, Nakia said, are easier to understand in the Native Tongue.

One of the stories Nakia related had to do with Coyote asking all the animals how they would relate to this newly created animal, the human. Each animal came forward, including the Chinook salmon who said I will return yearly. Foods like Chinook salmon and later roots and berries are part of the Tribe's sacred foods.

Nakia noted that the Nez Perce have no tradition of migration, instead they have had a single constant homeland from which they have gone forth from. They had stories about the Lake Missoula flood long before science discovered it.

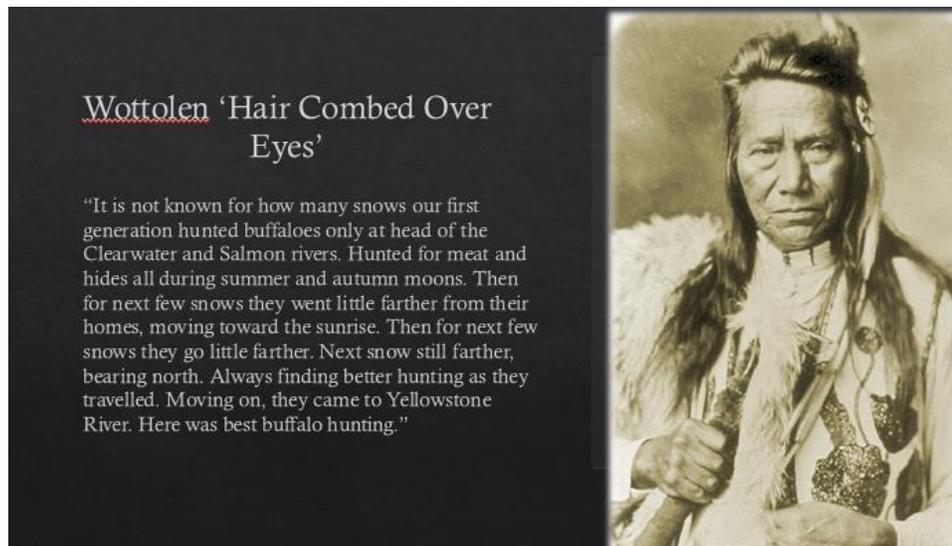


Figure 3.—Nokia Williamson, Cultural Resource Director for the NPT, described the Tribe’s unique connection to both Yellowstone and bison.

Horses came to the Tribe in the 1600s, though some have said the 1700s. The Tribe came to Yellowstone before the horse (by foot); the horse simple made getting there and back more efficient. We moved, Nokia said, to follow the buffalo. We called ourselves *Cuup’niitpelu*, which means “people traveling out of the mountain”.

The Tribe believes that some of the rights that the US Government supposedly gave to it by treaty are not actually owned by the Government, in other words that they are not the Government’s to give or grant. Those rights were instead given to the Tribe by coyote and have existed for the Tribe since its origin.

We look beyond the seventh generation, Nakia said. Decisions we make today, such as with the buffalo, can reverberate through time. The Tribe, he said, is proud to have taken the lead on critical natural resource issues ranging from Pacific Northwest salmon to Yellowstone bison.

Bison and the American Prairie Reserve

Dr. Kyran Kunkel, Chief Scientist for the American Prairie Reserve (APR), introduced the Partners to APR, which is located in NE Montana. APR's vision, Kyran said, is "to create and manage a prairie-based wildlife reserve that will protect a unique natural habitat, provide lasting economic benefits, and improve public access to and enjoyment of the prairie landscape." Bison, as Dr. Kunkel described, play a large part in that vision.

Kyran described how APR considers bison as flagships for large-scale conservation. He noted that the IBMP and APR both are looking for solutions to similar issues—science, innovation, collaboration—and that both seek not only success with wild bison populations but also share the goal of maintaining economically sustainable ranching.

Kyran made a case of how habitat limits bison, saying (1) bison occupy only 0.0002% of their original range in Montana, (2) the temperate grasslands preferred by bison make up a small percentage of all protected areas, and (3) there are only a very few regions of the world that have potential for large-scale wild bison reestablishment.

One of those areas includes NE Montana, along the Missouri Breaks, where APR centers its operations. This area is ideal for bison restoration, according to Kyran, because of

- unique wildlife history
- 95% untilled
- high % of public land

- 90-Year trend of steady decline of human population
- affordable land prices

The group eventually seeks to have a 3.5 million acre reserve. To accomplish that goal they are focusing on habitat accumulation, biodiversity restoration, and the human element. They believe that they can achieve the land acquisition goal for \$500M.

APR's vision includes:

- Largest wildlife populations on continent; a wildlife spectacle
- Ecological capacity, function, resiliency reached for all species
- Most successful, inspiring restoration and conservation program anywhere
- Rising benchmarks
- Populations driven by habitat not humans

That vision will be achieved with the following outcomes that APR seeks to accomplish over a ten-year time period:

- Viable population of swift foxes
- Prairie dog complex supporting ferrets, abundant owls, badgers, plovers, hawks
- >5000 bison – largest population in NA – ecologically effective
- Ungulates at ecological capacity, >5000 each on reserve
- Viable population of cougars
- >2 packs of wolves
- Bears



Figure 4.—Dr. Kyran Kunkel describes the goals and aspirations of the American Prairie Reserve, including being a potential repository for post-quarantine Yellowstone bison—in northeast Montana.

Kyran also described APR's mission, particularly as focused on bison. That mission says that the group seeks to "create and manage a prairie-based wildlife reserve that will protect a unique natural habitat, provide lasting economic benefits, and improve public access to and enjoyment of the prairie landscape." With respect to bison, APR seeks (1) high genetic diversity; (2) free of cattle genes; (3) fulfill ecological role in shaping the prairie ecosystem; (4) natural behavior; (5) enjoyed, with diverse cultural and economic benefits, by local communities and the public. To achieve those goals, Kyran said, will require the APR herd grow to thousands of animals that are free to roam over millions of acres.

Kyran noted that APR did put in for the YELL bison housed at the Turner Ranch, but was not selected as a final location for those bison. Dr. Kunkel's full presentation can be found at <http://ibmp.info/Library/20141120/20141120.php>

Status of brucellosis-free, post-quarantine bison

TRANSFER OF POST-QUARANTINE BISON TO TRIBAL GROUPS

Jim Stone of ITBC introduced Robbie Magnan of the Fort Peck Tribe and Mark Azure of the Fort Belknap Tribe. Jim described the history of the ITBC with Yellowstone, including their input to the 2000 ROD. The group has been pushing for the establishment of a quarantine procedure and facility since then as a pathway for transferring YELL bison out to tribes. Many tribes have let ITBC know of their interest. ITBC is hoping to scope a quarantine facility capable of helping facilitate the transfer of YELL bison out to tribes. They are looking, he said, for a facility or facilities on the order thousands, not tens, of acres.

Majel Russell added that ITBC's mission is to restore buffalo to Indian Country. ITBC can be the broker for these exchanges. EC noted that all else that is required of it, that ITBC's foremost goal is to bring bison out of YELL alive. Included in that movement, he added, is something few people ever mention—along with the transfer of animals they seek to keep the bison family structure intact, as well.

Mark and Robbie addressed the IBMP Partners regarding their Tribal bison programs. Roughly a week before the IBMP meeting, the Fort Peck Tribe received 139 disease-free bison from the Turner Ranch, bison that originated from or were offspring of a group of quarantined Yellowstone bison.

Robbie said that the bison will spend some time in a small (140 acre) enclosure getting used to their new surroundings—termed “soft release”—but then be released onto a 13,000 acre pasture. They will share that pasture with 48 Yellowstone bison that were similarly transferred two years back. In the early days of their program, Robbie said, the area the Tribe had available for bison was 5,800 acres, so it has more than doubled since then. Robbie noted that the tribe has the same fence as Kyran Kunkel described for APR, except without the electric line.

The experience at Fort Peck and Fort Belknap, Robbie said, proves that you can get bison out of Yellowstone alive.

Mark said they appreciated being here to listen to, and talk with the IBMP. He noted that bison have been housed on the Tribe's lands since 1974. Mark said that he wished the term “quarantine” had never been used with the bison; instead he prefers “surveillance”. In March 2012 70 other disease-free bison were transferred north, initially to the Ft Peck Tribe, then a portion of those moved on to the Fort Belknap Tribe. Since they've had those bison, Mark said, hardly anything remarkable has happened.

The program has been a big success, Mark continued. I believe and hope that we have answered all the questions anyone has had. The only sticking point, he noted, was their inability to get the office of the State Vet out to visit them. We want a dialogue, and we want to address any concerns they have. The Tribe is acquiring more land for bison, considering hunting, and looking into including bison as part of a tourism draw to their area. We are looking to the future, and at Fort Belknap conservation is our #1 goal for this animal. At Fort Belknap, we don't call or manage our buffalo as cattle or wildlife, he said, we manage them as buffalo.

Mark noted that in the discussion of transferring bison to tribes, one concept always gets lost: that is the healing process that occurs when Indian people's relationship with bison is restored. There is so much joy and excitement when the bison return. Our people, he said, feel pride in doing “our part for this animal who has sustained us forever.”

In response to a question about whether the success of the program has helped pacify local resistance, Mark and Robbie had different responses. Mark said that no, many in the local area still oppose the reintroduction. As such, he expects that there will be some anti-bison sentiment and/or bills in the legislature again this time. Robbie, on the other hand, said that many local ranchers are now fine with the buffalo introductions now that they have seen that the bison cause little or no issues. In three years, Robbie said, we have never had an escaped bison (although, he noted with a chuckle, that some escaped cattle have come into the buffalo pasture).



Figure 5.—Mark Azure of the Fort Belknap Tribe and Robbie Magnan of the Fort Peck Tribe updated the IBMP Partners on their Tribal bison programs, including the inclusion of quarantined YELL bison.

POSSIBLE QUARANTINE EA BY THE NPS

(Note that this item was discussed during the updates section but is placed here for report continuity and consistency with the meeting agenda.)

DaveH noted that the scoping period for the operational quarantine EA closed September 12. NPS received ~23,000 comments, of which ~22,000 were form letters. Most comments were in support of operational quarantine. One repeated concern was regarding where the facility will be located. The EA is under preparation now and expected to be out in the next couple of months.

At a previous meeting, DaveH noted that the 2000 EIS foresaw the possibility of an operational quarantine process being developed as a tool of the IBMP. Thus, a new EIS is unlikely warranted. However, the 2000 EIS noted that if an operational quarantine facility was to be established, further analysis would be needed. Hence the EA.

In response to questions, DaveH said

- the EA is being done now with the idea that it can be incorporated into the new bison management EIS later; and
- NPS wants to do the EA with the support of IBMP Partners but that yes, it could be completed by NPS alone.

North Hebgen habitat restoration efforts

CavanF introduced his team with a note that the Gallatin National Forest would be soon completing its planning phase for habitat restoration efforts in the North Hebgen area of the forest. That planning, as previously described to the Partners, serves as a foundation for future GNF projects that might influence bison habitat and thus impact the IBMP.

Then Courtney Frost, Anna Anderson, and Keith Konan updated the Partners on work completed or underway since their report at the fall 2013 IBMP meeting. They described the project goals as achieving the desired conditions identified in the Hebgen Duck Landscape Assessment. Those conditions include increasing forest resiliency to insects, diseases, and fire. More explicitly, the project objectives are to (1) reduce fuels, (2) enhance wildlife habitat enhancement, and (3) increase forest resiliency.

Project planning included inventory of unique habitat types including lodgepole/bitterbrush, sagebrush and grasslands, wetlands and riparian areas, parks and meadows, aspen, and whitebark pine. With the data in hand, the team is prioritized areas for treatment to meet the three project objectives noted earlier (and indeed some initial treatments have been completed).

To reduce fuels, the forest plans to focus its fuels treatment effort on areas of evacuation routes, wildland urban interface, and powerline corridors. They plan to reduce fuel continuity across the landscape, and to return fire to ecosystem via prescribed fire and proactive treatments. Fuel treatments, which will be integrated with other objectives, will take the form of a range of commercial, non-commercial, and prescribed fire treatments.

The team has identified three primary opportunities for wildlife treatments:

- Public Safety - Highway Corridor and Rainbow Point Campground
 - Increase visibility along highway and reduce potential for vehicle collisions
 - Decrease screening and cover within campground
- Aspen Enhancement
- Whitebark Pine Enhancement

With respect to forest resilience, the team has identified the three most prevalent agents of insect and disease, and proposed methods to treat them:

- Lodgepole Pine Dwarf Mistletoe
 - Regeneration and Sanitation treatments targeted at high infection areas
 - Work may be coincident with mountain pine beetle treatment areas
- Western Spruce Budworm
 - Thin/regenerate to reduce hazard and create age class/structural mosaic
 - Stand and landscape level approach
- Mountain Pine Beetle
 - Thin/regenerate to reduce hazard and create age class/structural mosaic
 - Stand and landscape level approach

The GNF presentation can be found at <http://ibmp.info/Library/20141120/20141120.php>.



Figure 6.—Keith Konen of the Gallatin National Forest updates Partners on the forest’s North Hebgen habitat restoration project.

GNF/MSU project to assess rangeland health in Gardiner Basin

Jodie Canfield described work that the GNF will undertake with researchers at Montana State University. The goal of the work will be to assess the rangeland health in the Gardiner Basin as a precursor to habitat restoration efforts on forest lands. The genesis of the project was 2011 work to assess Cutler Meadows

forage as part of expanded tolerance for bison on public forest land north of YNP. Goals of the project include assessing the current reference soil and vegetation conditions. Jodie expects the project will take two years for data collection and review.

Partner briefings and updates

Sam—update on bison coexistence/fencing project

The bison co-existence project continues, with funds available to help landowners purchase and erect fences. The 2014 Annual Report will contain a full description of number of projects completed and dollars spent since the inception of the program.

Germaine—status of continuing efforts on bison education brochures

GW and AJ handed out the now completed “Bison and Tribal Peoples” educational brochure. The brochure describes Native American cultural ties to bison, capturing the fundamental importance of bison to tribes, including discussions of traditional uses, bison management, and treaty rights. Brochures are available from MFWP, plus the pdf is be available for download on the IBMP website (see <http://ibmp.info/bisoneducation.php>).

Dave—status of lawsuit against helicopter hazing

Dave read a press release, just sent during the course of this meeting, regarding the appellate court’s decision on the case. In the 2011 case (Alliance for the Wild Rockies against the U.S. Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service and Christian MacKay as executive director of the Montana Department of Livestock) the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals (a) agreed with U.S. District Judge Charles C. Lovell in denying AWR’s request to stop bison helicopter hazing, and (b) overruled Judge Lovell in saying that AWR has standing under the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Protection Act to bring lawsuits.

Dave, Sam—New EIS to evaluate bison management

At the April meeting DaveH announced that NPS, MDOL, and MFWP had signed a Memorandum of Understanding to develop a new environmental impact statement for bison management. This agreement would require MEPA analysis by the State, NEPA analysis by NPS. The underlying reason for the new EIS is the on-the-ground changes that have occurred in bison management since the signing of the last EIS in 2000.

At this meeting DaveH said that there are likely to be six preliminary alternatives in the EIS. The notice of intent for the EIS is expected to be published in the next couple of months, followed by a 90-day comment period. Cooperator status has been agreed to by all Tribes on IBMP.

Ryan—update on Gonacon trials

RC note that there is nothing new to report from the Gonacon study, which is still underway.

Scott—status of the compilation of AM changes into a single AM document

At the previous IBMP meeting the Partners gave themselves two weeks to review the new AM Plan and return any comments or edits to the facilitator. With no changes forthcoming, the facilitator then posted the document as the 2014 IBMP AM Plan as final. The 2014 IBMP Annual Report is then, per Partner agreement, being based on the new 2014 IBMP AM Plan.

Future activity planning

PLANNING FOR COMPLETING 2014 IBMP ANNUAL REPORT

At the previous meeting, the facilitator described that the process for completing this year’s annual report will be similar to past year, per Partner agreement. The Annual Report is being built on the 2104 IBMP Adaptive Management Plan and includes reporting on progress toward meeting the 2011 recommendations of the Citizens’ Working Group.

The facilitator described the Annual Report as being ~80% complete and provided the following process to complete (**action item 5):

- Ver1 reviews complete; Ver2 input by Dec10
- Ver2 review, final input required by Dec 20
 - Lead on each topic has final say
 - In some cases two different reports can be recorded
- Lead Partner (Angela) has final say on disputes
- No signature required per past precedence
- As described in the Partner Protocols, the goal is to have the Annual Report completed and posted to IBMP.com by Dec31 (**action item 6).

PLANNING FOR IBMP 2015 MEETINGS

The IBMP Partners set aside the following dates for their meetings in 2015. Meetings are generally from 8 AM to 5 PM over a single day. In all cases shown, the Partners picked two days to allow for a possible field trip day. Confirmed dates and locations, and later draft agendas, will be posted well in advance.

- *April 22/23 -- West Yellowstone, MT*
- *August 5/6 -- Lapwai, ID*
 - This meeting had previously been scheduled for November 2014. Given public concern about the distance and winter driving, the Partners committed to, and MO agreed, to hold their summer 2015 meeting in Lapwai with the NPT acting as meeting host. As part of the decision, NPS agreed to incur responsibility for meeting location fees associated with the November 2014 meeting, while the NPT will do the same for the summer 2015 meeting. For the November 2014 IBMP meeting, then, NPS will act as host, NPT as Lead Partner. For the Summer 2015 IBMP meeting, NPT will act as host, NPS as Lead Partner.
 - One of the members of the public let the facilitator know that this scenario—i.e., a meeting in Lapwai in the summer—was much better given (a) it will be a safer drive in the summer than in November, and (b) better to have it in Lapwai in the summer since more on-the-ground bison related activities are happening in the spring and fall.
- *November 18/19 -- Bozeman or Chico Hot Springs, MT (TBD)*

THANKS AND LEAD PARTNER CHANGE

All Partners joined in thanking Lead Partner McCoy Oatman, along with Angela Sondenaar, Mike Lopez, and the rest of the NPT team, for their efforts running the third IBMP meeting of 2014 (and remaining efforts to complete the 2014 IBMP Annual Report).

Per agreement at the November 2013 meeting, the Lead Partner now changes to Dan Wenk of NPS for IBMP meetings in 2015.

Public comment

The following notes on public comment to the IBMP Partners are not intended to be complete, but rather reflect the facilitator's best effort to capture key statements. The facilitator has especially attempted to capture those comments from the public that appeared to be solution oriented and have the potential for inclusion in AM planning and/or process improvement. These items, as well as other potentially actionable public input, are called out with a "***" in the listings that follow.

Names associated with comments are available from the facilitator. They are not included here, however, in an effort to focus on the comment rather than the speaker. Line breaks in the bullets indicate a new speaker.

Public comment was taken during the middle of the day in reaction to numerous past public comments about public input being of less value at the end of the day.

- 589 bison were slaughtered in 1988-89. Since then I have witnessed the slaughter of 7600 bison. Think of what we could have done with those bison. We could have established bison herds on the Taylor's Fork, on the CMR, or on the BLM lands north of the CMR.
- **We need to begin working with the USFWS, who seem scared of this issue.
- Buffalo should be managed by the FWP, not DOL!
- **We should fence bison out of private lands, no in to our national park.
- NPS doesn't touch the genetic concerns in this population. These bison are on the cusp of extinction.
- Quarantine is just another method for slaughtering bison.

- Montana has a problem with bison, the National Park Service does not. Montana points a finger at the IBMP but itself has been unproductive in this issue since 1990.
- After so many years, Montana came up with a good plan, which is alternative B in the increased West Side tolerance EA. And now that has been deemed unacceptable. Now instead we have the veiled compromise alternative G. Alternative G is not nearly so good as alternative B.
- Alternative G is ambiguous. It could have the effect of decreasing habitat and concentrating bison more. It might even increase the risk of brucellosis transmission!
- Alternative G is a capitulation, not a compromise.
- I urge the agencies and the Tribes to contact the governor and ask him to still support alternative B. Alternative G is a step backwards.

- There are no landowners at the table.
- I have a kindred interest with the Tribal interests, for example hunting for food. I likewise am thankful for the gift of the hunt.
- I heard the Tribes say they will hunt wherever the opportunity is available. But that means less than 5 acres in the vicinity of Beattie Gulch.
- Does anyone care that I have to tell many tourists who want to come and stay with me that they will witness slaughter and gut piles?
- It is too bad that the knowledge of this travesty will now be documented and shown to national, and even international audiences—people who will care about what is happening at Beattie Gulch. It would have been better to avoid such documentation.
- I can't believe my North American friends are treating me as your ancestors were treated—that we are being ignored in our own place.

- My plea is for less harvest. Today it is more than the landscape can handle. A lower quota needs to be set.
- No one of you lives near Beattie Gulch and sees the killing, hears the shots, smells the rotting gut piles.
- You Partner make decisions that directly impact me!
- **Why don't you give bison to the tribes who are pleading for them and then let them hunt those bison on their own lands?
- Use the money that is wasted under the IBMP to beef up fences on tribal lands, instead.
- DOL needs to stop perpetuating fear about bison and brucellosis.
- ** Give bison to private owners.
- How will the general populace view what happens at Beattie Gulch once it is documented?
- You are destroying our home values. We landowners need a voice in what happens.
- I will not be silent when the health of my family is at stake!

- I agree with the two goals of the IBMP.
- Putting free-ranging, post-quarantine bison out into the state of Montana meets the goals of huntable, wild animals with no risk of disease transmission.
- Nowhere in the Lacy Act is hunting promoted inside of YNP!

** Final **

- Brucellosis infected bison are a real threat. If the gut piles, which can include fetuses, are left on the land then there is a real potential for disease transmission within the DSA.
- ****Leaving carcasses on the ground presents a risk of brucellosis transmission. DOL is required to assure safe and proper disposal of these carcasses to prevent disease transmission. (The speaker reads a Montana law, labeled 32.3.125, regarding proper carcass disposal.)**
- By law, then, DOL must act regarding these carcasses on the landscape.

- I am a Park County Commissioner concerned with the threat brucellosis caused by bison can have for the health and safety of our citizens and livestock.
- I worry about bison moving up into Paradise Valley.
- We are also concerned about gut piles.

*** Meeting adjourned ***

Abbreviations

- AJ—Andrea Jones
- AM—Adaptive management
- APHIS—Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
- BB—Brooklyn Baptiste
- BFC—Buffalo Field Campaign
- CF—Cavan Fitzsimmons
- CM—Christian Mackay
- CSKT—Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribes
- CTUIR—Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- CWG—Citizens’ Working Group
- DaveH—David Hallac
- DH—Don Herriot
- DSA—Designated Surveillance Zone
- DW—Dan Wenk
- EA—Environmental Assessment
- EC—Ervin Carlson
- GAO—Government Accountability Office
- GNF—Gallatin National Forest
- GW—Germaine White
- GWA—Gallatin Wildlife Association
- GYA—Greater Yellowstone Area
- ITBC—Inter Tribal Buffalo Council
- JH—John Harrison
- JS—Jim Stone
- LG—Leonard Gray
- MBOL—Montana Board of Livestock
- MD—Marna Daley
- MDOL—Montana Department of Livestock
- MDOT—Montana Department of Transportation
- ME—Mary Erickson
- MEPA—Montana Environmental Policy Act
- MFWP—Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks
- ML—Mike Lopez
- MO—McCoy Oatman
- MOU—Memorandum of Understanding
- MR—Majel Russell
- MSGA—Montana Stockgrowers’ Association
- MSU—Montana State University
- MZ—Marty Zaluski
- NEPA—National Environmental Policy Act
- NGO—Non-governmental organizations
- NP—Nez Perce
- NPS—National Park Service
- NRDC—Natural Resources Defense Council
- Park—Yellowstone National Park
- PF—Pat Flowers
- PIOs—Public Information Officers
- PJ—PJ White
- RC—Ryan Clarke
- ROD—Record of Decision
- RF—Rebecca Frye
- RFP—Request for proposals
- RT—Rob Tierney
- RTR—Royal Teton Ranch
- RW—Rick Wallen
- SB—Scott Bischke
- SEIS—Supplemental EIS
- SK—Salish Kootenai
- SS—Sam Sheppard
- TM—Tom McDonald
- TR—Tim Reid
- USFWS—US Fish and Wildlife Service
- USGS—US Geological Survey
- WMA—state of MT wildlife management areas
- YELL—Yellowstone National Park
- YNP—Yellowstone National Park