

Custer Gallatin Land Management Plan Bison Direction (2022)

Bison (WLBI)

Introduction

The Yellowstone bison population is unique in that it is genetically pure (for example isolated from domestic livestock), and it contains thousands of individuals that exhibit wild behavior and roam relatively freely over a very large landscape. As such, this bison population is of great importance to Tribes and local, regional, and national visitors. The Custer Gallatin National Forest is unique because it borders Yellowstone Park on the north and west sides, where bison naturally tend to migrate out of the Park to lower elevation habitats on National Forest System lands when winter snows become too deep in the Park. The framework for management of Yellowstone bison is found in the Interagency Bison Management Plan, which delineates management zones where bison presence is tolerated and management is emphasized. At the time the plan was written, bison were located only in the Madison, Henrys Lake, and Gallatin Mountains Geographic Area and the Absaroka Beartooth Geographic Area.

Desired Conditions (FW-DC-WLBI)

01 Native bison have access to forage, security, and movement corridors to facilitate distribution of the species to suitable habitats within the plan area.

02 Suitable habitat supports a year-round bison presence on the Custer Gallatin National Forest. Habitat accommodates bison migrating out of Yellowstone National Park in winter, as well. Adequate connecting corridors exist between suitable habitats to facilitate bison movement and distribution to increase resilience to stressors, adaptability to changing conditions, and contributing to stable and increasing genetic diversity.

03 Educational materials, including signage at trailheads and campgrounds where bison may occur, are available to help national forest users understand wild bison behavior and act accordingly in order to avoid conflicts.

04 Bison are present year-round with enough numbers and adequate distribution to support a self-sustaining population on the Custer Gallatin National Forest in conjunction with bison herds in Yellowstone National Park.

Goals (FW-GO-WLBI)

01 The Custer Gallatin National Forest engages with Tribal, Federal, State, and other willing partners to expand the science of bison ecology, foster awareness of the important biological, ecological, and cultural roles of bison on the landscape, reduce conflict with livestock and non-National Forest System property, and cooperatively develop adaptive strategies to manage bison and their habitats to facilitate natural movement or translocation of bison into and between suitable habitats.

Objectives (FW-OBJ-WLBI)

01 Complete three projects within, or for the purpose of creating or connecting, suitable bison habitat every three years, one of which is a habitat improvement project.

Guidelines (FW-GDL-WLBI)

01 To promote bison expansion within management zones, management actions taken to resolve bison-livestock conflicts should favor bison within these zones.

02 To facilitate progressive expansion of bison management zones over time, bison habitat improvement projects should be strategically placed within and near existing management zone boundaries.

03 To facilitate bison expansion into unoccupied, suitable habitat in the area that coincides with the grizzly bear primary conservation area, management actions should not create a barrier to bison movement unless needed to achieve interagency targets for bison population size and distribution.

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