

INTERAGENCY BISON MANAGEMENT PLAN



FALL 2022 IBMP PARTNERS MEETING

MEETING SUMMARY

Wednesday, November 30, 2022 ~ West Yellowstone, Montana

*Prepared by Julie Anton Randall, IBMP Facilitator and Approved as Draft2 (dated March 1, 2023)
for Posting by NPS, Lead Partner in 2022.*

PARTICIPANTS

Lead Partner & Host: Yellowstone National Park, National Park Service

IBMP Facilitator: Julie Anton Randall (ecomareterra@gmail.com)

IBMP Partner Primaries

Tom McDonald, Tribal Council Chairman, Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes (CSKT)

Lance Tissidimit (Shoshone-Bannock Tribes), Board member, InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC)

Mike Honeycutt, Executive Officer, Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL)

Marty Zaluski, State Veterinarian, Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL)

Dustin Temple, Deputy Director + **Marina Yoshioka**, Region 3 Supervisor, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP)

Cam Sholly, Superintendent, Yellowstone National Park (YNP), National Park Service (NPS) (**Lead Partner**)

Quincy Ellenwood, Natural Resource Chairman & Treasurer, Nez Perce Tribe (NPT)

Dr. Burke Healey, Senior Leader for Policy & Operations, USDA Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

Mary Erickson, Forest Supervisor, Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF), U.S. Forest Service (USFS)

IBMP Partner Seconds

NPS—Tim Reid, Jennifer Carpenter, and P.J. White

CSKT—James “Bing” Matt; John Harrison; Whisper Camel Means; Shannon Clairmont; Kari Kingery

APHIS—Rebecca Bigelow

USFS—Kathleen Minor, Mike Thom, Wendy Urie, and Josh Hemenway

Treaty Hunt Tribes (in addition to Partners)

Blackfoot Nation—Gerald “Buzz” Cobell

Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR)—Andrew Wildbill

Northern Arapaho—Devon Oldman
Shoshone-Bannock Tribes—Keirnan Tissidimit
Yakama Nation—Riley Neff Warner

Meeting Location: **Holiday Inn West Yellowstone**, 315 Yellowstone Avenue, West Yellowstone, Montana

Other Attendees: *Please see list in Appendix A.*

I. MEETING OPENING

A. Opening Prayer by Tribal Elder

The Fall 2022 IBMP Partners Meeting opened with a prayer by Devon Oldman of the Northern Arapaho Tribe in his native dialect.

B. Welcome by Lead Partner

As IBMP Lead Partner, YNP Superintendent Cam Sholly launched the meeting with a welcome and request to be clear on the main objectives of the IBMP, which are based on science, not politics. Vibrant discussion being expected, Cam expressed that IBMP is at a critical point where its capacity depends on recognizing individual Partner responsibilities and collective ideas in place of individual opinions.

C. Introductions by All

IBMP Facilitator Julie Anton Randall prompted introductions of all in the room, starting with the Partner Primaries at the table and extending to Seconds and Treaty Hunt Tribes, then other Partner representatives and members of the public in attendance.

D. Logistics of the Day

Members of the public in attendance were reminded to sign up for their public input spot by the coffee break. Arrangements had been made to exclusively open the Holiday Inn restaurant for IBMP Meeting participants.

E. Agenda Overview

The Facilitator provided a brief run-through of the Agenda, which had been created by the Lead Partner, circulated to the Partners for input, and posted on the ibmp.info website two weeks in advance of the Meeting per the IBMP Protocols. The Partners offered no further amendments to the Agenda.

Note: The presentation on the “Highway 191 Bridge over Cougar Creek in the West Yellowstone Area” to be given by Deb Wambach, Wildlife Biologist, Montana Department of Transportation, was postponed due to weather challenges.

II. IBMP PAST BUSINESS

A. Approval of the April 2022 Meeting Summary

The Spring (April 13) 2022 IBMP Partners Meeting Summary has been posted as a draft on the ibmp.info website since May 2022. An approved Meeting Summary will be reposted on www.ibmp.info as “Final.”

IBMP Partners Decision—The IBMP Partner Primaries approved the Spring 2022 IBMP Partners Meeting Summary.

B. Summary of Action Items from April 2022 & “Parked Items List

A document entitled, “Parked Items List,” developed by former IBMP Facilitator (Scott Bischke) to capture items from past IBMP Meetings left unaddressed by the Partners and Subcommittees was presented to the group. The current IBMP Facilitator (Julie Anton Randall) resent this list to the IBMP Partners in advance of the Meeting to create an opportunity for the Partners to resolve or permanently shelve issues on the List. Discussion ensued, with some Partners expressing that certain topics were out of the scope of IBMP or that certain topics might need further deliberation.

IBMP Partners Decision--The IBMP Partner Primaries approved the following procedure for “Parked Items”: Partners must propose that a “Parked Item” be an Agenda item for the next IBMP Meeting before the Agenda is drafted (by the Lead Partner), meaning by at least one month in advance of the Spring 2023 IBMP Partners Meeting (so May 6); otherwise, that item will be dropped from the “Parked Items List.”

Ardent discussion was held regarding the Westside Tolerance Zone Working Group and whether it should be reinvigorated. Mary Erickson/USFS shared that the Working Group had been active in the past (e.g., meetings with the CGNF line officer, a tour of the Taylor Fork, and discussions about how to get bison to disperse throughout the Tolerance Zone and use the available habitat via natural migration. Tom McDonald/CSKT asked that the Partners further explore the value of the Zone, favoring collaboration of the Partners to allow some bison to survive (not all be hunted) along the Highway 191 corridor.

The Facilitator asked the Partners to consider the terminology used by the Partners for types of subgroups—like “subcommittee,” “working group,” and “task force.” The Partners clarified that a “subcommittee” is considered a longer-term type of group, whereas a “working group” has an assigned task to perform within a certain time period. For the Westside Tolerance Zone Working Group to function, it will need a charter, members, goals and assignments set by the Partners, and a duration.

III. IBMP PARTNER PROTOCOLS

The IBMP Protocols Subcommittee had been assigned six tasks at the Spring 2022 IBMP Partners Meeting. These were (verbatim from the April 2022 IBMP Partners Meeting Summary):

1. *How does a group join the IBMP and who can join?*
2. *Should the IBMP Winter Ops Plan be renamed?*
3. *Verify IBMP decision spaces: What is an IBMP decision versus an agency or Tribal decision.*
4. *Definition of consensus?*
5. *Ability of each Partner at the table to commit their agency or Tribe to an IBMP decision during a meeting.*
6. *Timeline review of the IBMP calendar—does it need to be modified?*

A. Revision of IBMP Protocols

Julie/Facilitator noted that the Partners were sent (on November 23) a set of draft revised Protocols that the Subcommittee had deliberated upon during the months from May-November (3 meetings and much email correspondence); all Partners were represented on the Subcommittee except for USFS. However, USFS responded to the draft Protocols change recommendations in early October. The draft shows areas of agreement and remaining disagreement of the Subcommittee members. Also, the Facilitator had worked with NPS/Lead Partner to update the Protocols with the current Primaries and Seconds, Lead Partner rotation schedule, and calendar.

Protocols Subcommittee Chair Majel Russell was absent, so Subcommittee member P.J. White/NPS was asked to cover progress. The Subcommittee had addressed all of its tasks except for #1, how new Partners can be added to the IBMP. On tasks #2-#6, agreement was achieved among the Partners, except for #4, "Definition of 'consensus.'" The Subcommittee discussed the situation where the dissent by one Partner can stymie the consensus-building process. The topic was tabled with no change to made to the Partner Protocols, which reads (in part): "Each of the nine Partner organizations has one vote in multi-agency decisions. The Partners seek consensus (100%) for all decisions that they make as a group...No objections equals consensus" (from page 3 of the IBMP Partner Protocols dated 12/27/2021).

IBMP Partners Decision – The IBMP Partner Primaries agreed to change the title of the "Winter Operations Plan" to simply "Operations Plan."

To aid the process of understanding and achieving consensus, P.J. had developed three documents:

- *Statutory Authorities*
- *Bison Management Decisions Made Under Exclusive Authority and Jurisdiction*
- *Some Examples of IBMP Decisions*

These were distributed to all of the Partner Primaries and Seconds in draft form on November 23, 2022. The intent is to discern the bison operations decisions that a Partner makes alone, because of the Partner's authorities and jurisdictions and legal responsibilities (for a Tribe, this involves the Tribal Council), and the bison operations decisions that should be made collaboratively by the IBMP Partners. Narrowing the decision space to these areas of collaboration could focus the IBMP Partners and enable efficient use of Partner time at IBMP Meetings and on IBMP matters.

B. Resolution of Consensus Definition Issue

Can a Partner "abstain" from a decision and the decision still carry as an "IBMP Decision"? In December 2021, NPT would not sign the Operations Plan, for reasons related to timing of the Tribal Council's ability to meet on the NPS-given Yellowstone bison population count, and that NPT wanted to see a bison reduction target of only 500-700, not the 900-1,100 that the other Partners had agreed upon.

Views included:

- **Marty Zaluski (MDOL)** – The process that IBMP Partners have lived by is not broken, and there are three possible outcomes: (1) nonagreement; (2) abstention; and (3) full agreement.

- **Cam Sholly (NPS)**—Everything in the Operations Plan is not subject to IBMP “consensus” decision-making. For example, NPS’s responsibility is to effectively manage for a healthy, genetically-viable population of bison and manage conflict within the Park boundaries.
- **Mike Honeycutt (MDOL)**—There are occasions when IBMP Partners are attempting to make decisions that they should not be making collaboratively because of respective decision-making authorities. Hazing in Zone 3 is an example: IBMP cannot usurp the authority of the Montana state legislature by ruling on hazing at the Zone boundary.
- **Quincy Ellenwood (NPT)**—The IBMP decision process broke down last December. Low numbers of bison creates competition among the Tribes, stunting their Treaty rights to hunt. Conditions have changed since the 2000 Record of Decision: there were at first four Tribes but now 9 that now seek to hunt. As respected sovereigns, these Tribes need to be considered, hand-in-hand with formal consultation on Federal processes affecting hunting rights (in NPT’s opinion, this includes quarantine). There is a “power in numbers”—of bison and of Tribes.

The Partners agreed that a formalized procedure is needed for how to move forward when a Partner dissents. There is also a need to define what is the collaborative space for decision-making; the IBMP Partners have allowed IBMP scope to creep. Certain decisions that IBMP Partners might try to make could hold a Partner to a commitment of resources that would be untenable or infringe on legal management responsibilities.

The NPS position is that the number of bison in YNP is based on science and data (and its authority and responsibility to determine it); IBMP decision-making related to the bison target population and NPS authorities have been conflated over time, creating an impossible scenario. It is important and necessary for Partners to be informed of YNP science and plans and their relationship to meeting the goals of the IBMP. Disagreement by the Partners with NPS is fine, but science-based population management recommendations issued by NPS in the annual population status report to the Superintendent and not an IBMP decision subject to consensus or partner veto.

Cam/NPS remarked that it is the responsibility of a Partner to speak up—for the record, during the public forum of the IBMP Partner Meetings—if it does not agree with a point being made by another Partner. Cam’s experience is that over his near-five years of IBMP participation, IBMP objectives have been met, and include management changes made on multiple occasions (Tribal hunting, Tolerance Zones, Quarantine progress). “IBMP is in a good place.” The Partners need to simply set transparent parameters within which IBMP group decision-making is made. State of Montana points out that silence at the table does not necessarily constitute agreement.

The Facilitator pointed out the value in utilizing the Adaptive Management Plan itself to ground the discussion about IBMP decision points.

A lack of Partner consensus underlay the apparent disagreement over whether to officially revert back to the 2020-21 Operations Plan (the last one signed by every IBMP Partner) or try to move forward under the current year’s existing and projected conditions with as much agreement as possible. Some Partners indicated that moving forward means simply fulfilling the responsibilities under their respective authorities and jurisdictions that are not subject to an IBMP partner consensus. [Some explained in the AMP.]

At the core of disagreement is the Yellowstone bison population count and whether or not the IBMP Partners should collaboratively recommend an increasing, decreasing, or stable population. In January 2022, NPS issued

a Notice of Intent to Prepare an EIS¹ requesting public input on three possible scenarios for bison management within the park. MDOL and MFWP have indicated they prefer a “stable or decreasing” population, with a concern for the risks of a higher population stretching the capacity of MDOL to mitigate bison crossing out of the Tolerance Zones.

Reckoning to the 2000 Federal EIS Record of Decision (2000 ROD) which indicated that 3,000 was the target Yellowstone bison population number, discussion ensued about science versus politics. According to the *Status Report on the Yellowstone Bison Population to the Superintendent*², YNP has the capacity to sustain the approximately 6,000 bison currently in the park and that management should be responsive to migration intensity and conflict, rather than a minimum number.

The Partners recognized that some Partners have differing opinions on what the Yellowstone bison population number should be: the Tribes want more; the State of Montana remains concerned over continually increasing abundance (2000 ROD stated 3,000 bison as the target and threshold at which point more aggressive population management actions may be implemented), as the State is responsible for managing bison in the Tolerance Zones within Montana. State of Montana states the IBMP partners have not formally accepted, either through adaptive management or other agreement, the existing population numbers, and lacking this type of documented consensus, the IBMP is still bound by the record of decision.

NPS perspective is that management actions have been successful in achieving the goals of the IBMP and reducing conflict. Given this success, and increases in spatial tolerance, managing to bison to mitigate conflict rather than to a minimum number is preferable.

The Facilitator noted that the IBMP Partners actually have a fair number of values in common; these need to be brought to light.

In conclusion, on the consensus issue, the Partners need to decide:

- (1) What is an IBMP decision?
- (2) What is the method for achieving IBMP decisions (e.g., receiving the YNP bison population count by October 1, as occurred this year)?
- (3) How to execute a decision in final?

[The IBMP Facilitator will assist the Partners by drafting a decision framework for consideration.]

C. New IBMP Process Calendar

The Partners discussed the IBMP Calendar (Table 3 of the Partner Protocols) revised based on the idea of reverting to 3 meetings a year as a way to be better prepared for decisions on the Operations Plan.

Also, there was a question by MFWP about why the Treaty Tribe Hunt (TTH) Meeting is on the calendar (since it is not a meeting of IBMP Partners per se). The TTH Meeting has been typically in May then reported on at the summer IBMP Partners Meeting. The Primaries agreed that the TTH Meeting’s content factors into IBMP decision-making (ground-truthing of MFWP bison hunt numbers by each Tribe, for one thing) and thus it should remain in the Calendar. Despite that hunting is considered to be a primary bison population management tool, there is no protocol regarding a formal report from the TTH Meeting to the IBMP Partners. **The Partners agreed**

¹ <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/01/28/2022-01865/notice-of-intent-to-prepare-an-environmental-impact-statement-for-a-bison-management-plan-for>

² https://ibmp.info/Library/OpsPlans/2022_StatusYellowstoneBisonPopulation_FINAL_Oct2022.pdf

that such a report (on the migration situation and hunt results) should be an agenda item for the Spring 2023 IBMP Partners Meeting.

The Partners discussed the relative value of a summer meeting, with some arguing it gives the Partners a forum useful to preparing for votes on the forthcoming year's Operations Plan (information shared and discussed earlier). The reality for YNP is, however, that the aerial surveys cannot be performed before July/August and having the summer meeting afterwards would space the Summer and Fall IBMP Partner Meetings too close together. Mary/USFS and Tom/CSKT shared their perspectives on the value of field trips that had been part of past Summer Meetings—that they enabled Partners to identify issues related to land capacity. Mike/MDOL suggested that a field trip could be organized ad hoc, and that the Summer Meetings of the past were not particularly valuable since the NPS bison population count was not yet available (“nothing to act upon”). Chris Geremia/NPS confirmed that October 1st works as a date for when NPS can deliver the bison population count to Partners. Mary suggested that with a higher number of outmigration bison in a given year, the Partners may want to remain flexible on when the meetings should occur each year.

The Partners' meeting schedule must align with the sequencing of bison operations and cycle of requests and receipts for IBMP document content, e.g., preparing the Annual Report due December 31 to include data on bison on Horse Butte, hazing, and cattle allotments. It makes sense that the Fall Meeting is scheduled to occur after the Partners are through the operational cycle (which ends October 31).

IBMP Partners Decision—The IBMP Partner Meetings will occur just twice per year. The Spring Meeting will occur later in the year and potentially include a field trip, and the Fall Meeting will occur earlier in the year (about one month after the bison population count is available from NPS).

Julie/Facilitator pointed out that under any meeting schedule scenario, it is important that Partners commit to reviewing and providing the essential input on documents that enables effective decision-making at the Partner Meetings.

D. New IBMP Lead Partner Rotation Schedule

The Partners discussed the “IBMP Schedule of IBMP Lead Partner Roles” (Protocols, Table 1) revised by the Facilitator to bring it up to date. Note that the Lead Partner year starts January 1; MDOL is the next Lead Partner.

Julie/Facilitator had reached out to every Partner Primary to confirm the Primary(ies) and Seconds, and any others who are to receive requests for input; there is now a Partner Directory with full contact information. She created a similar Treaty Tribe Hunt Tribes Directory by reaching out to the Tribes to confirm the appropriate contacts. Partners should strive to inform Julie when there are changes (i.e., NPT expects changes after elections in May).

E. IBMP Reference Documents

Julie/Facilitator had noted earlier in the meeting that the Protocols Subcommittee suggested that the following two documents, once finalized by the Partners, could become references in the “IBMP Library” online.

- 1. Statutory Authorities*
- 2. Bison Management Decisions Made Under Exclusive Authority and Jurisdiction*

F. Becoming an IBMP Partner

Although assigned to the Protocols Subcommittee, no new Protocol provision regarding how an entity becomes an IBMP Partner was developed or proposed. The last year a new Partner joined was in 2009 (the Tribal Partners). The Blackfeet Nation remains interested in joining the IBMP. Criteria is needed to guide the Partners in their decision to consider new Partners, which should be joining because they are directly involved in bison management. To be considered, the requesting entity must provide a clear rationale. (There is a letter sent by the IBMP Partners to the Park County regarding their petition to be part of the IBMP that clarified that elected officials and NGOs would not be appropriate IBMP Partner candidates.) The topic of “Becoming an IBMP Partner” was pushed to the Spring IBMP Partners Meeting with the intent to develop a protocol with criteria for vote at that meeting.

IV. IBMP PARTNER UPDATES

Typically, the IBMP Partners share news and legislative, policy, or Tribal Council actions that since the last IBMP Partners Meeting and how those might impact the IBMP. To condense the meeting since time was running short, Partners were asked by the Facilitator to also cover what Annual Report contents they provided or will provide to complete the Annual Report.

- **Yellowstone National Park/NPS** – *Cam Sholly and P.J. White*
YNP has provided several sections for the IBMP Annual Report. Some of these are from the *Status Report on the Yellowstone Bison Population to the Superintendent*. NPS looked at genetic diversity of the 5,500 or so bison in the park and noted a diversity similar to that seen in the 1990s. Per a request from MDOL received before the meeting, the allele frequency tables will be omitted from the Annual Report, since the topic has not been part of IBMP deliberations over the past year. [These tables are available in the *Status Report*.]
- **Custer Gallatin National Forest/USFS** – *Mary Erickson*
The new CGNF Forest Plan addresses key bison habitat concerns. CGNF is interested in working collaboratively on certain habitat objectives in the Plan, whether through an official IBMP Subcommittee or less officially.
- **Montana Department of Livestock** – *Mike Honeycutt and Marty Zaluski*
MDOL provided numbers and information for the Annual Report that included bison abundance in Zone 2, hazing events, lethal removal, and utilization of habitat.
- **Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks** – *Dustin Temple and Marina Yoshioka*
MFWP was in the process of finalizing its updates for the Annual Report before the meeting. Marina reported that also, MFWP has updated the information kiosk at the trailhead in Beattie Gulch with maps and an indication of the safety zone. Thus far this season, state-licensed hunters have harvested 9 bison: 3 in the Northern Zone and 6 in the Western Zone.
- **USDA APHIS** – *Dr. Burke Healey*
APHIS submitted its portions of the Annual Report related to quarantine. It is currently reviewing the quarantine procedure, including the number of bison shipped to Fort Peck and still there.

- CSKT** - *Tom McDonald, Tribal Council Chair*
 CSKT submitted input to the Annual Report, which was basically that no bison were hunted last year. One bison has been hunted so far this year. CSKT did renew its agreement with NPS.
- ITBC** – *Lance Tissidimit*
 Lance noted that ITBC Primary (Ervin Carlson) and Seconds (Troy Heinert, Majel Russell, and Jason Baldes) were in Washington, D.C. for a Tribal summit.
 Requests for Proposals have been issued to ITBC member Tribes that would like to receive bison from Fort Peck; coordinating Yellowstone-origin bison from Fort Peck to other Tribes is an ITBC responsibility. ITBC is worried about diseases like chronic wasting disease (CWD) spreading from east to west and already affecting elk and deer in increasing numbers.
- NPT** – *Quincy Ellenwood*
 NPT has not provided input to the Annual Report. NPT hunted just one bison last year by Cooke City; the members know that the migration was lower than usual. Despite that the Western Bison Management Area is open for hunting, NPT has not harvested bison yet. NPT members look forward to hunting in the Northern Bison Management Area soon.

V. IBMP ANNUAL REPORT

A. Overview of Annual Report Process

The 2022 Annual Report Process developed by the Lead Partner was sent to by the Facilitator to IBMP Partners on October 20, 2022. Julie/Facilitator noted that the Annual Report period ends October 31 each year; thus, the current Annual Report’s title will reflect the actual period covered by the report (i.e., it is no longer simply the “2022 Annual Report” since it covers November and December 2021 and not all of 2022).

B. Partner Reports on Adaptive Management Plan Monitoring Metrics & Management Responses

Julie/Facilitator developed tables within the Adaptive Management Plan (AMP) that Partners can use to report metrics and management responses under their purviews. These were sent as part of the Annual Report Process on October 20, 2022, and used by APHIS and CSKT so far.

C. Treaty Tribes Hunt—Northern and Western Bison Management Areas

Each of the Treaty Tribes was asked to share news and describe aspects of their anticipated hunting season that implicates the Operations Plan.

- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation**—Andrew Wildbill reported that one bull was harvested last year at Cooke City. He noted the potential need for focused management in Cooke City, or it could become a “Beattie Gulch” scenario. CTUIR’s season runs December 1 to February 28, with bulls huntable until March 31.
- Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes**—See above.
- Nez Perce Tribe**—Eric Kash Kash, Wildlife Director, is the contact on this topic for NPT. The season opened on September 1 on the Westside; typically, the season opens December 1 on the Northside.

NPT would like to see an earlier migration. As a respected sovereign, the Tribe has a right to adjust its hunting season for safety and other reasons. The NPT Fish and Wildlife Commission administers the hunt and has not committed to an end date; it will provide two-weeks' notice to members that the season will close. NPT does not want to jeopardize herd memory. Usually, the season ends in April or March, with just bulls hunted by that point.

- **Yakama Nation**—No harvests last year. The season will extend from December 5 to February 28.
- **Blackfeet Nation**—Buzz Cobell reported that 10 bison had been hunted (6 cows and 1 bull and 3 unknown). Bulls are hunted on the Westside until May 1st usually. On the Northside, hunts are restricted to bulls and calves by March or April.
- **Northern Arapaho Tribe**—The hunting season will extend from the first week of December until the end of February or March. One bull has been harvested already off Jardine Road.
- **Shoshone-Bannock Tribes**—No bison have been harvested by SBT yet this year. The SBT season is year-round. Most hunters to go to bison hunt areas until after deer and elk season, and usually bulls are hunted because the cows might be pregnant.

Treaty Tribe Hunt coordination calls are held on Wednesdays, hosted by CTUIR (Andrew Wildbill is lead).

D. Approving the Annual Report

Partners committed to providing missing pieces they are responsible for. The Annual Report will be finalized and approved by the Lead Partner (YNP) and posted on ibmp.info by December 31, 2022.

VI. USING NON-LEAD AMMUNITION

David Moen/NPT delivered a presentation on the importance of hunters using non-lead ammunition. NPT's slogan is "Loyal to Land: Lead-free Hunter." Key points of this presentation were:

- Lead ammunition is fatal to nontarget wildlife (e.g., the grizzlies, wolves, eagles, and condors which feed on carcasses) and affects the whole food chain. Humans are a top predator--lead particles in lead bullets disperse into the meat and are ingested by humans as well.
- Copper ammunition does not fall apart and is high-performance in quality ("one shot, one kill").
- Lead bullet wounds can heal over, so lead can be in an animal hunted with copper bullets—this is another reason why all hunters need to get on the same page and use nonlead ammo.
- NPT has established an ammo exchange program (2 boxes of lead bullets for 2 boxes of copper bullets of the same caliber).
- Reasons for lack of and resistance to use of copper ammo are that hunters do not know about the copper alternative or why it is important, no brand recognition (otherwise the bullets look the same), and sometimes cost (although for same quality of performance, the price is same).

Related handouts can be found on ibmp.info under Fall 2022 IBMP Partners Meeting.

VII. OTHER TRIBAL INTERESTS

Written comments were provided by Patrick Kincaid, Tribal Attorney for the Treaty Counsel composed of 44 Dakota, Lakota, and Wolakota Sioux chiefs, during the public comment session.

VIII. PUBLIC INPUT SESSION—PRESENTATION OF PUBLIC VIEWS

The following members of the public (time allocated by IBMP Facilitator) provided oral comments, with the exception of Patrick Kincaid, who also provided a written statement. Comments included: recognizing the success of the quarantine program; hoping for greater bison use of the Tolerance Zones and taking into consideration that the Tolerance Zones did not exist when the 3,000 bison target was declared in 2000 (bison reduction threshold should be based on the capacity of YNP + Tolerance Zones); road infrastructure leading to bison-vehicle collisions; concern for changes in bison behavior caused by hunting and the hunting of pregnant bison (are the calves counted?); the cost of protecting cattle; and bison as our National Mammal.

VI. STATUS OF YELLOWSTONE BISON POPULATION

Chris Geremia, YNP Lead Bison Biologist described contents of the *NPS Population Status Report to YNP Superintendent* (located in the IBMP.info Library) shared with Partners via the Facilitator on September 30, 2022. Chris has been presenting on this topic at IBMP meetings since 2014 in connection with the IBMP dual goals of reducing brucellosis spillover to livestock while maintaining the viability of the bison population. He asked, “what can your agency do to meet the goals?”

There are currently around 6,000 bison in the population—the most ever. From the NPS perspective, “viable” does not equate to “minimum.” When at 3,000, the population has real potential to lose genetic variability. Population genetics are negatively impacted when large numbers of adults and similar groups of animals are removed. NPS has a state-of-the-art monitoring system that also considers predators as well as the sustaining of nutrients and the water cycle; YNP can support greater than 10,000 bison.

Bison are also a cultural resource and vital to Tribal expressions of culture which includes hunting. A larger herd allows for both wildlife and cultural objectives to be met. Moreover, quarantine is enabling other Tribes to co-steward Yellowstone bison by having their own herds.

There is not a direct relationship between the number of bison in YNP and brucellosis transmission (there has been no transmission to cattle, and hazing needs have decreased since hunters play this role). Also, there is not a direct relationship between number of YNP bison and conflicts outside YNP. Conflict resolution and resource management are YNP’s goals and better targets to measure. NPS asked Partners to be tolerant and flexible; allow the system to self-correct, given that it has been in place and succeeding in preventing brucellosis transmission for 22 years.

NPS monitors bison movements; animals are down into the Gardiner Valley earlier than usual. It looks like there will be a strong migration this year. BCTP capacity will depend on the bison groups coming through; there could be space in the quarantine facilities for up to 200.

IBMP needs to define “viable” and “reduced brucellosis risk”; setting a reduction range of numbers of bison has not worked. Marty/MDOL expressed a preference for preventative (“keep bison out of Paradise Valley”) measures, especially if bison continue to flow out of the Park after the capture season.

Chris reviewed population trends: it took a decade to grow from 3,000 to 4,000, and another decade to go from 4,000 to 5,000.

IBMP Partners should work together throughout the winter and respond accordingly. The year 2011 saw the most conflict – when the bison count was 4,600, but only hunting was used to control the population (bison could not be transported across Montana that year, and the quarantine program did not yet exist), and the Tolerance Zones were not yet established (there were more livestock occupying the habitat of those zones, although the bulk of the conflict did not stem from cattle owners). Otherwise, conflict has gone down as the population has gone up. Marty/MDOL expressed concern about not having aggressive management early in the season. Cam/NPS countered that IBMP has developed tools over the past 10 years to manage and reduce conflict, such that the 3,300-3,500 range set in 2008 is no longer relevant plus, there is need to support opportunities for Treaty Tribes outside YNP.

John Harrison/CSKT deplored the Partners to look to history for answers and distinguishing factors that have changed, and not focus on a perceived impending event.

Some Partners are concerned that the Tolerance Zones “sit empty” despite all the effort to establish them and see the value of bison out on a landscape larger than Beattie Gulch. Can management tools be defined better and tolerance thresholds set in place of a general reduction target? Trapping closer to the far edge of the Tolerance Zone boundary is one idea. Tom/CSKT supports the “limits of acceptable change” concept and acknowledgement of Treaties signed with the expectation that bison would be on the landscape in perpetuity; this will require managing conflict but also habitat in the Tolerance Zones. He noted many Tribal hunters are also livestock owners and understand the need to mitigate disease risk. IBMP Partners could consider creating an “adaptative scheme” – and as Tom/CSKT remarked, “the more tools, the better.”

MDOL pointed out that timing the vote on the new Ops Plan so close to (and even after) the operations year has started creates challenges to finding collaborative solutions. For example, the turnaround is too short to set up mobile trapping at the north end of Zone 2 this season. Once the bison are in Zone 3, MDOL only has one option—to remove the animals. Intervening earlier would be their preference (MDOL does not wish “to learn by dealing with a crisis” and having to regain the trust of livestock owners lost over escaped bison. Other Partners pointed out that during 2016, when the largest hunt (486 bison) occurred, the bison never moved into Zone 3, and those surviving moved back into YNP by the haze-back date.

With diverting bison to quarantine being one option for population reduction, Burke/APHIS described the capacity of the two quarantine holding facilities which together can take in 260 bison when empty (not currently empty). But in reality, it takes capturing more than twice that many (500-600) to collect bison qualified for quarantine per the brucellosis mitigation protocols.

IX. IBMP 2023 OPERATIONS PLAN

A. Process for Finalizing the Operations Plan

NPS issued the call for edits to the Operations Plan on September 12, then reissued drafts with Partner input received to date on October 12 and again on November 3. NPS noted that the Operations Plan draft it has put forward as Lead Partner for Partner consideration aims to “get away from numbers” and focus on the IBMP objectives of collaboration.

No input was received from MFWP or MDOL prior to the meeting. NPT provided input on November 23, too late for NPS to incorporate it effectively into the draft for Partner consideration. NPS chose to present a clean November 3, 2022, version of the Operations Plan that all Partners had a chance to see prior to the meeting.

Some Partners asserted that a dissenting Partner must be transparent about its position. Mike/MDOL indicated for the record that MDOL does not agree with all statements made by Chris/NPS in his presentation, or to the methodology that is assumed.

Julie/Facilitator shared detailed new maps of the Northern and Western Bison Management Areas produced by Randy Scarlett/USFS that can be useful in IBMP Partner discussions.

B. Approving the Operations Plan

The IBMP Partner Primaries zeroed in on the [Managing Bison Abundance](#) section, and revealed these Partner perspectives:

NPT—Does not agree with a removal cap of “up to 25%” and said it could agree to 10-11% (about 650-700 bison); later in the discussion, NPT suggested that 12% might work as a cap. NPT also hopes hunting can be used as a management tool over a longer period (i.e., not just wintertime). Tribes are frustrated about the low numbers available to hunt; formerly only 4 Tribes hunted and now there are 9 and more that wish to hunt. Quincy/NPT cannot agree to “up to 25%” removal target, because that would mean 1,575 bison at risk of removal; NPT recommends 300 as a better target. He noted that state-licensed hunters are getting more bison than Tribes; also, bison fetuses are growing by December/January; hunting earlier is preferred.

MDOL—Would like to manage for a “decreasing population.” The “up to 25%” cap allows for taking advantage of opportunities to take more bison if needed. It cannot consent to “stable and increasing” terminology. It wants a guarantee that a larger number will not become unmanageable. MDOL could live with “a decrease between 11-25%,” and believes that with a target number set, “there is more pressure to meet it.”

NPS—Early migration is expected due to weather this year; the “targets” have not been “met” the last 3 years because bison did not leave the Park in the expected numbers. Fundamentally, Partners cannot agree on what the reduction number should be; at the same time, they have not yet had a chance to see what having 6,000 bison on the Yellowstone landscape looks like year after year; NPS is confident that YNP can accommodate them. To achieve a “stable” population, the reduction target would be 14%; reducing only 11% would likely result in an “increasing” population. NPS would like to get out of the business of setting targets—there is no science-based reason for the population to need to decline. NPS does not wish to manage for a minimum nor for huge vacillations in the population total.

Discussion ensued over whether the 3,000 target is science-based or based on social values, political perspectives, and outdated conditions. Fundamentally, partners struggle with this section of the Ops Plan because they cannot agree on what a “Bison Abundance target” is and how it relates to IBMP consensus and agency authority.

IBMP Partners Decision—The Partners agreed that the term, “**maximize Tribal hunting and capture opportunities based on conditions**” should be inserted into sentence two of the first paragraph of the [Managing for Bison Abundance](#) section of the Operations Plan.

Moving forward, the Partners might look at scenarios—what each entity would do under its purview or collaboratively, and what might trigger NEPA or MEPA, for example.

The IBMP Partner Primaries spent some time on the [Hunt-Trap Coordination](#) section, and revealed these Partner perspectives:

CSKT—Parameters on how to “operate the trap,” which implicate bison numbers, could be clearer. Also, CSKT believes the Tribes could hunt 600, no problem, so this could be a “target,” combined with BCT needs. Then removals of bison that press the Tolerance Zone boundary would be a last resort.

MDOL—Does not expect IBMP Partners to collaboratively “micromanage” the hunt or trap.

NPS—Herd memory is a consideration, as is safety.

The Partners then went back to debating what size the reduction target should be or if there should be one. The Facilitator noted that the Partners need a values statement that recognizes the individual values held by each Partner entity once during the meeting to reduce the amount of restating of individual values taking time during the meetings.

The 2022-23 Operations Plan as drafted could not achieve consensus of the Partner Primaries present. Partners disagreed over whether or not this meant “reverting back” to the 2020-21 Ops Plan (last Ops Plan signed by all nine Partners, since NPT did not sign last year’s Plan). Some argued that the conditions on the ground have changed substantially, and science has evolved since 2020-21, so the target reduction number from 2020-21 has lost its relevance.

IBMP Partners Decision—The Partners agreed that the IBMP Facilitator would work with each Partner in an attempt to craft language that would bridge gap in perspectives toward issuing at least a new draft Operations Plan for Partner consideration by December 31, 2022.

IX. SETTING OF THE 2023 CALENDAR

After some discussion, the Partners decided to set the Spring Meeting date and leave the Fall date unset (although estimated) until the Spring Meeting; meeting locations were not discussed, but Partners expressed concern about traveling to West Yellowstone during snow season and setting meeting dates near the holidays.

IBMP Partners Decision—The Partners agreed that the Spring 2023 IBMP Partners Meeting will be held on June 6-7 for 1.5 days, to include a field trip. The Fall 2023 IBMP Partners Meeting will be held about one month after NPS issues its Status Report, so around November 1.

X. OTHER TOPICS TABLED UNTIL MEETING END

No other topics were raised. It was snowing hard, and Partners were anxious to get on the road.

XI. CLOSING

NPS Lead Partner Cam Sholly closed out the meeting, thanking the Partners and all the members of the public who traveled to West Yellowstone for the meeting. He remarked that he has great confidence in the IBMP to take advantage of tools and thresholds for taking the appropriate actions as a group to prevent brucellosis risk to cattle and conflict involving the Yellowstone bison leaving the Park.

APPENDIX A

Participants List

(In addition to IBMP Partner Primaries and Seconds listed on page 1)

InterTribal Buffalo Council—Heather Ready

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks – Adam Pankratz

National Park Service—

- Cody Caville
- Kevin Dooley
- Marc Eckert
- Tobin Roop
- Katie W. Wilkinson

Nez Perce Tribe

- Eric Kash Kash, Wildlife Director
- David Moen

Others³

Buffalo Field Campaign

- Angela De Sapio
- Jackson Doyle*
- Rayna P.L. Meade
- Mike Mease
- Tom Woodbury*

Defenders of Wildlife – Chamois Anderson

Gallatin Wildlife Association/Great Old Broads for Wilderness – Nancy Ostlie*

Greater Yellowstone Coalition—Shana Drimal*

Montana Stockgrowers – John Hagenbarth

Ocai Sokowin Oyote Treaty Council – W. Patrick Kincaid*

Office of Montana Governor Greg Gianforte – Rachel Meredith

Roam Free Nation

- Jaedin Medicine Elk (Northern Cheyenne Tribe)*
- Brittany Olson
- Stephany Seay

Royal Teton Ranch – Alan Shaw

Concerned Citizens – Gail Richardson

³ An (*) next to a name means that person provided public comment.