

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

STEVE BULLOCK
GOVERNOR



MIKE COONEY
LT. GOVERNOR

January 11, 2016

To the Administrative Record for the Interagency Management Bison Plan:

On December 22, 2015, and pursuant to my authority under Section 87-1-216, MCA, I issued a decision regarding Year-round habitat for Yellowstone Bison. A copy of that decision is attached for reference.

This decision allows very modest year-round tolerance for bison in part of the Hebgen basin on the west side of Yellowstone National Park (both sexes), and year-round tolerance for bull bison in part of the Gardiner basin on the north side of the Park. Both are subject to geographic limitations, and bison numbers on the west side are limited to an upper range by season.

There are six fundamental changes in circumstances that support the expansion of year-round bison habitat outside the perimeter of Yellowstone in Montana:

- Cattle are no longer found on Horse Butte because of change in ownership and subsequent changes in land use.
- On the west side of the Park, there are no active cattle allotments on the public lands which constitute over 96% of the area to be accessed by bison.
- Modifications in the federal rules that govern the response to brucellosis infection in cattle have significantly reduced the economic consequences to Montana producers of a brucellosis infection in cattle.
- New research indicates negligible risk of transmission of brucellosis from bull bison to cattle.
- Research on brucellosis persistence indicates decreased risk related to cattle turnout dates in the Hebgen Basin.
- Elk are now recognized as the primary transmission route of brucellosis infection to livestock.

The fact is we've been successful at managing Yellowstone Bison and preventing brucellosis from being transmitted by bison to cows. The risk of brucellosis transmission from bison to cattle can be successfully mitigated through focused management. Accordingly, we're adjusting how we manage bison.

Montanans clearly recognize bison as wildlife and want us to do what we can to manage them as such, including providing more hunting opportunities. We can learn how to do that better with our experience from a careful and measured expansion of tolerance, with no additional risk to our livestock industry.

I remain fully committed to pushing for a reduction of the bison population in the Park, and keeping those numbers to manageable levels. I believe that with this decision, hunting outside the Park by state-licensed and tribal hunters will become a more vigorous tool for population management.

In addition, it is my expectation that we will be able to save money and resources with more effective and targeted management – responding to conflicts when and where they actually occur – but we need to do a limited expansion such as this to find out.

Montana will continue to use the management tools used today to manage bison, applying them on the landscape where bison will be tolerated year-round. Bison will be managed to enforce tolerance zones and seasonal limits, and address situational conflicts as appropriate.

The Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) was adopted by the State of Montana in 2000 (through a record of decision signed by Governor Marc Racicot). Pursuant to that decision, the State of Montana agreed to work with you as partners to manage Yellowstone Bison through adaptive management. In the IBMP process, the State of Montana is represented by the Departments of Livestock, and Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

The attached decision represents the final action by the State of Montana in regard to year-round habitat for Yellowstone Bison, and by virtue of Montana law it is binding on the Montana state agencies that are members of the IBMP. Before Montana's decision is implemented by the non-state IBMP partners, it must be adopted under the standard process for adaptive changes to the IBMP.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Steve Bullock', with a horizontal line above it and a long horizontal line extending to the right.

STEVE BULLOCK
Governor

Cc: Jeff Hagener, Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Sam Sheppard, Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Rebecca Cooper, Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Marty Zaluski, Montana Department of Labor
National Park Service
Mary Erickson, USFS – Custer Gallatin National Forest
Don Herriot, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
Leonard Gray, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
Erin Carlson, InterTribal Buffalo Council
Anthony D. Johnson, Nez Perce Tribe