

Memorandum

~~April 8~~ ~~August 14~~, 201~~6~~⁴

To: Administrative Record

From: Scott Bischke, facilitator for the Interagency Bison Management Plan (~~IBMP~~) ~~a~~ Agencies

Re: 201~~6~~⁴ IBMP Adaptive Management Plan

This document outlines adaptive adjustments to the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) that was set forth in federal and state Records of Decision signed in 2000 and adjusted on multiple occasions since then. These adjustments, ~~are~~ documented on the IBMP website at <http://www.ibmp.info/adaptivemgmt.php>, ~~—were based on the adaptive management framework and principles outlined in the U.S. Department of Interior’s 2007 technical guide on adaptive management.~~

~~Agencies involved with the IBMP are the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, InterTribal Buffalo Council, Montana Department of Livestock, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, National Park Service, Nez Perce Tribe, and U.S. Forest Service (the IBMP Partners). At their April 5, 2016 meeting the IBMP Partners agreed to the creation of this 2016 IBMP Adaptive Management Plan (2016 AM Plan), which modifies the 2014 AM Plan to include the December 22, 2016 Decision Notice from Montana Governor Bullock on an Environmental Assessment titled *Year-round Habitat for Yellowstone Bison*.~~

~~Following their protocols for interaction, the Partners will sign their acceptance of the 2016 AM Plan electronically. That signature page will be included with the published 2016 AM Plan, as posted on the IBMP website at <http://www.ibmp.info/adaptivemgmt.php> in two forms: as a clean document, and as one showing changes made to the 2014 AM Plan.~~

~~All actions described in this document are interpreted to be consistent with the analyses of impacts included in the federal and state Final Environmental Impact Statements for the IBMP that were completed in 2000 to comply with the National and Montana Environmental Policy Acts. The adaptive adjustments outlined in this document will remain in effect until replaced by subsequent updates.~~

~~The IBMP agencies will continue to adjust bison abundance and distribution on lands adjacent to Yellowstone National Park, as appropriate, based on evaluations of new conservation easements or land management strategies, reduced brucellosis prevalence in bison, new information or technology that reduces the risk of disease transmission, or different funding available for maintaining separation of bison and cattle. Future adaptations to the IBMP will require continued surveillance of bison and cattle, monitoring the effects and effectiveness of management actions, and new knowledge regarding vaccine efficacy, vaccine delivery methods, and disease diagnostics. At their April 10, 2014 meeting, the IBMP Partners agreed that the creation of this 2014 IBMP Adaptive Management Plan changes made here represent a simple administrative task—a consolidation of adaptive management changes that they have agreed to since the last 2011 consolidation and update of the IBMP Adaptive Management Plan. As such, the Partners (a) agreed that no formal signoff was required since they signed the individual adaptive management changes, and (b) instructed the facilitator to construct the new adaptive management plan, check with the Partners to assure their agreement, then publish the new plan to the IBMP website (see). The 2014 Adaptive Management Plan is to be published at the website in two forms: as a clean document, and as one showing via MS Word markup what changes were made since the 2011 Adaptive Management Plan.~~

~~These adjustments were based on the adaptive management framework and principles outlined in the U.S. Department of Interior’s 2007 technical guide on adaptive management. Agencies involved with the IBMP include the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, InterTribal Buffalo Council, Montana Department of Livestock, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, National Park Service, Nez Perce Tribe, and U.S. Forest Service. The adaptive adjustments outlined in this document will remain in effect until replaced by subsequent updates. All actions described in this document are interpreted to be consistent with the analyses of impacts included in the federal and state Final Environmental Impact Statements for the IBMP that were completed in 2000 to comply with the National and Montana Environmental Policy Acts.~~

~~The IBMP agencies will continue to adjust bison abundance and distribution on lands adjacent to Yellowstone National Park, as appropriate, based on evaluations of new conservation easements or land management strategies, reduced brucellosis prevalence in bison, new information or technology that reduces the risk of disease transmission, or different funding available for maintaining separation of bison and cattle. Future adaptations to the IBMP will require continued surveillance of bison and cattle, monitoring the effects and effectiveness of management actions, and new knowledge regarding vaccine efficacy, vaccine delivery methods, and disease diagnostics.~~

Goal #1: Increase tolerance for bison in Zone 2 outside the north and west boundaries of Yellowstone National Park (YNP) with no unacceptable consequences (e.g., transmission of brucellosis from bison to cattle, unacceptable impacts on public safety and private property).

Objective 1.1: Within ~~timing and~~ geographical and timing considerations, allow a level of year-round bison tolerance within Zone 2 of the Hebgen and Gardiner basins, consistent with (a) s ~~to managing e~~ the risk of brucellosis transmission from bison to livestock and (b) ~~enhancing~~ wild bison conservation and hunting.

Specific guidance regarding the management of bachelor groups of bull bison is provided in Objective 1.2.

Management action 1.1.a—Consistent with the management responses outlined in the Governor of Montana’s Environmental Assessment (EA) Decision Notice of December 22, 2016 (quoted here and as further quoted [quotes not shown] or paraphrased elsewhere throughout this plan) below, state agency managers at the Montana Department of Livestock and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks are provided “...management discretion on the ground to address potential threats as they are anticipated or arise, rather than simply applying a uniform, inflexible management response that at times may be unnecessary and costly.”

State managers will manage the bison population in the Horse Butte area and up through the Taylor Fork Drainage within ranges or limits that avoid unacceptable human conflicts. The bison population ranges and limits will vary seasonally given the nomadic nature of bison and their sensitivity to specific weather patterns, population pressures, and winter range condition.

Geographic range (see maps of Western and Northern Management Areas at end of this plan):

- Hebgen Basin.—YNP bison will have access year-round to Horse Butte, and north along U. S. Highway 191 up to and including the Taylor Fork Drainage, as well as the Cabin Creek Wildlife Management Area and the Monument Mountain Unit of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness (year-round tolerance has been allowed in the Cabin Creek and Monument Mountain areas since the original IBMP in 2000). YNP bison will not have access south of the south fork of the Madison River outside of YNP, and in that area will continue to be managed under the 2000 IBMP Record of Decision and subsequent adaptive management changes (i.e., this plan) .
- Gardner Basin.—Bull bison will have year-round access within the Gardiner Basin from the northern boundary of YNP to the southern entrance of Yankee Jim Canyon. All bison will be managed to prohibit travel north of the hydrologic divide (i.e. mountain ridge-tops) toward Dome Mountain/Paradise Valley and Tom Miner Basin.

Timing, use limits:

- Winter (January through February).—The initial range will be up to approximately 450 bison. This level of tolerance recognizes the role and importance of hunting as the preferred wildlife population management tool.
- Spring (March through June).— The initial desired range will be up to approximately 600 bison, recognizing that during this season population numbers can vary substantially because of weather and or conditions within YNP. Based on current experience, the spring migration of bison and winter range conditions often dictate bison spring movement in larger numbers into the Hebgen Basin. However, managers will continue to ensure bison stay within the expanded tolerance area described above. Once environmental conditions allow, bison tend to migrate back to YNP.
- Summer (July through August).—The initial limit will be up to approximately 250 bison. This level of tolerance allows bison to take advantage of summer conditions as needed within the tolerance area. Experience has shown that most bison will choose to move back to familiar summering areas within YNP.

- ~~Fall (September through December).—The initial range will be up to approximately 450 bison. Again, this level of tolerance recognizes the role of hunting as the preferred wildlife population tool.~~

~~allow untested female bison (or mixed groups of males and females) to migrate onto and occupy the Horse Butte peninsula (between the Madison Arm of Hebgen Lake and Grayling Creek) and the Flats (the area east of South Fork Madison River, south of the Madison Arm, and west of Highway 191) each winter and spring in Zone 2 (subject to end of winter hazing described in Objective 3.2.c; see attached map).~~

Monitoring metrics:

- ~~Complete periodic surveys of the number and distribution of bison within Horse Butte, the Flats south of U.S. Highway 20, Monument Mountain Unit of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness, Cabin Creek Wildlife and Recreation Area, and Upper Gallatin River corridor to Buck Creek.~~
- ~~Complete periodic surveys of the number and distribution of bull bison within the Gardiner Basin.~~
- ~~Determine natural routes and timeframes for bison migrating back into YNP from tolerance zones.~~
- ~~Document bison movements within tolerance zones.~~
- ~~Annually document the numbers of bison and dates bison attempt to exit tolerance zone boundaries.~~
- ~~Document and annually evaluate bison population interactions and coexistence with resident wildlife within tolerance zones.~~
- ~~In cooperation with other agency partners, monitor existing vegetation and rangeland conditions. Document and evaluate any changes to conditions.~~
- ~~Evaluate the effectiveness of natural boundaries of tolerance zones.~~
- ~~Weekly surveys of the number and distribution of bison in the area of tolerance on Horse Butte, the Flats, crossing the Narrows, and going beyond the Madison Resort (Lead = Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL)).~~
- ~~Annually document the number of bison in the west boundary management area and the number and type of management activities needed to manage bison distribution (Leads = MDOL and NPS).~~
- ~~Create a density curve of the threshold number of bison on Horse Butte that results in movements of bison to the South Fork Madison area. Use this information to modify or verify the limits set for bison counts at Madison Arm Resort that trigger management responses (Lead = MDOL).~~
- ~~Determine natural routes and timeframes (in the absence of hazing) for bison migration back into the park (Lead = National Park Service (NPS)). Use this information to evaluate the effectiveness of management responses for bison tolerance in Zone 2 (Lead = MDOL).~~
- Management responses:

~~Bison will be managed to enforce tolerance zones and address situational conflicts as appropriate, with a variety of tools including:~~

- ~~Hazing will be used to move bison away from imminent or anticipated contact with cattle, damage to private property, or risk to human safety. Bison will be hazed in the most efficient manner possible to eliminate the immediate risk and to limit the need for repeated hazing.~~
- ~~If hazing is impractical or ineffective in addressing imminent or anticipated contact with cattle, damage to private property, or risk to human safety, then bison may be trapped or lethally removed.~~
- ~~If bison go beyond the tolerance zone boundaries they will be hazed back within the tolerance area, removed by hunters with a valid license or treaty hunters, or removed through administrative action, such as portable trapping, shipment to slaughter, or lethal removal based on the discretion of state managers.~~

~~Groups (>1 animal) of female/mixed bison will not be allowed in the following areas at any time of year: north of the Narrows; west of Corey Springs; or south and west of the Zone 2 boundary. Bison attempting to enter these areas will be hazed to the Horse Butte peninsula, other available habitat, captured, or if necessary, lethally removed.~~

~~During the period from November 15 through April 15, up to 30 female bison (or a mixed group of 30 males and females) will be allowed in Zone 2 on the Madison Arm. After April 15, up to 30 female/mixed group bison will be allowed east of the Madison Arm Resort. After May 15, no female/mixed group bison will be allowed on the Madison Arm.~~

~~If female/mixed group bison exceed 30 animals or breach the Zone 2 perimeter on the South Fork two or more times before April 15, then this will trigger management actions to reduce risk that may include hazing, capture, testing, or lethal removal at the discretion of the State Veterinarian.~~

~~If female/mixed group bison exceed 30 animals or breach the Madison Arm Resort two or more times between April 15 and May 15, then this will trigger management actions to reduce risk that may include hazing, capture, testing, or lethal removal at the discretion of the State Veterinarian.~~

~~Allow up to 40 female bison (or a mixed group of 40 males and females) north of Duck Creek and east of Corey Springs during November 15 through May 15 before management actions are instituted. The number of bison tolerated in this area may be adjusted at the discretion of the State Veterinarian based on bison behavior, environmental conditions, and other considerations.~~

~~If female/mixed group bison breach the perimeter described above two or more times before May 15, then this will trigger management actions to reduce risk that may include hazing, testing, or lethal removal at the discretion of the State Veterinarian.~~

~~If female/mixed group bison cross the Narrows two or more times before May 1, then this will trigger management actions to reduce risk that may include hazing, testing, or lethal removal at the discretion of the State Veterinarian. After May 1, any crossing may trigger management action.~~

~~Allow bison to remain on Horse Butte, where there are no cattle, until May 15 or the agreed upon haze-back date and plot the movement patterns and migration routes (without hazing) of bison with GPS collars.~~

Management action 1.1.b—Consistent with the management responses outlined below, allow bison on habitat on U.S. Forest Service and other lands north of the park boundary and south of Yankee Jim Canyon (see attached map at the end of this Adaptive Management Plan). Bison would not be allowed north of the hydrological divide (i.e., mountain ridge-tops) between Dome Mountain/Paradise Valley and the Gardiner basin on the east side of the Yellowstone River and Tom Miner basin and the Gardiner basin on the west side of the Yellowstone River.

Monitoring metrics:

- Weekly survey of the number and distribution of bison in the Eagle Creek/Bear Creek area and the Gardiner basin (Lead inside YNP = NPS; Lead outside YNP = MDOL with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MFWP)).
- Annually document the numbers and dates that bison attempt to move north of Yankee Jim Canyon into Tom Miner basin or the Paradise Valley (Leads = MDOL and MFWP).
- Annually document the number of bison in the north boundary management area and the number and type of management activities needed to (1) track disease management (Lead = MDOL), and (2) provide for public safety and property protection (Lead = MFWP).
- -Annually collect data to update the relationships between bison herd and/or population size, snow pack, and the number of bison moving near or beyond the boundary of YNP (Lead = NPS).
- Annually collect data to determine natural migration routes and timeframes (in the absence of hazing) for bison migration out of and back into the park (Lead inside YNP = NPS; Lead outside YNP = MDOL/MFWP).

- Annually document the number of bison tested negative at Stephens Creek facility for release into the Gardiner Basin.
- Annually document number of times bison move north of the hydrological divide and the actions taken; i.e. licensed hunting, agency lethal removal, or haze back into Zone 2.

Management responses:

- Bison will not be allowed north of the hydrological divide (i.e., mountain ridge-tops) between Dome Mountain/Paradise Valley and the Gardiner basin on the east side of the Yellowstone River and Tom Miner basin and the Gardiner basin on the west side of the Yellowstone River (see attached map).
- —Evaluate the effects of these adjustments and modify as necessary to prevent bison from occupying lands north of the hydrological divide and minimize the risk of transmission of brucellosis to livestock.
- Bison will not be allowed in Zone 3 any time of year. Bison entering Zone 3 will trigger management actions to reduce risk that may include hazing to available habitat within Zone 2, the Eagle Creek/_Bear Creek area, or the park, increased monitoring, capture, or removal at the discretion of the State Veterinarian.
- Regardless of testing status, bison will be allowed year-round in the Eagle Creek/_Bear Creek area.
- Adaptive adjustments to monitoring metrics and management responses will be made prior to subsequent winters based on new information obtained through surveillance, the effects of management actions on the conservation of bison, and the effectiveness of management actions at maintaining spatial and temporal separation of cattle and bison and retaining bison within Zone 2.

Management Action 1.1.c—Use research findings to inform adaptive management.

Monitoring metric:

- Complete research reports and attempt to publish findings in a peer-reviewed, scientific journal (Lead = MFWP).

• Management response:

- Adapt temporal and spatial separation guidelines during spring and summer based on research findings.

Objective 1.2: Manage bull bison to reflect their lower risk of transmission of brucellosis to cattle.

Management Action 1.2.a— Allow bachelor groups of bull bison to occupy suitable habitat areas in Zone 2 outside the north boundary of YNP within the following parameters of conflict management. ~~Allow bachelor groups of bull bison to occupy suitable habitat areas outside the west boundary of YNP in the portion of Zone 2 south of Duck Creek each year within the parameters of conflict management.~~

Monitoring metrics:

- Weekly counts and locations of bull bison in Zone 2 (Lead = MDOL/MFWP).
- Document threats to human safety and property damage (Lead = MFWP/MDOL).
- Annually document the numbers and dates that bull bison attempt to move north of Yankee Jim Canyon into Tom Miner basin or the Paradise Valley (Leads = MDOL and MFWP).

Management responses:

- Avoid hazing or removing bull bison unless they are breaching the agreed-upon perimeter or pose an imminent threat to livestock co-mingling, human safety, or property damage.
- If there is a threat of livestock co-mingling, human safety, or property damage, or a group (>1 animal) of bull bison attempt to travel beyond the perimeter of Zone 2, then the bull bison will initially be hazed from area of conflict.
- If bull bison actually co-mingle with cattle, then they will be lethally removed and additional management actions may be taken by the State Veterinarian to reduce the risk of further commingling by other bull bison, including capture, hazing, or lethal removal.

~~—Management Action 1.2.b— Allow bachelor groups of bull bison to occupy suitable habitat areas in Zone 2 outside the north boundary of YNP within the following parameters of conflict management.~~

~~• Monitoring metrics:~~

- ~~• Weekly counts and locations of bull bison in Zone 2 (Lead = MDOL/MFWP).~~
- ~~• Document threats to human safety and property damage (Lead = MFWP/MDOL).~~
- ~~• Annually document the numbers and dates that bull bison attempt to move north of Yankee Jim Canyon into Tom Miner basin or the Paradise Valley (Leads = MDOL and MFWP).~~

~~• Management responses:~~

- ~~• Avoid hazing or removing bull bison from Zone 2 during November through April each year unless they are breaching the agreed-upon perimeter or pose an imminent threat to livestock co-mingling, human safety, or property damage.~~
- ~~• Regardless of testing status, bull bison will be allowed year round in the Eagle Creek/Bear Creek area.~~
- Bull bison will not be allowed in Zone 3 any time of year. Bull bison entering Zone 3 will trigger management actions to reduce risk that may include hazing to available habitat within Zone 2, ~~the Eagle Creek/Bear Creek area~~, or the park, increased monitoring, or removal at the discretion of the State Veterinarian.
- ~~• If a group of bull bison progresses beyond Yankee Jim Canyon, then they may be lethally removed at the discretion of the State Veterinarian.~~

- If groups of bull bison progress beyond Yankee Jim Canyon two or more times, then additional management actions may be taken by the State Veterinarian to reduce the risk of future incidents by other bull bison, including capture, hazing, or lethal removal.
- ~~If bull bison actually co-mingle with cattle, then they will be lethally removed and additional management actions may be taken by the State Veterinarian to reduce the risk of further commingling by other bull bison, including capture, hazing, or lethal removal.~~
- ~~Adaptive adjustments to monitoring metrics and management responses will be made prior to subsequent winters based on new information obtained through surveillance, the effects of management actions on the conservation of bison, and the effectiveness of management actions at maintaining spatial and temporal separation of cattle and bison and retaining bull bison within the agreed-upon perimeter of Zone 2.~~

Objective 1.3: Reduce conflict between landowners, livestock operators, and bison outside YNP via permit management, improved relations, education, and incentives.

Management Action 1.3.a—Work with private land owners and livestock producers and operators to provide conflict-free habitat in the Hebgen and Gardiner basins.

Monitoring metric:

- Create an annual record of the: 1) number of acres made available to bison from conservation easements (Lead = MFWP); 2) locations, numbers, types, and turn-out/off dates for cattle grazed on private land in the Hebgen and Gardiner basins (Lead = MDOL); and 3) extent of fencing erected to separate bison from livestock (Lead = MDOL).

Management responses:

- Implement site-specific brucellosis risk management plans for livestock that may include stocking less-brucellosis susceptible cattle (e.g., steers), brucellosis testing and vaccination, fencing for livestock, and adjustments of turnout dates, when necessary, to ensure temporal separation. As available, financial incentives (working with government and non-government partners) may be provided for altering the timing of cattle operations to ensure temporal separation.
- Evaluate where additional habitat is available for bison commensurate with land management and ownership changes.

Management Action 1.3.b—Work with landowners who have human safety and property damage concerns, as well as those who favor increased tolerance for bison, to provide conflict-free habitat in the Hebgen and Gardiner basins.

• Monitoring metrics:

- Annually document the numbers, timing, and types of reported incidents for human safety and property damage related to bison (Lead = MFWP with support from MDOL).
- Annually document the numbers and types of actions taken to provide conflict-free habitat bison (Lead = MFWP with support from MDOL).

• Management responses:

- If there is a human injury by bison, then this will trigger management actions to reduce the risk of future incidents that may include hazing, capture, or lethal removal.
- If annual property damage is excessive or unacceptable in frequency, impact, and/or cost, then this will trigger management actions to reduce the risk of future damage that may include hazing, capture, or lethal removal at the discretion of the Region 3 Supervisor of Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks.
- Consider developing a new funding source to assist land owners with fencing damage from bison.

Management Action 1.3.c—Annually, the Gallatin National Forest will ensure conflict-free habitat is available for bison and livestock grazing on public lands, as per management objectives of the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP).

- Monitoring metric:
 - Annually track the status (e.g., number of acres, location, etc.) of active and inactive grazing allotments on public lands (Lead = U.S. Forest Service (USFS)).
- Management response:
 - Evaluate where additional habitat is available for bison commensurate with land management and ownership changes.

Management Action 1.3.d—Consider a voluntary compensation program to allow for adjusting the dates livestock are released on private land beyond May 15.

- Monitoring metric:
 - Annually document the number of acres and days made available to bison through the voluntary program (Leads = MDOL and MFWP).

Objective 1.4: Recognize tribal treaty rights for hunting bison.

Management Action 1.4a—Allow bison to occupy National Forest System lands and other areas determined suitable within the designated tolerance area (Zone 2), and maximize timing and geographical extents to increase tribal hunt opportunities.

- Monitoring metrics:
 - Annually document the number of acres and number of days available for tribal hunting (Leads = USFS, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), and Nez Perce Tribe (NPT)).
 - Annually document the number of bison (by age and sex) harvested by tribal hunters (Leads = CSKT and NPT).

Management Action 1.4b—Coordinate management activities that could potentially impact opportunities for tribal members to exercise their treaty rights.

- Monitoring metric:
 - Annually document the number of hazing operations while tribal hunts are occurring (Leads = MDOL, CSKT and NPT).

- Management response:
 - Tribal leadership involvement in, and signatories to, the annual Operations Plan.
 - Complete evaluation of opportunities for tribal hunting outside of the hunt period for licensed Montana hunters when bison are typically available in greater number (i.e., late winter or spring).

Goal #2: Conserve a wild, free-ranging bison population.

Objective 2.1: Manage the Yellowstone bison population to ensure the ecological function and role of bison in the Yellowstone area and to maintain genetic diversity for future adaptation.

Management action 2.1.a—Increase the understanding of bison population dynamics to inform adaptive management and reduce sharp increases and decreases in bison abundance.

Monitoring metrics:

- Conduct aerial and ground surveys to estimate the annual abundance of Yellowstone bison each summer (Lead = NPS).
- Document and evaluate relationships between bison migration to the boundary of YNP and bison abundance, population (or subpopulation) growth rates, and snow pack in the central and northern herds (Lead = NPS).
- Continue to obtain estimates of population abundance through the remainder of the year based on surveys, knowledge of management removals, and survival probabilities (Lead = NPS).
- Conduct an assessment of population range for Yellowstone bison that successfully addresses the goals of the IBMP by retaining genetic diversity and the ecological function and role of bison, while lessening the likelihood of large-scale migrations to the park boundary and remaining below the estimated carrying capacity of the park's forage base (Lead = NPS).

Management responses:

- If abundance estimates decrease to $\leq 2,300$ bison, then the agencies will increase the implementation of non-lethal management measures.
- If abundance estimates decrease to $\leq 2,100$ bison, then the agencies will cease lethal brucellosis risk management and hunting of bison and shift to non-lethal management measures.

Management action 2.1.b—Increase the understanding of genetics of Yellowstone bison to inform adaptive management.

Monitoring metric:

- IBMP managers will consider the findings of genetic analyses that evaluate effective population size, allelic diversity, and effects of various management actions on the genetic diversity of Yellowstone bison and document findings as necessary (Lead = NPS).

Management response:

- Define genetic diversity and integrity, and establish long-term objectives for conserving genetic integrity, including assessing hunting and risk management removal strategies that are compatible with conservation of genetic diversity.

Management action 2.1.c—Increase understanding of the ecological role of bison to inform adaptive management by commissioning a comprehensive review and assessment.

Monitoring metric:

- Complete research to gain a better understanding the role and function of bison for providing nutrient redistribution, prey and carrion, and microhabitats for other species (Lead = NPS).

Management response:

- Adapt the management responses in 2.1.a based on new monitoring, research, and management findings.

Objective 2.2: Minimize bison slaughter by employing alternative management techniques.

Management action 2.2.a—Use slaughter only when necessary (e.g., disease suppression by selectively removing likely infectious bison); attempt to use other risk management tools first.

Monitoring metrics:

- Annually document the number, age, sex, and sero-status of bison sent to slaughter (Lead = Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) with the MDOL).

- Develop ideas for limiting Yellowstone bison abundance within a range that conserves a wild population, while reducing shipments of bison to domestic slaughter facilities (Lead = IBMP Subcommittee).

Management response:

- Consistent with the management responses in 2.1.a, increase the use of, and allocation of resources to, management actions (e.g., hazing to habitat, hunting, quarantine, and shipping eligible bison to alternate, isolated destinations) that reduce the number of bison sent to slaughter.

Management action 2.2.b—In Zone 2 lands adjacent to YNP, emphasize management of bison as wildlife and increase the use of state and treaty hunts to manage bison numbers and demographic rates, limit the risk of brucellosis transmission to cattle, and protect human safety and property.

Monitoring metrics:

- Weekly and annual summaries of bison harvested by state and treaty hunters (Lead = MFWP).
- Complete an assessment of suitable bison habitat in the Hebgen and Gardiner basin watersheds and explore appropriate new areas with increased tolerance for bison that could accommodate additional hunting opportunities (Leads = IBMP Subcommittee).

Management responses:

- Consistent with the management responses in 2.1.a, develop a hunting strategy annually by August that includes combined harvest thresholds with state and tribal hunters that manage bison abundance, especially in areas of high brucellosis transmission risk to cattle, while ensuring the conservation of population demographics and genetic integrity. That strategy might include, for example, a goal of increasing the hunt as a percent of overall yearly bison mortality.
- Consider adjusting conservation zones and allow for increased tolerance in some areas to increase state and treaty hunting opportunities in habitat outside YNP. ~~For example, the Eagle Creek area could be expanded to include Maiden Basin, located north of Little Trail Creek and adjacent to Bison Hunting District 385.~~

Management action 2.2.c—Complete the quarantine feasibility study and consider an operational quarantine facility to provide a source of live, disease-free bison for tribal governments and other requesting organizations.

Monitoring metrics:

- Annual summary of bison sent to quarantine and bison transported from quarantine to suitable restoration sites (Lead = MFWP/APHIS).
- Annual summaries from bison populations restored using quarantined Yellowstone bison, including numbers, demographic rates, and implemented risk management actions (Lead = MFWP/APHIS).
- Evaluate regulatory requirements and constraints for moving live bison, including adults, to suitable restoration sites (Lead = APHIS/MDOL).
- Conduct an assessment of the quarantine feasibility study and offer recommendations regarding whether the quarantine of bison should become operational (Lead = IBMP Subcommittee).
- Develop plans for implementing operational quarantine and transferring bison to American Indian tribes. Make recommendations regarding the goals and scale of bison restoration, including possible sites for operational quarantine facilities and suitable release sites for brucellosis-free bison that complete operational quarantine (Leads = IBMP Subcommittees and the InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC)).

Management responses:

- Based on the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) processes, determine if operational quarantine of bison will be implemented to restore bison outside of YNP.
- Release brucellosis-free bison from quarantine to suitable sites recommended by the Interagency/Tribal Bison Restoration Panel.

Goal #3: Prevent the transmission of brucellosis from bison to cattle.

Objective 3.1: Reduce the risk of disease transmission through vaccination.

Management Action 3.1.a—Continue bison vaccination under prevailing authority.

Monitoring metrics:

- Document the number of eligible bison captured and vaccinated outside of the park (Lead = MDOL/APHIS).
- Implement the *Monitoring Plan for Yellowstone Bison* to assess the effects and effectiveness of management actions (Lead = NPS).
- Complete an assessment of why brucellosis seroprevalence has not decreased in Yellowstone bison and recommend adaptive management adjustments and strategies that should result in a reduction in brucellosis prevalence (Lead = IBMP Subcommittee).

Management response:

- Consistent with the management responses in 2.1.a, vaccinate and release eligible bison (i.e., calves, yearlings, non-pregnant females) captured near the boundary of YNP after state and treaty hunting seasons end each winter and spring.

Management Action 3.1.b—Complete EIS processes (MEPA/NEPA) for remote delivery vaccination of bison and use the outcomes to inform adaptive management.

Monitoring metric:

- Complete the NEPA process and reach a decision on whether remote delivery vaccination of bison can/will be employed inside YNP (Lead = NPS).

Management response:

- Based on the MEPA process, determine if remote delivery vaccination of bison can/will be employed outside of YNP (Lead = MDOL).

Management Action 3.1.c—Test and vaccinate cattle.

Monitoring metric:

- By June 15, determine and document the vaccination status of all “at-risk” cattle in or coming into the Hebgen and Gardiner basins (Leads = MDOL and APHIS).

Management responses:

- Vaccinate all calves, with booster vaccination of adults as deemed appropriate by the Montana State Veterinarian.
- Use existing regulations and provide incentives to ensure 100% of adult cattle in the Hebgen and Gardiner basins are calf hood and booster vaccinated.
- For Zone 2, vaccination is mandatory. If the vaccination status of adult cattle is not 100%, then undertake vaccination or other to-be-determined actions to achieve 100% status as determined by the Montana State Veterinarian.

Objective 3.2: Prevent cattle/bison interactions, with an emphasis on the likely bison birthing and abortion period each year.

Management action 3.2.a—Use spatial and temporal separation and hazing to prevent cattle/bison interactions.

Monitoring metrics:

- Document the minimum temporal separation and space between bison and cattle during February through June (Lead = MDOL).
- Document the number of times bison are successfully or unsuccessfully moved to create separation in time and space from cattle (Lead = MDOL).
- Annually document the amount of strategic fencing erected to minimize bison/cattle interactions (Leads = MDOL, MFWP, and USFS).

Management responses:

- As necessary, institute bison hazing, capture, or lethal removal to prevent bison from entering cattle-occupied properties.
- Adapt temporal separation guidelines for bison and cattle during spring and summer based on research findings from *Brucella abortus* persistence and viability research.
- Consistent with the management responses in Management Actions 1.1.a, 1.1.b, and 2.1.a, any bison found within areas that will be occupied by cattle within 20 days will be hazed, captured, or lethally removed.

Management action 3.2.b—Evaluate the use of limited, strategically placed fencing when and where it could effectively create separation between domestic livestock and bison, and not create a major movement barrier to other wildlife.

Monitoring metrics:

- Document the number of additional acres of habitat made available for bison as a result of strategic fencing (Lead = MFWP/USFS/MDOL).
- Document fence damage or the number of times fencing fails to inhibit bison trespass on private property occupied by cattle (Lead = MDOL).

Management responses:

- Fencing to provide additional bison habitat will not create a movement barrier to other wildlife or detract from or preclude other land management priorities.
- Any incidence of fence failure requires that action be taken to repair and/or enhance the effectiveness of the fence.

Management Action 3.2.c—~~There will be no effective haze back date for the West side expanded tolerance area covered under the Governor of Montana’s EA Decision Notice of December 22nd, 2016 (see Western Management Area map at the end of this plan). YNP bison will not have access south of the South Fork of the Madison River outside of YNP, and that area will continue to be managed under the 2000 IBMP Record of Decision and subsequent adaptive management changes (i.e., this plan). This area has been, and will continue to be, an area of complex and specialized management that needs to be addressed through further adaptive management actions. Haze bison from the Hebgen basin into YNP with a target date of May 15.~~

Monitoring metrics:

- ~~Consistent with management action 1.1.a, assess the prevailing environmental conditions and reach consensus by May 13 on a step-wise, integrated plan for the end of winter return of bison into YNP from Zone 2 (Lead = MDOL/NPS).~~
- ~~Annually document the timing-use of the expanded tolerance zone and of the end of winter return of bison into YNP, the number of bison returned, prevailing environmental conditions, and success or lack thereof of hazing bison and getting them to remain in the park, (Lead = MDOL/NPS)~~
- ~~Annually review private land cattle turn-on dates, and apply as well as Brucella abortus persistence information, private land cattle turn-on dates, and other applicable research, for potential new opportunities to aid in results to determine the effects of haze to habitat actions on bison and their effectiveness at~~ preventing the commingling of bison and cattle (Lead = MDOL).

Management responses:

- ~~The actual beginning date for hazing bison will be consistent with the management responses in 1.1.a and based on weather (e.g., green up, snow pack), cattle turn out dates, and consideration of the natural migration by bison back into the park. Hazing bison will be consistent with the management responses in 1.1a.~~

~~Step-wise, coordinated, interagency hazing will be used, as needed, to minimize repeated hazing into situations where snow or other variables will prevent bison occupancy.~~

Management Action 3.2.d— Haze cow/calf bison from the Gardiner basin into YNP with a target date of May 1. Bull bison will be allowed year-round tolerance in the Gardner Basin (see Northern Management Area map at the end of this plan). These actions are consistent with the management responses outlined in Management Action 1.1.a.-

Monitoring metrics:

- Consistent with Management action 1.1.b, assess the prevailing environmental conditions and reach consensus by April 15 on a step-wise, integrated plan for the end-of-winter return of cow/calf bison into YNP from Zone 2 (Lead = MDOL/NPS).
- Annually document the timing of the end-of-winter return of bison into YNP, the number of bison returned, prevailing environmental conditions, and success or lack thereof of hazing cow/calf bison and getting them to remain in the park (Lead = MDOL/NPS)
- Annually review and apply *Brucella abortus* persistence information, private land cattle turn-on dates, and applicable research results to determine the effects of haze-to-habitat actions on bison and their effectiveness at preventing the commingling of bison and cattle (Lead = MDOL).

Management responses:

- The actual beginning date for hazing cow/calf bison will be consistent with the management responses in Management Action 1.1.b and based on weather (e.g., green-up, snow pack), cattle turn-out dates, and consideration of the natural migration of bison back into the park.
- Step-wise, coordinated, interagency hazing of cow/calf bison will be used, as needed, to minimize repeated hazing into situations where snow or other variables will prevent bison occupancy.
- While every effort will be made to allow bull bison to remain in the tolerance area during cow/calf haze backs, for personnel safety concerns bulls will not be sorted or separated from mixed cow/calf herds.

Management Action 3.2.e—Haze bison away from tolerance boundaries when conditions are conducive to breach. The goal is to reduce the opportunity for bison to breach the tolerance zone boundaries by employing management actions at the most efficient trigger points in consideration of overall conditions and risks.

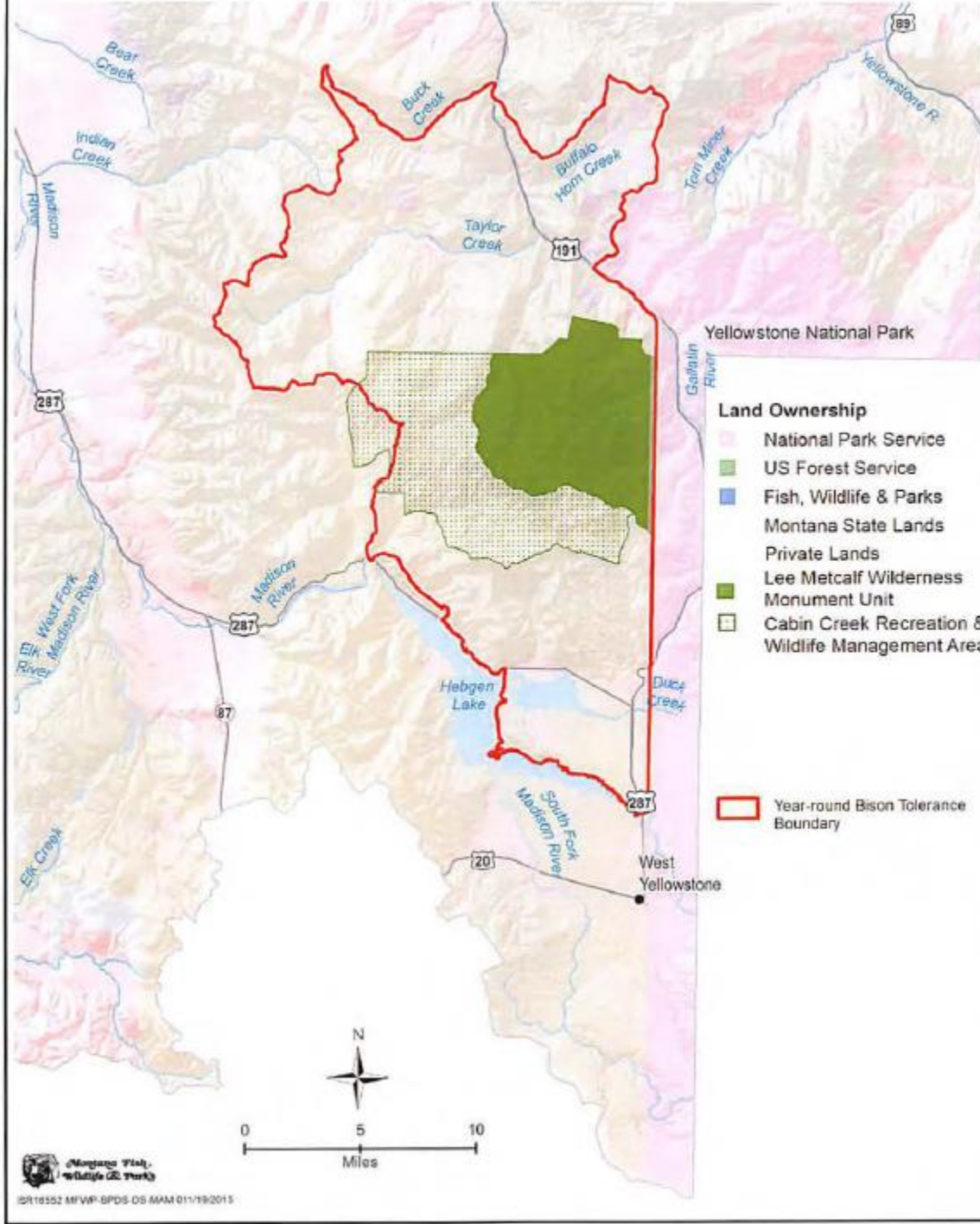
Monitoring metrics:

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

Management responses:

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

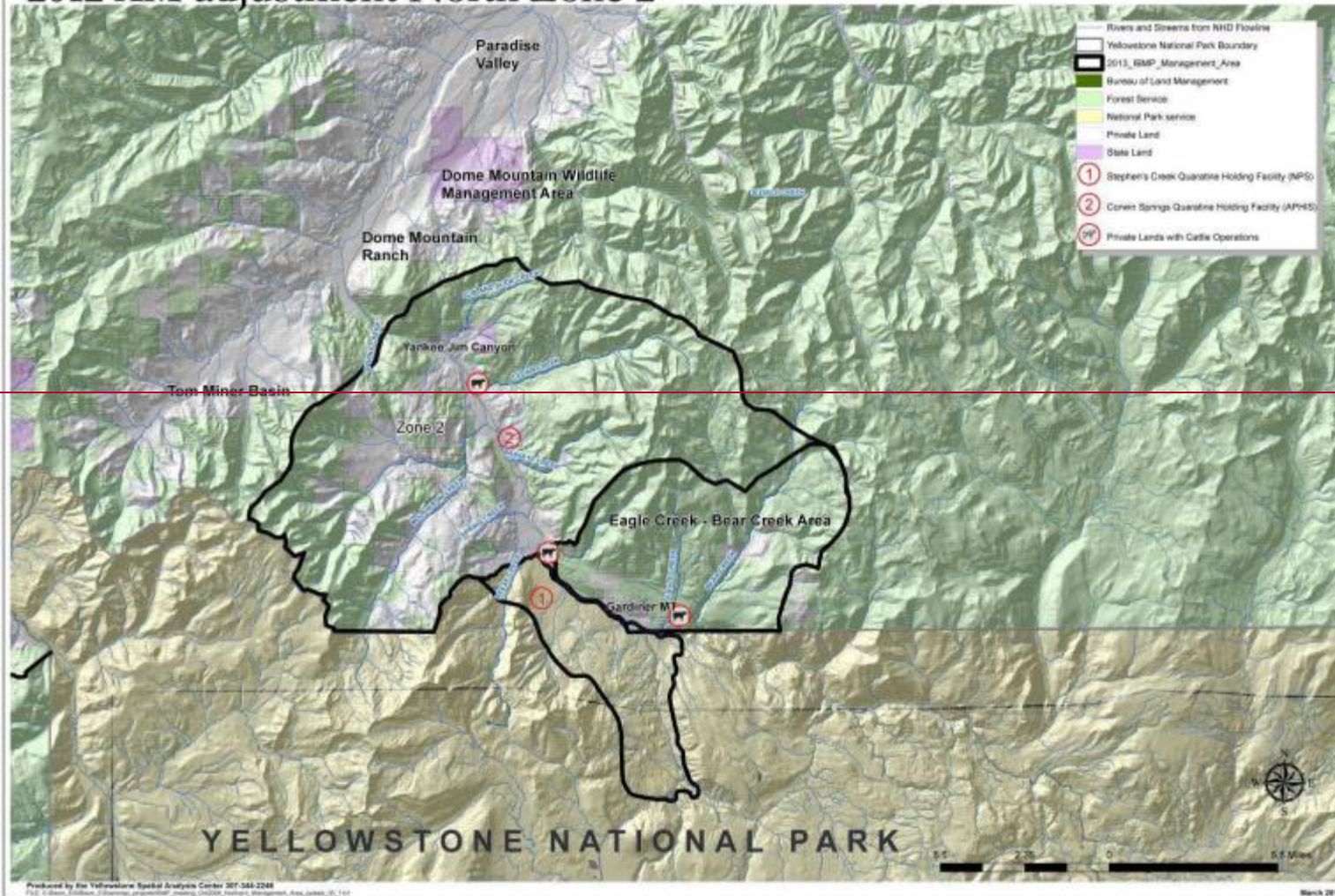
Year-round Bison Habitat



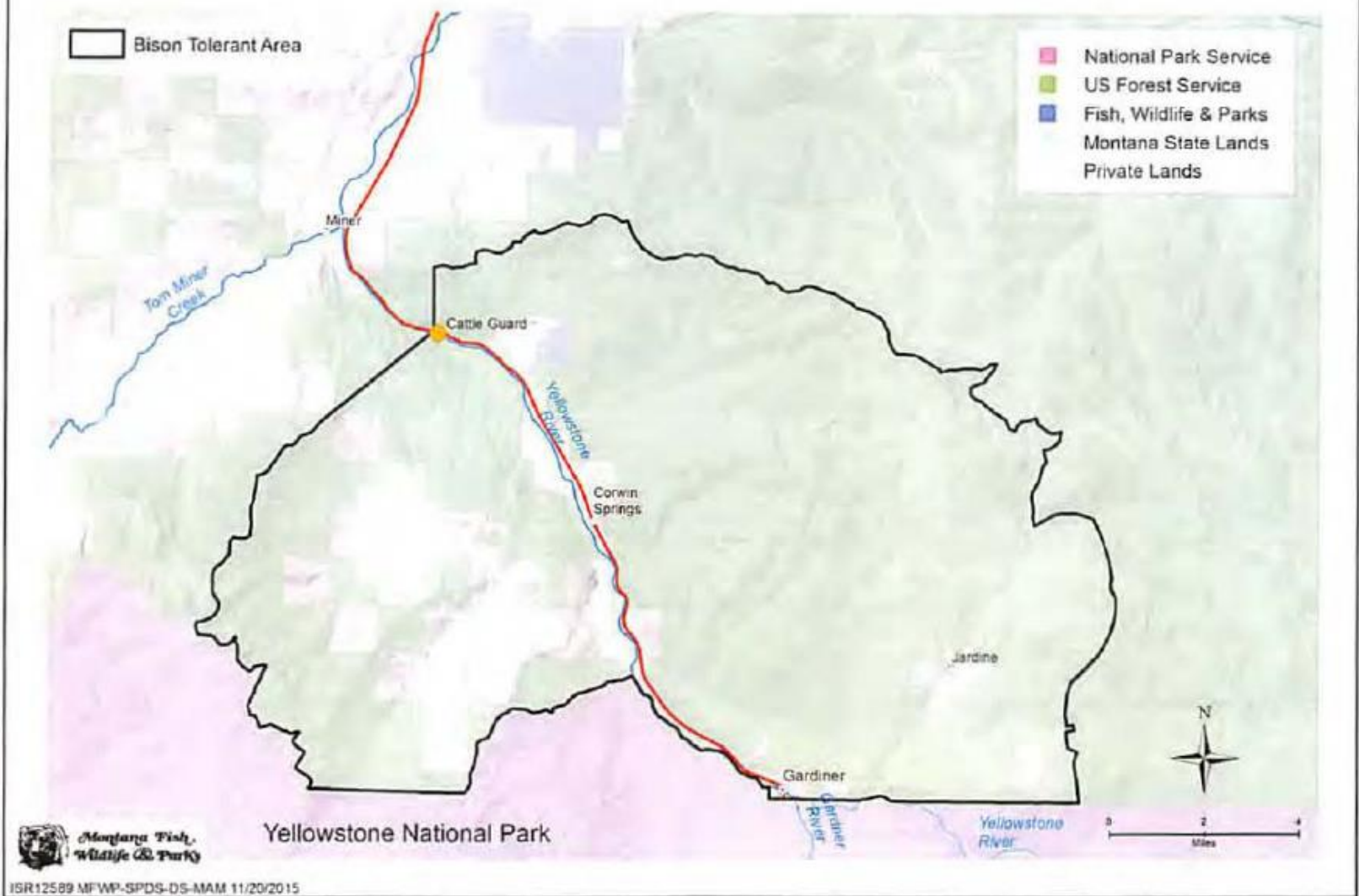
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
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2012 AM adjustment North Zone 2

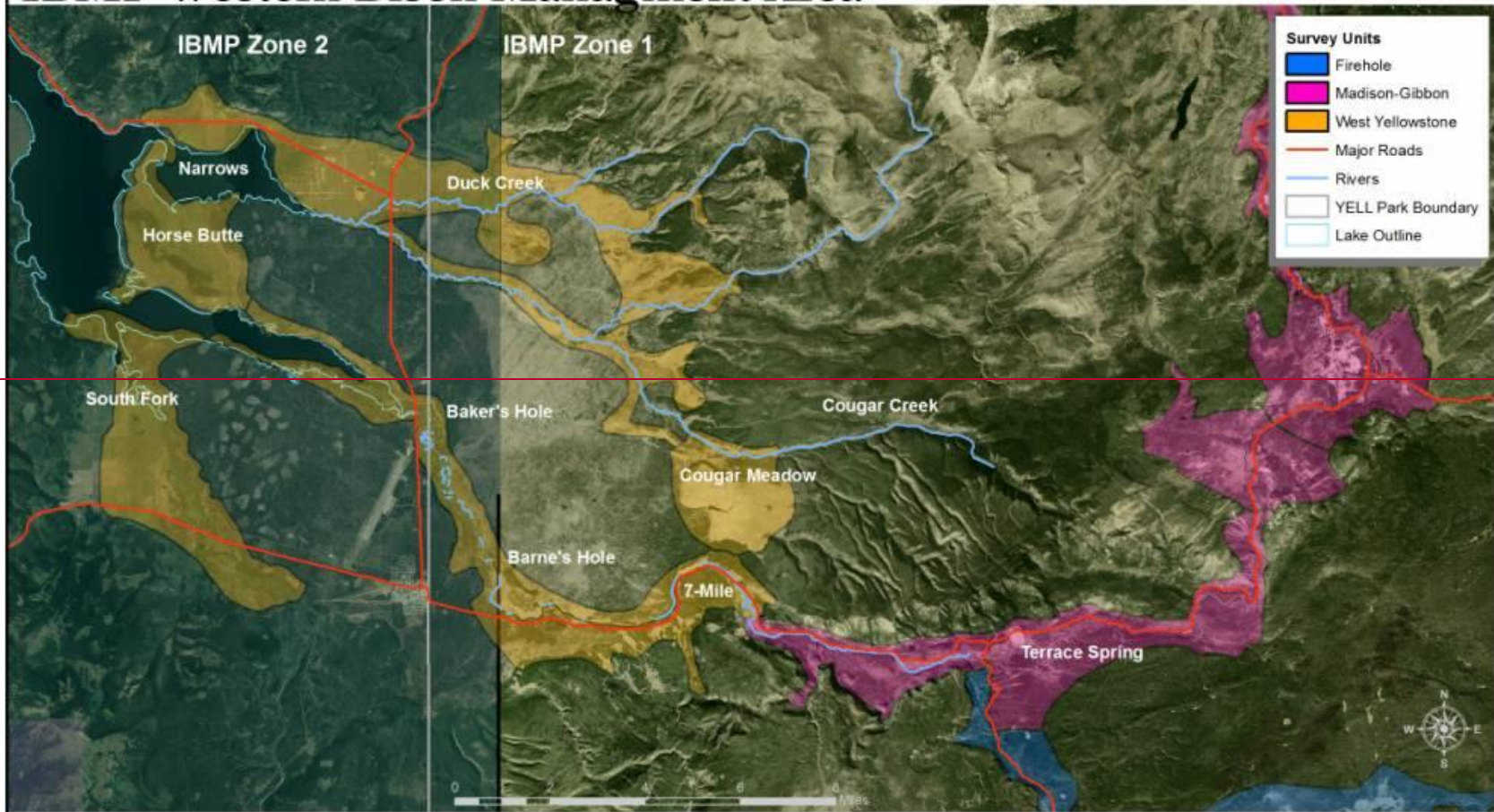


Northern Bison Management Area





IBMP Western Bison Management Area



Produced by the Yellowstone Spatial Analysis Center 307-344-2246

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May 2009