

# Summary Report from the Interagency Bison Management Plan Meeting April 25, 2018



**First draft presented 6 May 2018 by meeting facilitator Scott Bischke**

The following summary report reflects activities at the April 25, 2018 meeting of the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) Partners, held at the Holiday Inn West in West Yellowstone. This report comes from the flip chart notes of facilitator Scott Bischke<sup>1</sup>. The report will be marked *Draft* until formal Partner agreement to make it *Final* before the start of their next meeting. The nine Partner attendees were Rebecca Frey (APHIS), Leonard Gray (CSKT), Ervin Carlson (ITBC), Mike Honeycutt (MBOL), Martin Zaluski (MDOL), Mark Deleray (MFWP), Daniel Wenk (NPS-YNP), Quincy Ellenwood (NPT), and Mary Erickson (USFS-CGNF). In addition to those at the deliberative table, ~35 staff members from across IBMP organizations and ~55 members of the public were present at various times during the day.

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## Action items identified

### Action items identified during this meeting

#	Who	What	By when
1	Scott Bischke	Post the Nov 2017 meeting report to the website as "final"	ASAP
2	MD (lead)	<p>Partner discussion moved to creating an action item to consider creating a new capture facility somewhere north of YNP. Partners were careful to a) use the word say "create" not "move," and b) not be any more explicit than just noted in describing the possible location of a new capture facility. Questions to be answered, as brainstormed, included:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Where would the new capture facility be located?</li> <li>(2) Would the facility be only for capture, or would it be a quarantine facility, also?</li> <li>(3) What would be the process to establish a new capture facility?</li> <li>(4) Who would manage the new capture facility?</li> <li>(5) How would the capture facility impact the hunt?</li> </ol> <p>The questions noted above were assigned to a team as follows: MFWP MD (lead), CSKT (TM); USFS (Michael Thom); NPS (TR); NPT (QE); ITBC (legal); APHIS (RF); MDOL (MZ, CV).</p>	Meet before next meeting and report back at next meeting

## Agreeing to previous meeting minutes

The meeting started with introductions of Partners, staff, and all members of the general public in attendance, followed by a short review of IBMP history. Then the facilitator asked if there were any objections or changes to the draft meeting report from the November 2017 meeting, and noted the report has been available in draft for review since shortly after that meeting. No objections were brought forth. Thus the facilitator, per Partner Protocols, is to post the November August 2017 meeting notes to IBMP.info as *Final (\*\* action item 1)*.

The facilitator also reminded Partner of their agreement to include focus on three items that they agreed to as having a good chance for short term success. That agreement, first discussed at their May 2017 meeting and finalized at their August 2017 meeting, can be found at <http://ibmp.info/Library/20170803/20170803.php> (see link titled "Report on increasing IBMP Partner effectiveness"). The three items of focus—1) Improving utilization of expanded bison habitat, especially in new West Side tolerance area, 2) Creating a bison quarantine facility, 3) Improving safety, quality of the north side hunt/improving boundary issues—form three sections of this meeting, as reported below.



Figure 1.—Roughly 100 people attended this meeting of the IBMP, including IBMP Partners, staff, and the public.

## Improve utilization of expanded bison habitat, especially in new West Side tolerance area

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### TAYLOR FORK FIELD TRIP REPORT

On March 1, 2018 the IBMP Partners held a field trip in the Taylor Fork drainage, an area that is part of the Governor’s West Side bison tolerance zone. Roughly 30 people—Partners, staff, local landowners, public—skied or snow-shoed up the drainage. The trip was spurred, in part, by a similar field trip in August of 2017. During that earlier field trip, local landowners mentioned multiple times that people really needed to see the Taylor Fork in the winter to get a sense of how winter habitat conditions dramatically differ from those in the summer.

The Kelsey family, owners of the Nine Quarter Circle Ranch, kindly allowed field trip attendees to park in their parking lot. Kim Kelsey provided a welcome to all and also skied with the group. Slideshows from this winter 2018 and summer 2017 field trips can be found on the IBMP website; see <http://ibmp.info/photos.php>.

Following the morning tour into the Taylor Fork, Partners, staff, local landowners, and public met after lunch at the 320 Ranch for a panel discussion. As with the Kelsey family earlier in the day, the Partners (and everyone) thanked and acknowledged the 320 Ranch for their hospitality. This thanks was repeated by several Partners and public attendees to field trip at different times in the course of the current IBMP meeting.

The panel consisted of six area landowners: Kim and Kelly Kelsey (Nine Quarter Circle Ranch), Jim McGinnis (Elk Horn Ranch), Duncan Patten (Black Butte Ranch), John Richardson (320 Ranch), and Karrie Taggart (Horse Butte area homeowner). The panel was formulated as a Q&A session, initiated with questions from the facilitator, and then with follow-on questions from anyone present. The discussion went on for roughly 2 hours. The facilitator has summarized the discussion in the bullets that follow, lumping key and often recurring points and counterpoints into like categories:<sup>2</sup>

- Winter in the Taylor Fork
  - “If you saw it in the winter...”
  - ~30 people skied/snow-shoed up into the Taylor Fork
  - Some said, “What would bison eat? Why so few other wildlife in basin?”
  - Some said, “But it’s similar to conditions in Hebgen Basin where bison are in winter.”
- Weather, climate
  - Good, early snowpack this year—will impact fire, pasture, late-season water
  - Colder winters in past; memories of elk starving
  - Impact of warmer temps on vegetation (type, phenology), bison movement?
- Importance of winter habitat/food
  - Yes/No? Elk behavior more impacted by wolves, weather, or habitat/vegetation; but elk are not bison
  - Recall that bison are browsers as well as grazers

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<sup>2</sup> In the short summary discussion of the field trip at this April 25<sup>th</sup> meeting, several of these bulleted topics were mentioned again by Partners, staff, and a few members of the public who were along on the field.

- But little nutrition regardless of what they eat
- Bison migration
  - With little food, elk go to Madison in deep snow; will bison also?
  - Landowner have unity on bison should not be trucked in
  - Expect Hwy 191 to be a (the?) main migration route
  - Are we willing to mix bison with semi-trucks?
  - Bison will also go up the plowed Taylor Fork road
  - What will the bison really do? It's all speculation until they actually get there.
- Safety concerns
  - Highway accidents, Ophir School and kids, guest ranch tourists
  - Broken fences, bison eating livestock feed, goring a horse
  - Recall, cattle are hit in open range areas, as well
  - Solutions = cattle guards, highway signs, NGO fencing programs
  - Horse Butte success in living with bison, story of horses acclimated to bison
- Enforcement concerns
  - Lack of enforcement for *current* needs, adding bison will add more issues
  - 75 field wardens for the entire state of MT (2000 mi<sup>2</sup> each)
  - Simply the presence of wildlife not a reason for a call to authorities
  - Bison can be lethally removed by landowner for certain conditions
  - No cellular towers (and folks in the Upper Gallatin don't want them!)

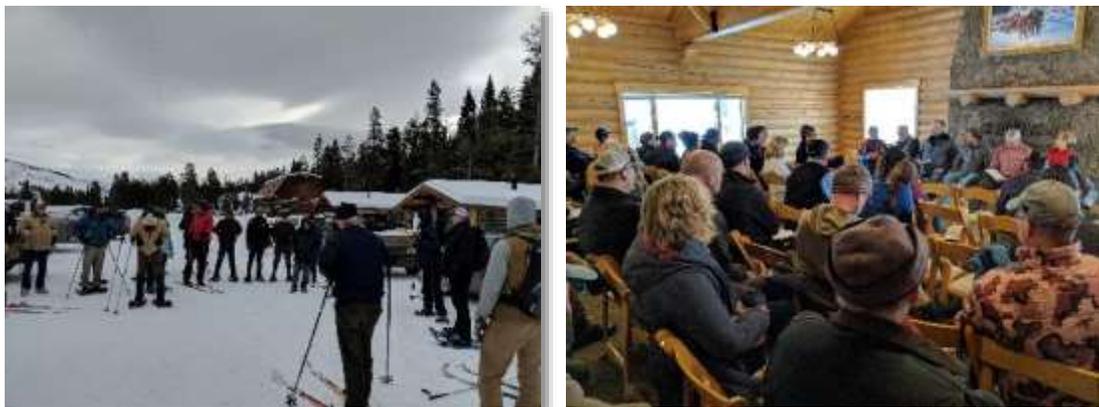


Figure 2.—IBMP Partners, staff, and public met with landowners living in the Upper Gallatin for a morning field trip into the Taylor Fork drainage, followed by an afternoon panel discussion with local landowners serving as the panelists.

- Hunt
  - Will a hunt keep bison from moving to Upper Gallatin, Taylor Fork?
  - Can a hunt be held off until bison migration to Upper Gallatin is established?
- Upper Gallatin Landowners
  - Create many jobs + gateway to MT wonders for many (often ill-informed knowledge, including little understanding about dangers of interacting with wildlife)
  - May have 500 people/day on the 320 Ranch
  - Bison in winter won't impact guest ranches as much as in the summer
  - Not opposed to bison in Upper Gallatin/Taylor Fork, already live with grizzlies. But there is difference of a few bison and hundreds of bison.
  - Local landowners just do not want bison shipped/trucked into Upper Gallatin or Taylor Fork

- FWP — the intent is to allow bison into Upper Gallatin or Taylor Fork; while there is no plan to ship bison there is also no plan to remove shipping bison from the “possibles” tool box
- Items brought forth by some in the audience
  - Area was selected in part because no cattle thus no brucellosis issue
  - Bison are a public resource
  - Concerns of landowners real issues but amount of public lands >> private lands
  - While landowner concerns are critical, landowners do not have yes/no veto power over if and how the bison arrive in the Taylor Fork, particularly regarding public lands access
  - Need to create private/public relationship ala the Blackfeet Challenge

## TECHNICAL COMMITTEE REPORTS

### ***Modeling for habitat suitability and potential migration corridors***

*Chris Geremia (NPS) and Julie Cunningham (MFWP)*

Chris and Julie described provide modeling for habitat suitability of and migrations corridors into the West Side bison tolerance zone outside of Yellowstone National Park, focusing particularly on winter months. NPS led the modeling aspect of this work for *outside* the Park applying what NPS has they have learned from *inside* the Park. Chris and Julie’s presentation follows, and can also be found on the meeting webpage (see <http://ibmp.info/Library/20180425/20180425.php>). Only brief comments are provided for each slide.

**Habitat suitability assessment of the year-round tolerance area for bison in the State of Montana**

Contact Info:

Chris Geremia Bison Ecology and Management Office Yellowstone National Park PO Box 168 Mammoth Hot Springs, WY 82190 <a href="mailto:Chris_Geremia@nps.gov">Chris_Geremia@nps.gov</a> 307/344-2584	Julie Cunningham Bozeman Area Wildlife Biologist Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks 1400 S. 19th Ave Bozeman, MT 59718 <a href="mailto:juliecunningham@mt.gov">juliecunningham@mt.gov</a> 406/994-6341
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Questions regarding this presentation should be addressed to Chris and Julie.

**Model Development**

Step selection model:

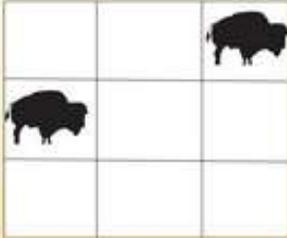
- 62 Adult Female Bison
- 2004-2015

Static Habitat Attributes:

- Percent Slope
- Land Cover Classification
- Distance to Water

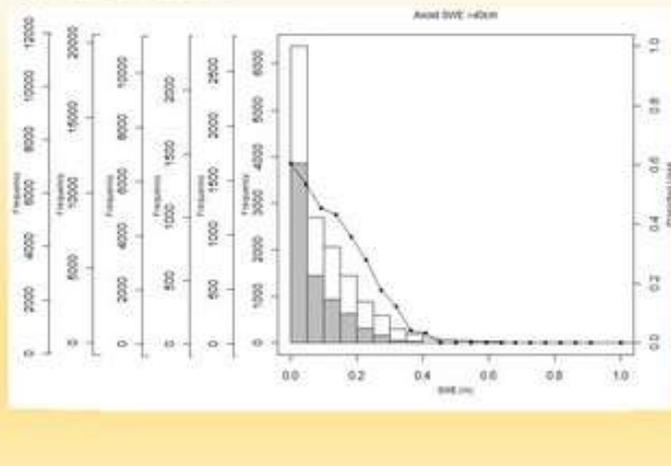
Dynamic Habitat Attributes:

- Snow Water Equivalent
- Growing Season Production
- Vegetation “Green-ness”



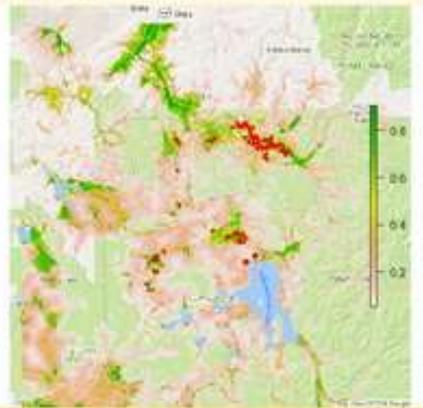
Habitat modelling efforts were completed via resource selection function modeling—a tool spatial ecologists use to determine what habitat characteristics are important to a population or species of animal. Ecologist assess the probability of an animal using a certain resource (e.g., vegetation type, water) proportional to the availability of the resource in the landscape under consideration.

### Habitat Selection



Chris noted such things as bison utility of habitat dropping off substantially with distance from water.

### Habitat Suitability Score



February 16 2010 (Mild Winter)

Modelling results can be presented on a mapping interface, with green being areas of greater habitat suitability for bison.

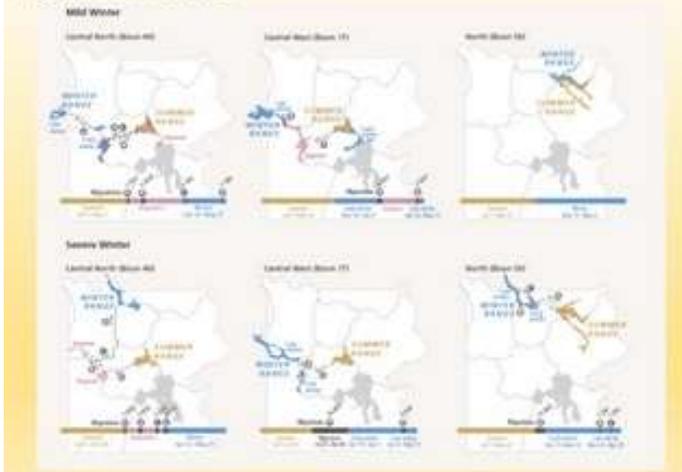
### Habitat Suitability Score



February April July

Models can be run to assess habitat suitability at different times of the year. For an individual area, habitat suitability may vary across the seasons.

## Migration Routes



Migration routes for Yellowstone bison between summer and winter ranges can and do vary with the severity of winter, and over the years.

## Migration Routes

### Highway 191

1. Cross 9-10 miles of poor habitat
2. 20-25 miles to entrance of Taylor Fork road
3. Bison near West primarily during April-May, less so during fall and winter
4. Existing migration behaviors are to move back into the Park along the Upper Madison



April Habitat Suitability

Habitat suitability influences migration corridors, but bison can move across an area of poor habitat suitability if an area of good habitat suitability awaits at the end of their migration.

This slide depicts a possible migration route into the Upper Gallatin and Taylor Fork up Highway 191.

## Migration Routes

### Red Canyon

1. Potential route during summer and fall
2. Exploratory movements through linking small, disjointed suitable habitat patches

### Gallatin Headwaters

1. Likely used during mid 1990s
2. Potential route during summer and fall



July Habitat Suitability

This slide depicts two possible migration routes into the Upper Gallatin and Taylor Fork: via Red Canyon off Hebgen Lake and over Fawn Pass from the Mammoth area.

## Migration Routes

### Tom Miner

1. Migration into Tom Miner Basin is likely
2. Would additionally require movement through alpine areas to link to the Upper Gallatin



July Habitat Suitability

This slide depicts a possible migration route into the Upper Gallatin and Taylor Fork traveling from the Gardner area through Tom Miner basin.

## Year-Round Habitat and Migration Corridors

1. The Taylor Fork and Upper Gallatin provide the largest contiguous area of habitat in the year-round tolerance area
2. Suitable habitat is constrained to the Taylor Fork and 191 corridor particularly during winter
3. Four potential migration routes – each have constraints
4. Exploratory movements affected by
  - high abundance
  - high snow
  - human disturbance



This summary slide shows the four likely migrations routes expected for Yellowstone bison moving into the Upper Gallatin and Taylor Fork.

Julie Cunningham also provided a summary of the Technical Committee's deliberations on habitat and migration. That summary was accompanied in a two-page report, which is presented below in its entirety.

IBMP West-Side Technical Committee  
Report on Habitat and Migration

**Technical Committee Composition:** LeRoy Adams Jr. (Yakama), Julie Cunningham (MFWP), Becky Frey (APHIS), Chris Geremia (NPS), Stephanie Gillin (Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes), Josh Hemenway (USFS), Jeffrey Mount (MDOL), Carl Scheeler (Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla), Neil Thagard (Nez Perce Tribe), Patrick Toomey (ITBC), Rick Wallen (NPS)

**Objective:** According to the Technical Committee Charter, the Committee was to determine suitable habitat for bison, to include summer and winter range, to identify possible migration routes from Yellowstone National Park into the west side area, and to discuss how they would be managed.

**Summary:** The National Park Service produced an interactive map of potential bison habitat (year-round and seasonal) based on 270 bison-years of GPS data from 60-70 individuals. The Resource Selection Function (RSF) considered habitat, slope, aspect, snowpack, and distance to water. The RSF was projected across the west-side habitat expansion area. The map highlights areas where potential bison migration into the west-side could occur.

On a 3/21/18 conference call, 7 of the 11 technical committee members discussed bison habitat, potential migration routes, and relevant aspects of bison behavior and ecology. Attendees drafted recommendations to present at the IBMP meeting. We e-mailed a draft document to the larger committee 3/22/18 to ensure everyone had a chance to review the work. Additional comments were received and incorporated as needed.

**Discussion Points:** The identified need is to clarify how bison could enter and use available habitat on the west side. The following points are draft discussion points for the Partners to consider.

- **West-side disturbance:** past and present disturbance (including hazing and hunting) may influence the ability of bison to move and explore. Exploratory movements may be a function of bison numbers and security/ability to use the habitat. If bison are deterred from habitat use, exploratory behaviors may be less likely.
- **Opportunistic conditions:** NPS has noted occasional major shifts in bison distribution based on convergence of population and environmental events. If population or weather events align to present opportunistic conditions, as in an abundance of bison poised along a potential migratory route, managers could discuss their ability to make adaptive changes to increase probability of bison movement into the west side habitat expansion area.
- **Migratory routes:** each identified migratory route (see attachment) has advantages and disadvantages. Use of some may require political action or management manipulation.
- **Management manipulation:** Manipulations could include herding bison up Highway 191 or changes to the structure of bison hunts. Exploration may occur on the decadal scale without large-scale management changes or manipulations.

POSSIBLE MIGRATION ROUTE	PROS	CONS	COMPOSITION/SEASON
Gallatin Headwaters	Shortest distance between current distribution and west-side habitat	Would require movement through high alpine areas which is not likely behavior	Summer/fall; likely small bull groups
Highway 191	Most likely given current distribution and tolerance	Bison would have to move through 9-10 miles of suboptimal habitat	Year-round, could be bull or cow/calf groups
Red Canyon	Within current tolerance area	Would only be possible in summer through series of meadows	Summer only, likely small bull groups
Tom Miner Basin	Biologically, most likely migratory pathway with the most connected bison habitat	Is outside current tolerance area	Possible year-round, most-likely in summer, could be bull or cow/calf groups

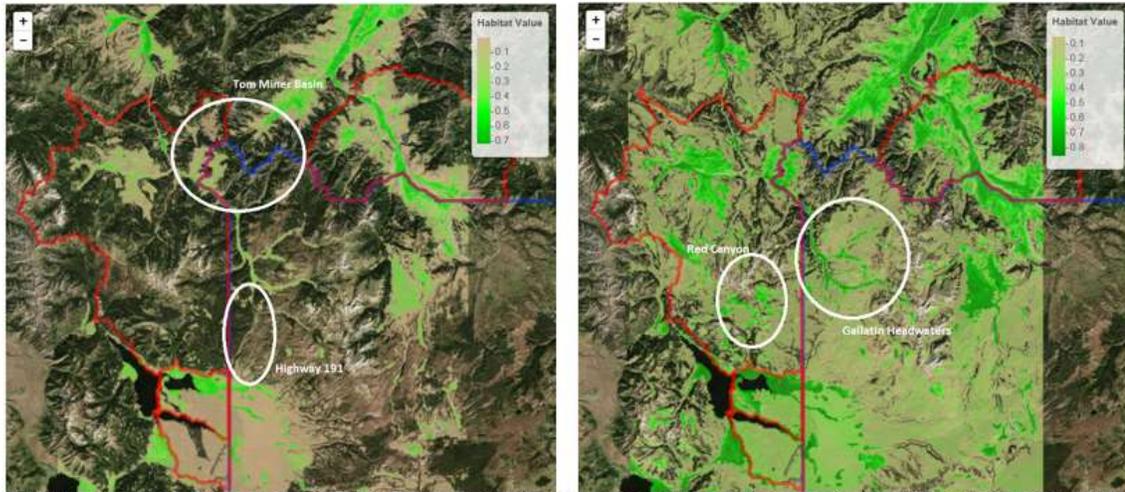


Figure 1: Potential bison corridors connecting current distribution with west-side habitat expansion area. On left, base map indicates year-round bison habitat with the Highway 191 and Tom Miner Basin highlighted. On right, base map indicates summer (July) bison habitat with Red Canyon and Gallatin Headwaters highlighted.

### **Response to land owner questions posed in Aug 2017**

Following the August 2017 IBMP field trip and IBMP meeting, Daphne White of the Elkhorn Ranch sent the Lead IBMP Partner a set of questions from Upper Gallatin landowners. Ms. White’s letter can be found in full in the meeting report for the August 3, 2017 meeting report (see <http://ibmp.info/Library/20170803/20170803.php>). The Technical Committee provide a full set of responses to those questions at this meeting. Those responses can be found as Appendix A to this meeting report, and also online at the webpage for this meeting (see <http://ibmp.info/Library/20180425/20180425.php>).

### **Status of West Side Bison Tolerance Technical Committee**

At the conclusion of their presentation, JC asked the Partners if they felt the work presented by the Technical Committee was sufficient response to the action items that committee had been given at the November 2017 IBMP meeting. Partners indicated their agreement to that sentiment, with recognition that there could be further work for the Technical Committee in the future.

## **Citizens’ Panel on sharing session living with bison**

At the request of the 2017 Lead Partner, and with full support of the 2018 Lead Partner, the Partners invited four citizens to provide their experience after many years of living with bison. The four included three living on the North Side—Doug McCartney (Gardiner and member Greater Gardiner Community Council), Alan Shaw (Royal Teton Ranch [RTR], ranch business manager), and Sabina Strauss (owner Yellowstone Basin Inn); and one living on the West Side (Karrie Taggart, homeowner Horse Butte area).



Figure 3.—Four citizens shared their experiences regarding living with bison wit IBMP Partners, staff, and the public. The four panel members, from left to right, were Alan Shaw, Sabina Strauss, Doug MacCartney, and Karrie Taggert.

The panelists considered two simple questions: What did they like and what did they dislike or have concerns about regarding living directly with or regularly in the vicinity of bison. Partners provided some Q&A built around these themes. The following bullets capture (paraphrased) some of the discussion that ensued, almost exclusively from the panelists, sometimes lumped to include multiple panelist's thoughts in a single bullet:

- Bison belong on the landscape. They are inspiring. I love to hear their vocalization. They deserve better.
- I love their wildness, love anticipating them coming, love the anticipation of new calves. I appreciate that though there is some divisiveness around this issue, we all somehow have the bison in common.
- It can be a challenge. We have had over 500 bison on the RTR, sometimes a couple of hundred in residence. We had thought the maximum would be far less than that, say 100. They have obliterated over 50% of our fence in some years. Ten years ago we anticipated getting rid of bison. We have had issues with protecting our hayfields, property damage, and safety — the latter, for example, when people were scared to exit living quarters because of bison being so close.
- When bison come out, our Inn is mostly empty since it is our low season. Thus we likely have fewer problems. We had some tree damage until we worked with the NGOs to put fences around them—the fences work great. My biggest concern is hazing, because hazing stresses the bison and that's when they cause property damage. My other concerns are driving at night, and also safety issues surrounding the hunt.
- We moved to our house, just at the park boundary in Gardner, in 1993. We have fences to protect parts of our property. When bison come out of the park they might move quickly, but then they settle quickly. We have never had any property damage save perhaps some nose marks on the windows. They can be stressed, I agree, for example by dogs.
- I have had bison in my yard. We too have fences around our trees to protect them — I think the property owner simply has to take responsibility for things like that. It is not a mystery; you simply need to learn how to read the bison's body language.
- My biggest concerns are 1) logging on Horse Butte—will it bring more animals and possibly then hazing to habitat?—we could have 400-500 animals in a populated area; 2) the hunt as it is being carried out — hunters in our community; 3) watching the slaughter as in Beattie Gulch; 4) about too many bison making our community a tourist attraction
- We worry about our liability, should someone be injured by a bison on our property

Regarding a question about the safety of children in the vicinity of bison:

- Yes, we have had the occasion when people were afraid for the children to get out of the bus when being picked up because bison were so close.
- I am more worried about grizzlies for our staff and guests. Bison are not that complicated—just watch their body language and talk to them. Perhaps we could teach a short course on how to live with bison.
- Agreed; some people at the Arch have no idea. I've seen all kinds of inappropriate behavior, like people trying to feed bison.
- I think the Gardiner Chamber of Commerce hands out information fliers.
- At the RTR we regularly send out emails depending on time of year regarding what to watch for, that bison are expected to be exiting the Park soon, and similar.
- I live next to the school in Gardiner. Bison are in my yard, bison are in the schoolyard. They show no aggression to kids. Elk can be far more aggressive.

Regarding a question as to direct experience themselves, or knowledge of others, having an automobile accident involving bison, the panelists had little direct experience to relate. Instead they noted:

- They are especially hard to see at night unless you catch the eye shine.
- The flashing sign reminding drivers of the presence of bison helps. Also, local knowledge regarding when and where they migrate, and if they are now moving, really helps.

## **Bison quarantine and translocation**

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DW noted that quarantine has been envisioned as a tool of the IBMP for a long time. There has been movement of animals out of YNP through the quarantine process, including to Turner Ranch and to the Fort Belknap/Fort Peck tribes.

NPS expects to soon conclude the Quarantine EA. They expect to have a finding of no significant impact (FONSI) regarding the EA signed no later than May 7, 2018.

DW noted the following key dates in the quarantine process:

- In March 2016 NPS captured bison with the intent to hold in the DSA, then move to the Fort Peck tribe when the quarantine process was complete (i.e., no brucellosis transmission risk).
- In January 2017 some female bison were removed while 24 males were retained. Over the course of 2017, 28 more bison were retained.
- In the summer of 2017 NPS took steps to make the Stevens' Creek facility a certified brucellosis quarantine facility. An inspection by APHIS and MDOL on December 15, 2017 resulted in a verbal approval, though with some nonconformities that needed to be addressed.
- In January 2018 52 bison were illegally released from the Stevens' Creek facility.

DW said that two MOUs are being prepared: between NPS, APHIS, and the state of MT, and between NPS, APHIS, and the Fort Peck Tribe. He said that NPS believes the quarantine process is an important tool to repatriate bison on tribal lands and across the USA. NPS hopes that the first cohort of bison will be moved to the Fort Peck Tribe in November or December of 2018, though APHIS will inform determination of final schedule based on their risk analysis and assessment. In March of 2018, 73 males and 25 females were placed into the Stephens Creek facility for consideration of enrollment in quarantine. Males would be moved first, due to shorter testing time frames.

DW said that NPS is committed to working with APHIS, the state of Montana, and the tribes. He noted Corwin Springs and Fort Peck as potential quarantine sites.

MR noted that the FONSI does not include the Fort Peck facility. They are still waiting for APHIS certification. RF stated that APHIS will be connecting with the Fort Peck Tribe soon, and also that APHIS is looking at streamlining the brucellosis quarantine protocol.

EC thanked NPS for its efforts, saying ITBC's goal is and always has been to bring live bison into Indian Country. He said that ITBC condemns whoever released the bison as that act slowed the transfer of bison to tribes. EC stated his hope that it will never happen again.

## **Improving safety, quality of the North Side hunt/improving boundary issues**

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While the North Side hunt includes tribal and state hunters, this agenda item was led by the Tribal Hunt Managers. JH reviewed the formation of the Tribal Hunt Managers group, how the North Side hunt had been termed “unworkable” a year earlier, with people saying, effectively, “Something has to be done,” how they went through 20 drafts of a tribal hunt MOA, how the work took many individuals across the tribes, as well as the input and oversight of each tribal council involved. JH said that the MOA includes agreement on such items as a) limiting the number of guns at Beattie Gulch, b) assuring guns are “pointed the same direction,” c) enforcement cooperation, d) an adaptive management framework, e) slot signups, f) pre-hunt meetings and setting a lead each day, and more. He also noted that tribal representatives met with citizens in Gardiner to explain the MOA. The MOA was presented at the November 2017 IBMP meeting in Chico (a full description was provided in the summary notes for the last IBMP meeting at <http://ibmp.info/Library/20171128/20171128.php>).

JH said the MOA had been a great success in this Winter Ops season. The groups encountered only a few unforeseen variables — for example, one tribe did not sign, a new tribe began hunting, the state did license hunters after at one point considering not doing so.

Enforcement officers Pablo Espinoza (CSKT) and Adam Villavicencio (NPT) provided positive review of the hunt under the MOA. Both thanked other tribes and the state for increased safety and cooperation during this winter’s hunt. Pablo added thanks to the YNP rangers for their help. Adam said that the MOA helped “organize chaos and create safety.” They also mentioned witnessing acts of good will this year: hunters allowing first shots to a tribal elder in one case, to a state hunter—having a once-in-a-lifetime permit—in another instance.

MD noted that all hunts are a work-in-progress—including continuing efforts to improve safety—and noted that work to improve the hunt will continue with the upcoming annual hunt managers’ (tribes and state) meeting. That meeting—a public meeting where hunt issues are covered in greater detail than at IBMP meetings—will be held June 13<sup>th</sup> in Missoula.

ME stated appreciation of the Tribal Hunt Managers’ MOA. She asked if anyone could provide thoughts on additional tribes beginning to hunt, or on the ongoing challenge of getting bison further distributed on the landscape. In response, CS noted that the CTUIR would like all parties, including the Blackfeet Tribe (newly hunting) and the state of Montana to be a party to the Tribal Hunt Managers’ MOA. He also said he looks forward to discussions with NPS regarding the potential of retrieving animals that have been shot but cross back into YNP before dying. CS said that everyone has a role to play.

MR noted that now that the state of Montana has recognized the right of the Blackfeet to hunt under the Fort Laramie Treaty, by extension that gives all signees of that treaty the right to hunt just as with the Stevens’ Treaty. How do we best extend that opportunity to those tribes, she asked, and provide them the information they will need?

JH explained that the genesis of the current tribal hunt included 2007 meetings between the NPT, CSKT, and state of Montana. Since that time, the hunt and relationships have grown, including an annual state/tribal hunt meeting and the recent formation of the Tribal Hunt Managers’ group (as described above). He said that MOA tribes would like all tribes involved and that while the MOA has many tribal aspects, it could be adapted to include the state. In addition, he noted that though the MOA was first about safety, the potential exists for it to evolve to cover issues of a sustainable hunt, including increasing bison distribution on the landscape.

TM noted that each tribe might have different financial capabilities in funding enforcement and other topics—could ITBC possibly help with funding gaps? MD said that the state of Montana also has a funding concern, and pointed out that the state pays far more to support the yearly bison hunt than it brings in. He also stated his concern that if more and more hunters arrive, there may need to be an adjustment in expectations regarding the definition of a “sustainable hunt.”

MR said that ITBC could attend the annual state/tribal hunt meeting to help get communication going with its Fort Laramie Treaty members regarding the Tribal Hunt Managers MOA and other topics. She reminded everyone that those groups are sovereign nations and so could choose not to participate.

## Report on and Discussion of 2017/2018 Winter IBMP Operations to Date

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As noted in their Partner Protocols, at their spring meeting the Partners review winter field operations to date. Per the agreed upon meeting agenda, topics for this session included

- (1) *Transfer of bison to research facilities.*—RF said that no bison were transferred to research facilities during this operations season.
- (2) *Scope, timing of upcoming hunt planning meeting.*—Due to scheduling conflicts, this meeting was changed from the usual timeframe of late May until June 13 for this year. It will be held in Missoula and is open to the public.
- (3) Status of newest Tribes participating in or petitioning to hunt.—While given the opportunity by the facilitator, no Partner or staff member chose to speak on this topic during this session.
- (4) Overall removals
- (5) Hunt results
- (6) Culls /transfer /distribution of bison to processing facilities and tribal groups
- (7) Evaluation of bison distribution, including use (or not) of newest North and West Side tolerance areas

Items 4-6 were covered in a summary presentation by Tim Reid of NPS, and bison distribution in a short presentation by Karen Loveless of MFWP. Further information on both talks are provided below.



Figure 7.—Tim Reid of NPS updated Partners, staff, and public on the status of bison removals during 2017/18 winter operations.

### **BISON REMOVALS**

Tim Reid of NPS began the discussion by providing a review of bison removals for the 2017/18 winter operations season. Tim's full slide presentation, which includes substantial detail and explanation, follows.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Tim's presentation is also available at the meeting website — <http://ibmp.info/Library/20180425/20180425.php>.

## NPS Recommendations 2017

~4,800 bison: ~3,970 north/~850 central

- Remove up to 1,250 bison breeding in north
- Decrease numbers to 4,200-4,400 after calving
- No removals in west due to lower numbers
- Allow bison to distribute on landscape and hunt
- Maintain 250-400 bison in Gardiner basin
- Begin culling bison in north when migration deemed sufficient to support hunting and culling
- Conduct larger culls if there is a larger migration

## 17/18 Winter Operations Plan

Manage for a decreasing population

- Optimize harvest while assuring combined hunt/cull take of 600 to 900 bison
- Reduce impacts of bison captures on hunt
- Monthly removal goals:
  - 75-115 by the end of November
  - 225-335 by the end of December
  - 372-560 by the end of January
  - 522-785 by the end of February
  - 600-900 by March 15

## Harvests

December 2017: Hunters began harvesting bison west of the park (NPS recommended zero)

**Removal goals/reported harvests (north):**

- November 30: Goal = 75-115; Harvest = 8
- December 31: Goal = 225-335; Harvest = 8
- January 31: Goal = 372-560; Harvest = 21
- February 28: Goal = 522-785; Harvest = 146
- March 15: Goal = 600-900; Harvest = 206

➤ Reported harvests lagged well behind removal goals by mid-February

## Captures/Culls

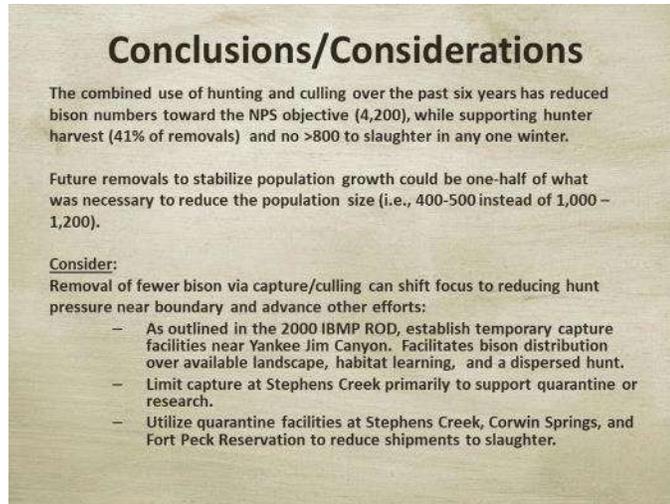
- Winter conditions led to a large migration into Gardiner basin during late February/March
- NPS began capturing on February 16 and captured ~800 bison over a 3-week period
- Another 800+ bison in the Gardiner basin (Mammoth-Yankee Jim) during captures
- NOTES:
  - Harvest higher after captures began (77 bison harvested 30 days before; 172 after)
  - Many harvests and reports after March 11, when captures ended

## Harvests and Culls

	MT/ NPS	CSKT	Nez Perce	ShoBan	CTUR	Yakama	BFN
<b>Hunt (372)</b>							
North	37*	2	111	35	28	40	32
West	22*	45	4	2	0	8	6
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>38</b>
<small>* includes 5 dispatched, 3 poached, 1 abandoned</small>							
<b>Cull (796)</b>							
Slaughter	694	Transferred to the CSKT for processing					
Quarantine	98	Includes 25 female and 73 male yearlings					
Pen Mort	4						
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,168</b>	<b>2018: Harvest 32%; Culls 68%</b>					
		<b>2012-2017: Harvest 50%; Culls 50%</b>					

## WHY > 600-900

- Winter severity exceeded predictions.
- Unusually large migration in late February allowed continued capture and hunter success with > 500 bison north of park at times.
- Telemetric data indicating that bison migrating into Gardiner basin were associated with the northern breeding area.
- NPS holds that a long-term average of ~4,200 bison allows balance of myriad demands/values surrounding bison and provides opportunity for progress on issues that have been difficult to advance, including:
  - Full dispersal into the conservation area
  - Reduced hunting pressure near boundary/better hunt success and optics
  - Mitigation of capture/hunt conflict
  - Reduction of cull size and shipments to slaughter
- The removal of 1,100+ bison provided the highest chance of a summer 2018 count near 4,200 bison compared to other alternatives.
  - Summer 2018: Predict ~4,200 +/- 500 bison post-calving
  - <4,500 bison for the first time since 2012



### Discussion

Following Tim's talk, Partners and staff discussed ramifications of what had been presented. A number of highlights from those discussion follow:

- Q—Could the Stephen's Creek capture facility be moved beyond Cutler Meadow? A—No, not allowed under the ROD.
- Q—What is the next step if we are to establish a capture facility near Yankee Jim Canyon? A—It is already in the ROD. The next step is to begin the discussion, potentially leading to a change to the IBMP Adaptive Management Plan.
- Q—What would be the timeframe for such a change? A—Some dependency on the progress on quarantine. Even if OK'd timing drivers include a) identifying the site, b) building the facility, recognizing that next year Partners will have fewer (say 500) bison to remove and possibly won't need capture facilities as much. Counter thought—Partners have had a tough time removing more than 350 animals by the hunt so should be careful setting any expectation that the capture facilities will not be needed.
- We need to remain aware that ROD states a population goal of 3000, not the 4200 or other numbers in the presentation.
- In the past, the idea of moving the capture facility to Cutler Meadows has been thought by some to conflict with hunting by removing land otherwise available as habitat. Counter thought—Moving the trap may help hunting by allowing greater distribution of bison farther north even if some of that land is given over to a new capture facility (i.e., if they are captured at Stevens' Creek, they will never get further north anyway).
- Q—Could the trap be moved the very northern end of Cutler Meadow to allow bison as much free movement as possible? A—We should not have the capture facility be the last line of defense because if we miss the bison there, they will be in Zone 3.
- We must be sure to balance hunt with capture and ITBC's goal to move bison to Indian Country. A reminder provided that quarantine facilities are ready on the Fort Peck Reservation now. Counter thought—Per USDA APHIS, under current certifications, the facilities at Corwin Springs and Stevens' Creek are not the same as those on the Fort Peck Reservation.
- Q—Would a new capture facility conflict with current CGNF planning process? A—No.
- Q—Again, what would be the next steps if we were to move the capture facility to Cutler Meadows or somewhere further north in the tolerance zone? A—If on USFS land, an important step would be getting the work on the calendar—we need to allocate time and capacity.

Partner discussion moved to creating an action item to consider creating a new capture facility somewhere north of YNP (the presentation used advanced concept of exploring use of a temporary facility). Partners were careful to a) use the word say “create” not “move,” and b) not be any more explicit than just noted in describing the possible location of a new capture facility. Questions to be answered, as brainstormed, included:

- (1) Where would the new capture facility be located?
- (2) Would the facility be only for capture, or would it be a quarantine facility, also?
- (3) What would be the process to establish a new capture facility?
- (4) Who would manage the new capture facility? Who would pay for it?
- (5) How would the capture facility impact the hunt?

The questions noted above became **\*\*Action item 2**, and were assigned to a team as follows: MFWP MD (lead), CSKT (TM); USFS (Michael Thom); NPS (TR); NPT (QE); ITBC (legal); APHIS (RF); MDOL (MZ, Vines).

## BISON DISTRIBUTION

Karen Loveless of MFWP provided the results of her bison observations in the past month (Figure 7). Those observations came both from the air and on the ground. Karen’s numbers of observed bison outside of the park varied greatly from late March, when hunting and trapping operations were still underway, compared to April, when those operations had ceased. Her observations indicated that the current hunt and trap operations removed bison close to the Park boundary and prohibited bison from moving across the tolerance zone. Only after these activities ended did animals move into the tolerance zone.

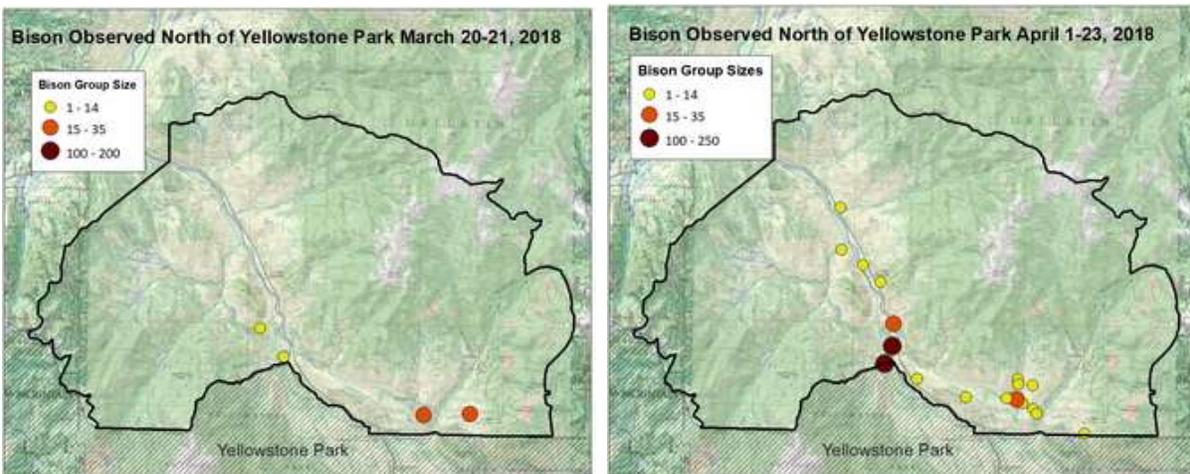


Figure 7.—Karen Loveless of the MFWP shared her North Side bison observations of March (with hunting underway) and April (no hunting) with Partners, staff, and public.

## Partner briefings/updates—status of ongoing activities related to Yellowstone bison and brucellosis

### **PJ—NPS Quarantine FONSI**

This item was covered under the quarantine section of the agenda above.

### **PJ—Status of legal challenge to USFWS decision not to list bison under the Endangered Species Act**

The USFWS is currently in a 90-day review period with a focus on genetic information.

### **PJ—Update on EIS for bison management**

There has been no significant progress for two years. NPS expects to soon initiate a meeting with the state of Montana to see about restarting the process again.

### **Shana Drimal <if anything new to report>—Update on bison coexistence/fencing project**

Two new projects are slated for this summer. Shana said that the bison coexistence/fencing project has funding, is looking for more work, and is asking people to get out the word.

### **MD—Update on recent changes to WY bison hunt**

MD said that JC had met with Wyoming Game and Fish and learned that the bison hunt there has far less controversy and conflict, in part because they hunt over a far larger area with fewer hunters. MFWP will continue to seek to learn from other hunts.

## **Next meetings, final comments**

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The facilitator note for Partners, staff, and public that their remaining two meetings for 2018 are set as follows:

- August 1<sup>st</sup>: Bozeman MT (Hilton Garden Inn); and
- November 28<sup>th</sup>: Pray MT (Chico Hot Springs).

The facilitator asked if there were any final comments and several were forthcoming.

EC stated that he was impressed with the citizens' panel on living with bison earlier in the day, in particular that the panelists said they could live with bison mostly no problem. He reiterated that ITBC seeks to bring live animals out to Indian Country. He noted that buffalo have been gone so long from his tribe (Blackfeet) that it was sometimes hard to get his people to understand how important bison are. EC said that for him buffalo being confined in Yellowstone is like tribes being put on reservation.

MR said she felt the IBMP had hit an evolution point of some kind: the group now seemed more focused on how to manage the hunt, and not so much on the threat of brucellosis to cattle.

QE said that the bottom line is that we have to be here for the wellbeing of what God created for the ecosystems. It is so important, he continued, for his friends and relatives. It is the supreme law of the land, the right for us to live as we choose, and I am seeking to uphold my pledge to the Nez Perce people. Having bison in our diet can help nations be healthy again. With great numbers of bison there can be great life. We share administrations but in a different way—yes let's make America great again. We have concern about disease. We consider that cattle are an invasive species. I understand they are part of life but am committed to bison being free and will be so committed until this heart stops beating. We need to change and allow our relative to be free again.

As a final comment the Lead Partner thank everyone for their attendance, and bid them safe travels, including a reminder to watch for bison on the road.

## **Public comment**

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The following summaries of public comment are not intended to be complete, but rather to capture key points of each public comment as stated. Upon review, Partners sometimes point out that statements made during the public comment are either incomplete or incorrect.

The facilitator has especially attempted to capture those comments from the public that appeared to be solution-oriented and/or have the potential for inclusion in adaptive management planning, and/or process improvement, and/or use as agenda items for future meetings. These items, as well as other potentially actionable public input, are called out with a "\*\*\*" in the listings that follow. The "\*\*\*" callouts are especially added to items that the facilitator does not believe are already under consideration by the Partners (or have been in the past).

Names associated with comments are available from the facilitator. They are not included here, however, in an effort to focus on the comment rather than the speaker. Line breaks in the bullets indicate a new speaker. Public comment was taken just after lunch in reaction to numerous past public comments about public input being of less value at the end of the day.

- Happy to see study of bison inventory of possible bison migration corridors. Really a step forward for the group. We never did that before.

- South end of the Madison Range facing east and south end of the Gallatin Range facing west are great places for bison. They will go north into the Porcupine, into the Buffalo Horn, into the Elkhorn and all those drainages will be great.
- But we have to give them opportunity to move there.
- The real national solution is a national bison conservation area in the area north and south of the CMR Wildlife refuge on solid public ownership. Montana owes it to the nation and is the only state that can make it happen.
- \*\* Challenge agencies and the group to get DOT and sheriff and highway patrol involved. Summer is coming now so we could actually do something together and make changes now!
- Very few speeding tickets. In the entire year of 2017 they gave out 85 tickets on upper portion of 191. They could be doing that a day.
- Can we work together and start making change there and show we can make a difference even without bison on the landscape? It would help protect people and animals everyone cares about.
- Want to tell a story. A few years ago young fellow, 15 years old, drew the state hunt. So excited for bison hunt, months of buildup and planning, family coming.
- But when he gets here finds nothing but gut piles. In talking to people he learned that CSKT people were here and harvested animals.
- He hunted hard but nothing. Tough thing was, he went back home and his classmates that were part of the hunt that had gotten animals. Apparently that there were hard feelings were brought on by that; think about it and I can't think but call it anything but racism. If you treat someone differently because of their race what else do you call it. Salish can't do anything about that but still, I feel for his whole family as what could have been a great experience was a bad experience.
- \*\* Solution is to have one hunt under one set of regulations that all people can enjoy unbiased by race.
- My group is Local Circle, Global Vision. Here to talk about a vision of wild-crafting bison in the GYE. We want to do many things to create a collaboration: economic needs of cattle industry while strengthening national food security, meet wildlife objectives of FWP, balance needs of each partner with the rights of wild bison, relieve pressure on NPS to keep bison contained.
- Thanks to all that are here.
- I believe the bison are our greatest teachers.
- Our vision is to bring bison back to our nation to roam free, but not hurt the cattle industry.
- The next speaker read a poem titled, "The bias against bison."
- Switching hats I want to read a statement from Bear Creek Council (35-years old, all volunteer) and Buffalo Field Campaign. It is our contention that current bison management is not safe, not prudent, not in the best interest of conservation, the local economy, or our community.
- Urge IBMP partners to remove carcasses and gut piles. Should be disposed of properly by hunters and patrolled. Carcasses may lead to brucellosis transfer; visually blight; concentrate scavengers and bears (safety risk); scavengers risk lead poisoning. Many iconic species have been found dead including bobcats and eagles.
- This is getting out of hand we don't have enough bison for slaughter each year. That is totally unacceptable.
- We need to close down Stevens Creek facility.
- You have not documented one case of brucellosis coming from bison. It comes from deer, elk, cattle. It does not come from the bison. This committee doesn't understand science.

- It's the human parasite that should be managed. Bison should not be managed. What gives you the right? They don't belong to you, why do you feel you have the right to pick and choose what lives.
- I want my grandchildren and great grandchildren to have what we had.
- It's high time you start listening to the public, not the ranchers.
  
- My children are native, my husband is native. I am with Aim West, Protect the Wolves, Campaign for Yellowstone Wolves, Buffalo Field Campaign.
- Protect the Wolves wants a 50-mile buffer zone around and national park. That means no hunting or shipping to slaughter in this area.
- Native people hunted only for subsistence not for sport. What's wrong with us.
- That's not a hunt coming out of the Park, cross border and shot. They need to roam. This is their native habitat for 60 M years. The cattle are the invasive species.
  
- I work for BFC. My 4<sup>th</sup> year coming to the IBMP.
- I want to highlight earlier comment regarding what is the effect of management activities of bison's ability to migrate. Rick said when there's more bison they migrate further.
- \*\* What needs to go is the ridiculous population cap of 3000 animals. Please reconsider it. The number must be larger if we want bison to hunt.
- The other elephant in the room is the trap. 600 buffalo killed this year. We want hunting opportunities for Native people, we want bison on the landscape. But yet we have YNP killing bison every year. It's not rocket science, folks. 600? It's too many.
- Is it reasonable for there to be a trap at all?
  
- \*\* Technical staff could study the correlation of bison population and bison use of other habitat. I too think that the population limit of 3000 is arbitrary.
- Not based on science. With my experience with bison observation over last 20 years, buffalo have the sense to seek out new suitable habitat. We need to let them expand.
- With more of Fort Laramie treaty tribes starting to hunt that is the biggest elephant in the room and biggest flaw in the plan is the Stevens Creek capture facility — it's shipped far more bison to slaughter than hunt has ever taken.
- \*\* Hunt more sustainable if Steven's Creek facility closed. If it is closed that money could be used for wildlife easements in Madison Valley and Tom Miner Basin.
- This plan is 18 years old and needs to be redone.
  
- Population cap is far too low.
- I would much rather see buffalo hunted than go to capture facility. It's awful.
- I would like to ask that bison population be removed, that Steven's Creek capture facility be removed.
- I ask landowners to recognize that this hunt has been going on longer than you've been here and if you have a problem with the hunt maybe you need to move somewhere else.



Figure 5.—Bison on highway 191, late afternoon, April 24, 2018.

- Bison are genetically pure and need to be returned. I am from Defenders of Wildlife and we has a strategic plan to establish 10 conservation herds of 1000 animals or better.
- We are working with World Wildlife Fund, National Wildlife Federation, working with tribes. We recognize that hunting is a tool but quarantine is the best tool we have.
- Seeing promise and seems like we are at a point of time to start with Stevens Creek being certified, Corwin Springs, Ft Peck. But we need to start. We can see these animals expand onto Great Plains.
- We need this group to get behind this. We need the EA signed and Fort Peck to be online for quarantine. Could have 1200 animals. And should be first.
- ~50% of animals are sero+. Those animals could go to quarantine instead of slaughter and have homes on tribal lands.
- \*\* Conservation partners are willing to help fill the funding gap to see that restoration efforts can begin.
  
- I am a landowner on the west side. I found panel helpful, hearing about other people's experience with bison.
- I worry about the RTR experience, where they thought there would be 25 bison then bumped to 100 now they have 600 and now they have no help and are overgrazed.
- That's my concern. That green map entirely surrounds our private land. I have 15 miles of fence. My concern is for my private land and my home and fencing.
- I think we can work together, find common ground, and make this a reality. But I shouldn't have to lose anything for this to happen.
- \*\* So let's work together, keep communication open, and help find a solution that can help get these bison out on the landscape but not make a few landowners suffer because of it. We need to find some real sideboards that are enforced and we can make this work.
  
- I want to thank the landowners who served on the panel. Important to hear real experiences.
- Also want to thank the Technical Committee to fill information gaps regarding bison in the Taylor Fork. It feels like we are making progress in understanding utilization of the West Side tolerance area. That's great.
- \*\* I want to know keep momentum going and want to see some clear next steps based on info and concerns. What's next? Could we look at each potential migration paths—maybe we could look at each one and determine and work to remove any roadblocks.

- \*\* Regardless of how bison get to Taylor Fork we (Greater Yellowstone Coalition) are ready to pitch in and help, like funding ranger positions, so let's talk.
- I am with the Gallatin Wildlife Association. GNF is going through forest revision where bison are not considered a species of conservation concern. Please comment to Mary that this should be changed.
- Second I want to thank the Technical Committee for their work and to Mark for your willingness to work outside the box.
- \*\* I want to bring up the idea of a study. Have some bison with collars on and see where they go. I think we are misreading some of land owners' levels of tolerance for bison. There are large landowners with easements on their land. I suggest a 24/7 hotline. If we get a call then perhaps tolerance is low; but with no calls tolerance may be fine.
- I am a concerned taxpayer speaker to other concerned taxpayers
- Purpose of operational quarantine is bison conservation. Supposed to be accomplished by new conservation herds. But that is limited by land not by number of bison. The 2<sup>nd</sup> reason/purpose of operational quarantine is to genetically augment conservation herds already out there.
- There is no need for quarantine bison to accomplish these goals. Hundreds of bison are produced every year — they're called babies — at far less cost, and can come from other herds, national parks. We don't need operational quarantine. Operational quarantine is a boondoggle.
- I am with Sierra Club, also want to thank the Technical Committee. I was really encouraged about what I heard this morning and also on the field trip.
- What we heard is that there is a large area of suitable habitat in expanded tolerance area, but as we all know there aren't any bison there. We learned that the primary reason is the heavy bison management, like hazing and hunting, has kept bison from moving to the expanded tolerance area along historic migration routes.
- \*\* So I want to urge Partners to move forward and undertake concrete actions in 2018 to allow bison to get to expanded habitat by removing barriers to migration or helping them move there with assisted migration. We may need to help them if it is to happen in my lifetime.
- I appreciate the comments from landowners. But recall that land is 99% public land. Large public agreement that people want bison on the land. I think we can resolve landowner issues.
- Everyone wants to see this be a success.
- Highway safety is a big issue. Traffic counts on 191 ranging in area of 5000 one way trips. Many of course to Big Sky. But in summer will be higher.
- Very poor communication in tolerance area south of Buck Creek for emergency services, response to injuries, response to accidents.
- 4 feet of snow in Fawn Pass; bison won't go that way into Taylors Fork. All of streams froze over in winter; idea presented that bison not being more than 4 km from water — they will be on the highway headed for Big Sky. Concern about property damage.
- We are in the designated surveillance zone. Quite a cost to do the testing. What does that cost to state of MT? I am concerned about that. MDOL? MFWP? Where do we get that money? Do we take it from health and human services, from schools?
- \*\* Request that new habitat map shown be extended to show prime habitat going north to Livingston and Bozeman.
- Want to talk to you on a personal level. We can get things done on a personal level.
- Policy and economics and politics rule.
- Montana has a unique place in the world.
- We have an opportunity here. We can change the politics of the state. We have to make sacrifices.

*\* Final \**

- Missed this morning; our groups was on the road protecting bison from traffic.
- Last meeting we said we would kill 600-900 bison. Who unilaterally decided to kill almost 1200? Why even have these discussions?
- Taylor Fork. Too much snow. They could have gone there but won't. Over 21 years I have seen 5 bulls there ever. They hang out on the highway; they could go there if they want to but they don't. Just setting up for problems.
- Ridiculous hunt. Just like a mass slaughter house. I am embarrassed for the Native hunters. Would much rather see families feed their family and reconnect culture than go through capture facility.
- Is it just me, or do tribes who don't buy into ship to slaughter are bison suddenly caught in trap when they are out hunting?
- Until you listen to the buffalo, you will just run into these problems.
- \*\* What is the one controllable element? The cattle.
- We have now established the DSA for brucellosis, why don't bison have access to that area?
  
- Thanks to landowners. Thanks to Technical Committee report — clear and much detail.
- I continue to see real opportunity in upper Gallatin and Taylor Fork.
- Lots of what ifs typically focused on negative what ifs? I'd like to see positive what ifs?
- We do a ton of speculating on the negative scenarios. If that's all we do we'll never accomplish anything.
- With some planning we can alleviate landowner concerns.
- \*\* I don't think it would be a big lift to get a plan on paper, 4 migration corridors, try a pilot study to help mitigate the severity of any problems. Let's stop speculating and get some bison in there. Embrace this opportunity.

*\*\* Meeting adjourned \*\**

## Abbreviations

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- AJ—Andrea Jones
- AM—Adaptive management
- APHIS—Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
- BB—Brooklyn Baptiste
- BFC—Buffalo Field Campaign
- CGNF—Custer Gallatin National Forest
- CS—Carl Scheeler
- CSKT—Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribes
- CTUIR—Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- CV—Clay Vines
- CWG—Citizens’ Working Group
- DH—Don Herriot
- DSA—Designated Surveillance Zone
- DW—Dan Wenk
- EA—Environmental Assessment
- EC—Ervin Carlson
- EH—Eric Holt
- GAO—Government Accountability Office
- GNF—Gallatin National Forest
- GW—Germaine White
- GWA—Gallatin Wildlife Association
- GYA—Greater Yellowstone Area
- ITBC—Inter Tribal Buffalo Council
- JC—Jennifer Carpenter
- JH—John Harrison
- JW—Jeremy Wolf
- LG—Leonard Gray
- LW—Leander Watson
- MBOL—Montana Board of Livestock
- MD—Mark Deleray
- MDOL—Montana Department of Livestock
- MDOT—Montana Department of Transportation
- ME—Mary Erickson
- MEPA—Montana Environmental Policy Act
- MFWP—Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks
- MH—Mike Honeycutt
- MOA—Memorandum of Agreement
- MOU—Memorandum of Understanding
- MR—Majel Russell
- MSGA—Montana Stockgrowers’ Association
- MSU—Montana State University
- MV—Mike Volesky
- MW—Mark Warner
- MZ—Marty Zaluski
- NAS—National Academy of Sciences
- NEPA—National Environmental Policy Act
- NGO—Non-governmental organizations
- NP—Nez Perce
- NPS—National Park Service
- NPT—Nez Perce Tribe
- NPTEC—Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee
- NRC—National Research Council
- NRDC—Natural Resources Defense Council
- NT—Neil Thagard
- Park—Yellowstone National Park
- PIOs—Public Information Officers
- PJ—PJ White
- QE—Quincy Ellenwood
- RC—Ryan Clarke
- ROD—Record of Decision
- RF—Rebecca Frye
- RFP—Request for proposals
- RT—Rob Tierney
- RTR—Royal Teton Ranch
- RW—Rick Wallen
- SB—Scott Bischke
- SEIS—Supplemental EIS
- SG—Stephanie Gillin
- SK—Salish Kootenai
- SS—Sam Sheppard
- TM—Tom McDonald
- TR—Tim Reid
- USFWS—US Fish and Wildlife Service
- USGS—US Geological Survey
- WMA—state of MT wildlife management areas
- YELL—Yellowstone National Park
- YNP—Yellowstone National Park

## Addendum A. West Side Bison Tolerance Committee Responses to Landowner Questions

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### GENERAL BISON MANAGEMENT DOCUMENTS AND GUIDELINES

Under Governor Bullock's 2015 Decision Notice for Year-round Habitat for Yellowstone Bison Environmental Assessment, bison are currently allowed to walk north up Highway 191, up to and including access to the Taylor Fork Drainage. Access to the nearby Cabin Creek Wildlife Management Area and the Monument Mountain Unit of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness has been allowed since 2000. Management of bison in these areas falls under the management and monitoring directives of the 2015 Decision Notice. These directives were incorporated into the current Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) Adaptive Management Plan in May of 2016 (IBMP 2016). Further management direction is found in IBMP Operating Procedures adopted annually by IBMP agencies (most recently the 2018 Winter Operations Plan; IBMP 2017). These two documents outline considerable direction, including geographic limits, population ranges, management responses and tools, seasonal expectations, hunting and recreational opportunities, habitat and grazing, monitoring metrics, human safety concerns, and property conflicts. Importantly, because of the many variables and changing conditions both seasonally and year-to-year, the governor's direction to agencies provides "...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." The IBMP has received questions regarding agency actions that may occur if bison move up and into the Taylor Fork. We have grouped questions and interagency responses under the following subtitles.

### BISON AND HIGHWAY SAFETY

1. If 6 bison walked up HWY 191, what if any management of the bison or the traffic will there be? How would the road be managed if there were bison on the highway? If there are reduced speed limits, will they be enforced?

Highway Safety falls under the authority of the Montana Department of Transportation and Montana Highway Patrol (MHP). These agencies are the best resources to answer questions about HWY 191. MHP has detachments in WY, Belgrade, and Big Sky that respond to highway issues.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) does help with safety issues on the highway, but does not respond to haze every animal that is reported on a public road, including elk, deer, bison, moose, or others. FWP will work closely with the Montana Department of Transportation, the Montana Highway Patrol, Gallatin County, and local citizens to discuss safety measures. Significant new signage may be necessary, as may reduced speed limits.

Montana Department of Transportation provides information and data, but they do not set speed limits. There is a process in place to include speed studies and how to handle concerns. This information can be found at: <http://www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/roads/speedlimits.shtml>

2. How often does law enforcement patrol from the south of Ophir School to the YNP line?

Montana Highway Patrol does not track the time troopers spend patrolling particular areas or highways. However, the trooper stationed in West Yellowstone spends several shifts a week in the area between Ophir School (Big Sky) and the Yellowstone Park line. There is an additional vacancy in Big Sky, which if/when filled, will result in additional patrolling in this area.

3. How many tickets are handed out?

85 in 2017; 88 in 2016

4. How many animals are hit per year that you know of?

Our best available knowledge is that 5 bison were struck in 2016, and 3 in 2017, all just west or north of West Yellowstone. There have been no reported human fatalities from accidents involving bison within Yellowstone Park (Adams and Dood 2011).

Department of Transportation collects animal-vehicle carcass records. Using 2006-2017 data from the entire HWY 191 corridor from north of the canyon (mile marker 75) to West Yellowstone (mile marker 0), an average of about 100 animals of all species are hit per year. Carcass records include white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, bighorn sheep, moose, and bison. White-tailed deer are the most common species hit and occur predominantly north of Big Sky. More animal-vehicle collisions occur between Bozeman and Big Sky than between Big Sky and West Yellowstone.

## **BISON AND HUMAN INTERACTIONS**

5. Are there some sort of guidelines or training for landowners on living with bison?

The IBMP partners have sponsored and distributed a brochure entitled “Staying Safe in Bison Country.” Perhaps this document needs reprinting, much wider distribution, or improvement. This information is available at: <http://www.ibmp.info/bisoneducation.php>

6. How long will it take to get FWP folks out to haze bison? Can we haze them? Can we use flash bangs on them? What if the bison come up around our cabins? How quickly can the dangerous situation be managed? Are there guidelines on hazing them and are there fencing guidelines?

In the case of a landowner complaint, FWP would expect to respond within 48 hours, as we would with any game damage complaint. If an emergency arises, landowners should call 911. The closest local law enforcement is the Gallatin County Sheriff’s Office in Big Sky. Landowners can also call 1-800-TIP-MONT, which is FWP’s dispatch number.

Any landowner with safety or property concerns can haze bison as necessary. Gates et al., 2010 recommend employing preventative safety measures when/if possible (e.g., removing food attractants, moving around bison rather than confronting them). If landowners need to haze bison, less-aggressive hazing can be more effective and safer for humans, property, and bison. Examples include: do not separate bison from one another; allow them to stay in a herd; motivate the lead cow to move, and others will follow. If more aggressive measures are needed, hazing with a motor vehicle or use of rubber bullets are acceptable and legal. Regarding the use of “flash-bangs” or cracker shells, federal regulations prohibits use of cracker shells by private citizen unless properly trained.

There are a variety of resources available for guidelines on living with bison (see literature cited) as well as fencing bison (see Page 4, below). (IBMP 2018, Paige 2012, Adams and Dood 2011, and Gates et al. 2010)

7. When folks drive into YNP they are given all sorts of information on the dangers of bison. How will that information be gotten out to folks using the forest and river up this way?

(Also see question 5) FWP and the IBMP agencies can print and distribute the handouts about “Bison Basics” and “Staying Safe in Bison Country” to guest ranches. These handouts are available at: <http://www.ibmp.info/bisoneducation.php>.

The Custer-Gallatin National Forest can work with FWP and other agencies to develop and distribute information regarding recreating safely in bison country. Potential outreach tools may include signs, brochures, flyers, web-based resources, and staff training. In order to maintain a consistent public message, outreach would align with literature previously developed by The Citizen Group on Bison Education with support of the IBMP addressing the basics of bison biology and staying safe in bison country.

8. When we travel into YNP there is almost always a ranger in attendance whenever there are bison near pedestrian areas or roads. Will bison/public interactions be managed in the Gallatin?

(See question 5.) Along with Gallatin County law enforcement, both FWP and MHP respond to safety issues on the highway, but do not respond to every animal that is reported on a public road, including elk, moose, deer, bears, or bison. We do not foresee the need to have rangers present due to bison on the landscape, although FWP wardens will at times be present, and will respond to landowner concerns.

9. How will campers/bison issues be managed on Taylor Fork?

FWP is open to discussing additional measures that may be necessary related to camping and campers, but would be prone to look at bison management similarly to bear or moose management in the same situation. If new signage is desirable, FWP will work with the Forest Service as necessary.

The Custer-Gallatin National Forest currently manages the Taylor Fork as a designated dispersed camping area. In addition, there are two rental cabins (Eldridge and Wapiti) available to the public. Bison safety information can be distributed and made available to campers through methods similar to those currently used for the "bear aware" program. Potential outreach may include signs, brochures, flyers, web-based resources, and staff training.

10. How will snowmobile users in the area be impacted?

FWP is open to discussing additional measures that may be necessary related to snowmobile users, but would be prone to look at bison management similarly to bear or moose management in the same situation. This situation presently exists in and around Yellowstone Park, and recreationists on snowmobiles are expected to behave accordingly. If new signage is desirable, FWP will work with the Forest Service as necessary.

#### General information on bison-human interactions

There are 2 reviews of bison-human interactions in Yellowstone National Park. Olliff and Caslick (2003) summarized data from 1980-1999, and Cherry et al. (in review) summarized data from 2000-2015. Olliff and Caslick (2003) described 79 incidents (range 0-13 per year) with annual Park visitation averaging 2.7 million people per year. The average distance between a human and bison for these incidents was 28.5 feet. There was one death in 1983. Cherry et al. described 25 incidents (range 0-5 per year) with annual Park visitation averaging 3.2 million people per year. The average distance between a human and bison for these incidents was 11 feet. There were no deaths. Both studies indicate photography as the major human activity leading to the encounter; that photographers were approaching just too close to get their picture. The clear finding of these reports is to recommend maintaining respectful distance from bison. The National Park Service (NPS) recommends a minimum distance of 25 yards or greater from wild bison. NPS also recommends observers learn to read the body language of wild bison; if a bison's tail is raised above horizontal, that is a clue the bison is agitated, and an observer should back up and increase distance between themselves and the bison (R. Wallen, personal communication).

Additional information is available from Adams and Dood (2011), who wrote at length about bison/human interactions. They reviewed several case studies from other areas. Although every area has unique qualities and circumstances, learning from what was done elsewhere can be very helpful. The two free-ranging bison programs in Utah have not had any reported incidents of bison threatening or injuring humans, even though the region of the Henry Mountains occupied by bison has seen an increase in public recreational use. As a result of hunting, the Henry Mountains bison have become very wary of humans, with most tending to flee at the sound of a stopping vehicle or the smell of approaching hikers. A similar situation exists on several of Montana's Indian Reservations where bison are hunted. There have been human/bison encounters resulting in light or no injury to humans on Antelope Island and in Saskatchewan; these are rare and anecdotal. Again, bison generally move off when humans enter an area. Wind Cave National Park in South Dakota hosts 600,000 visitors a year with 400 bison and has not reported a bison-related human injury (as of August 2010).

Other places with wild, free-roaming bison include:

- Henry Mountains, Utah: 300,000 acres (4,800'-11,500' with 98.6% public land). Country is steep and dry, bison have adapted to it and use the topography. Managed for 325 adults. Managed with cattle.
- Book Cliffs, Utah: 2.1 million acres, 5% private, 35% Ute Tribe Trust. 7,500-9,000' elevation, arid Colorado Plateau ecotype. 600-650 bison.
- House Rock, Arizona: >60,000 acres of public lands. 5,200-8,000' elevation, desert scrub grasslands, sagebrush, pinyon-juniper. 300 bison.
- Grand Teton, Wyoming: >350,000 acres of public land (Wildlife Refuge, National Park, National Forest) with some use on private lands in Jackson Hole. >6,200' elevation, sagebrush grasslands with long, cold winters. More than 1,000 bison as of 2007
- Sturgeon River Plains, Saskatchewan: >500 mi<sup>2</sup> public and private lands. Aspen forests, wet sedge, dry fescue. 200-400 bison.

## BISON AND FENCES

11. (Questions regarding fences in general) We use jack fencing to keep our horses off the highway. Will Bison respect our fencing or walk right through to get to our irrigated pastures? What changes to our fence would be needed to keep the bison out? How tall? Electric fence has been mentioned... cost? Maintenance issues? Can we add electric to the jack fence or would we need two fences?

Adams and Dood (2011) and Gates et al. (2010) provide a literature review on exclusion and containment fences for bison. They acknowledge management experience is hindered by the limited number of free-ranging herds to learn from, and that communication, observation, and future work will be necessary to develop creative management solutions. Based on these reviews, following are general guidelines:

- Effectiveness of any kind of exclusion fencing will differ based on the motivation of bison to breach the fence. Exclusion fence differs from containment fence; we do not need to discuss how to keep bison in (as on a bison ranch) but we do need to discuss how to keep bison out.
  - If motivation is low, less structure is needed to influence bison movement.
  - If hazed or chased, bison may break through fences.
  - Bison may test fences if they are hungry and there is a food attractant on the other side.
- Electric high-tensile fence can be effective at containment, as evidenced by many miles of it on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation.
  - Maintenance is minimal for this kind of fence if it is well-constructed.
  - High shocks will deter crossings. Energizers on electric fences increase amperage and voltage and power of the shocks.
- Properly-maintained 3 or 4 wire fences deter bison if motivation is low. This is the experience of Turner Ranches
- Woven-wire 48" fence with 2-strand barbed wire tops will be complete exclusion fences to all large wildlife species. This fence should only be considered for small areas (e.g., stackyards) and not be used on large scales (e.g., pastures) as animals, including elk and deer, attempting to cross can get entangled and perish.
- A 6' buck and pole fence along the Northern Range in Yellowstone was not crossed by bison, except by using an irrigation ditch that ran below the fence. They typically walk along it until they find a gate. Generally speaking, unless motivation is high, buck and pole fences provide a visual barrier that deters bison.

Any changes to fencing are entirely a landowner prerogative and decision. Experience has shown that taller fences are not necessary to deter bison. Cost and maintenance are items on which FWP and NGO's have worked cooperatively with landowners, and always remain an option.

12. (Questions regarding landowner liability) What if one of the bison breaks our fence and our horses get out on the highway and cause a wreck? What if a fisherperson touches our electric fence and gets hurt? What if our electric fence causes a fire to start?

Montana law (27-1-724. MCA) provides clear limits to the liability of any livestock or property owner in accidents involving motor vehicles and livestock. The law reads, "a person owning, controlling, or in possession of livestock or a person owning property has no duty to keep livestock from wandering on highways and is not subject to liability for damages to any property or for injury to a person caused by an accident involving a motor vehicle and livestock unless the owner of the livestock or property was grossly negligent or engaged in intentional misconduct." Neither gross negligence nor intentional misconduct applies to the proposed scenario. With proper installation of modern electric fencing technology, neither human danger due to shocking nor fire danger pose a risk.

## **BISON AND HUNTING**

13. If Bison are hunted in the area, how will the gut piles impact the behavior of our other wildlife or will the gut piles be packed out?

Experience has shown that gut piles are scavenged surprisingly quickly, and given the relatively low numbers of bison expected to be in the area, the expectation is that gut piles need not be packed out. That said, hunting seasons are set to avoid gut piles becoming an attractant to bears who may be coming out of their dens in the spring.

14. Will the Native American hunter be hunting other species than bison?

Treaty tribes hunting on Forest Service lands typically do not take other species, but treaties do not necessarily prohibit the incidental take of other species. The presence of bison is not the determining factor of what species may be taken by an American Indian Tribe that have secured off-Reservation hunting and/or fishing rights in their usual and accustomed places. Currently, most Treaty Tribes limit their respective big game hunting in the greater Yellowstone area and focus primarily on the taking of bison.

## **IF BISON WERE TRANSPLANTED**

If 20-25 bison arrived in Taylor Fork by truck:

15. Who would manage them?

FWP has management responsibility for all wildlife, including bison, unless there is a disease concern for livestock that may be present, in which case by law the Montana Department of Livestock has responsibilities as well.

16. Would they be monitored or tracked?

Yes, per the monitoring previously mentioned. (See question 1 above.)

17. What behaviors would be acceptable and what specific management steps would be taken?

(See questions 1, 7, and others, above.)

18. Would there be a hard cap on population growth?

Yes. Presently these caps vary by season, for the entire west side of the Park, from Horse Butte up through the Taylor Fork: January-February, up to approximately 450 bison; March-June, up to approximately 600 bison; July-September up to approximately 250 bison; September-December up to approximately 450 bison. These ranges are found in the 2015 Decision Notice and the May 2016 IBMP Adaptive Management Plan previously mentioned. (See literature cited for access to these documents)

19. Would there be meaningful help for local ranchers for fencing or livestock management?

(See questions 11 and 12 above)

20. Would the bison be removed/shot/... if they repeatedly crossed onto private lands or damaged fences?  
Yes, capture and lethal removal can both be used in these circumstances if property damage or human safety is threatened, by landowner or by agency, per the plans and operating procedures mentioned above.
21. Would there be additional rangers to monitor folks coming up to see the bison?  
(See questions 7 and 9, above)

## LITERATURE CITED

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Available at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/landowners/>
- Additional suggested reading on bison biology and behavior:*
- Olson, Wes. 2005. Portraits of the Bison. University of Alberta Press. Edmonton, AB. 107pp.