

Summary Report from the Interagency Bison Management Plan Meeting (via Zoom) April 1, 2021



First draft presented April 9, 2021 by meeting facilitator Scott Bischke

The following summary report reflects activities at the April 1, 2021 meeting of the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) Partners, held via Zoom teleconferencing. This report comes from the notes of facilitator Scott Bischke¹. The report will be marked *Draft* until formal Partner agreement to make it *Final* at the start of their next meeting. The report is shorter than usual because a full video of the ~3 hr meeting is posted on the meeting webpage at <http://www.ibmp.info/Library/20210401/20210401.php>.

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Attendees

The nine Partner attendees to the Zoom telecon were Ryan Clarke (APHIS), Bing Matt (CSKT), Arnell Abold (ITBC), Mike Honeycutt (MBOL), Martin Zaluski (MDOL), Marina Yoshioka (MFWP), Cam Sholly (NPS-YNP), Quincy Ellenwood (NPT), and Kathy Minor (USFS). In addition to these Partners, ~60 others attended (mostly listening) on the Zoom call. Those included staff and representatives from treaty hunting tribes, as well as Shana Drimal (Greater Yellowstone Coalition) and Nathan Varley (Bear Creek Council), both of whom had been invited to make short presentations.

General public participation

The general public was invited to join the meeting via Facebook Live. The real-time feed of the Zoom telecon was hosted on the NPT Tribal Council Facebook page. Links were provided on the IBMP website meetings pages. Several days before the meeting, a Google Form was made available for public input with a link again posted on IBMP meetings web page. A note told the public that any comments received would be sent to the IBMP Partners. Three comments were received and sent to the IBMP Partners and staff several days after the meeting. Those public comments are also recorded at the end of this report.

Meeting agenda, report structure

Building from their July and December 2020 Zoom telecon experience, the Partners moved smoothly through the 3-hr Zoom meeting, all seemingly aware that a 3-hr rather than all-day meeting demands concise, targeted discussion. The planning team from Lead Partner NPT sought to create a tight agenda worthy of the discussion challenges posed by the Zoom interface. That agenda is provided on the following page.

The Zoom teleconference was recorded and is posted in-full for viewing to the meeting web page (see <http://www.ibmp.info/Library/20210401/20210401.php>). As such, the report that follows should be considered a high-level overview of the meeting.

Agenda (ver 3/30/21) for IBMP Partners Apr1 Zoom telecon

(9 AM - noon Bozeman time; 8 AM - 11 AM Lapwai time; times shown below are Bozeman times)

Per Partner Protocols, the overall goal of the spring meeting is: **Review of winter operations to date and begin collecting, if applicable, ideas for adaptive management changes for the following winter.**

9:20 -- WELCOME!

1. Scott -- meeting logistics
 - o Zoom protocol for Partners, staff, and treaty hunting tribes
 - o Introduction of Kayeioni Scott: her thoughts on slide presentations, microphone management, Facebook Live streaming, monitoring Zoom chat, recording this meeting
 - o Public comments have been and still are being taken via Google Form (not on Facebook Live)
 - o Acceptance of Dec1 meeting report, including full meeting video
2. Welcome from Lead Partner Quincy Ellenwood (and NPT team)
3. Scott summary of update on IBMP key end of year deliverables from Dec1 meeting (Winter Ops Plan, Annual Report)
4. Per Partner Protocols, overall spring meeting goal: **Review of winter operations to date and begin collecting, if applicable, ideas for adaptive management changes for the following winter.**

9:20-9:50 -- 3 min per Partner to summarize their own handling the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and other changes since Dec1, and how those might impact the IBMP

1. Begin with MFWP and introduction of new Region 3 Director Marina Yoshioka
2. APHIS, CSKT, ITBC, MDOL/MBOL, NPS, NPT, USFS
3. Time permitting--CTUIR, ShoBan, Yakama, Blackfeet

9:50-10:05 -- Action items from Dec1 meeting

1. Nathan Varley, Shana DrimalD, Mark D, Mike Thom -- report on meeting to discuss GYC-funded, voluntary carcass collection trailer -- who will the trailer will be transferred to, who will maintain it (people power and \$), when will it be purchased and delivered, etc. Meeting expected to occur on or before Dec 11 (concept was that GYC would like to spend \$ soon and the trailer-building contractor is already waiting for the go ahead)

10:10 - 11:20 -- Review of 2020/21 Winter Operations to date

- o **(A) Improving safety, quality of the north side hunt/improving boundary issues.**
 1. Harvest summaries to date (MFWP, USFS, CSKT, NPT, CTUIR, Yakama, Blackfeet)
 2. Field operations to date (MFWP, USFS, CSKT, NPT, CTUIR, ShoBan, Yakama, Blackfeet)
 1. hunt management summaries
 2. enforcement status -- cooperation, enforcement actions (if any) etc.
 3. field staff communications status -- good, bad, opportunities (all, but including Steph G per Winter Ops leadership on this topic)
 3. Status of hunt-trap coordination; status of hunt removals vs IBMP population goals (Jeremy W, Chris G)
 4. Status of bison distribution (actions or observations regarding bison migration out of Park and distribution across tolerance area) (NPS, MFWP, MDOL, all)
 5. Handling of bison carcasses on the North Side (discussed earlier, may be complete)
 6. Status of Beatty Gulch safety zone markers (Mike T)
 7. Positives, negatives, or opportunities associated with current efforts under the Tribal hunt MOA (Tribal hunt managers)
- o **(B) Bison quarantine and translocation**
 1. Bison Conservation and Transfer Program (BCTP) at Stephens Creek (NPS)
 2. Potential expansion of BCTP facility (NPS, APHIS)
 3. Bison transfers to Fort Peck (APHIS, ITBC, NPS, MDOL)
 4. Bison status at Fort Peck (ITBC)
 5. Bison transfers from Fort Peck (ITBC)
- o **(C) Improve utilization of expanded bison habitat, especially in new West side tolerance area**
 1. Hunt status, west side, including MFWP hunt zone status, tribal hunt (MFWP)
 2. Status change (if any) of habitat manipulation -- with goals potentially to include increased migration of bison and/or increased traffic safety -- along the Hwy 191 corridor (USFS, MFWP)
 3. Re-engagement, if any, with West Side owners (USFS, MFWP, all)

11:20 - 11:25 Opportunity to introduce Adaptive Management topics to the current IBMP Adaptive Management Plan.

11:25 - 11:40 -- SHORT status updates on new or ongoing programs or issues

1. ITBC (also APHIS, MDOL?)
 - o status of Fort Peck assurance testing facility capacity (if not already covered)
2. MBOL, ITBC -- status update on bison-related bills being considered by the Montana Legislature
3. MDOL -- update, if any, on removing brucella abortus from CDC select agent list (i.e., response, if any, to Apr 2020 comments from MDOL to CDC and USDA request for input)
4. NPS -- description, current status, timeline if available of new bison EIS
5. NPS, USFS -- Updates on lawsuits (Neighbors against bison slaughter, Cottonwood Law, more?)

11:40 - 11:55 -- Planning for 2021 and 2022 meetings

1. Lead Partners set, Partner Protocols modified to reflect decisions below
2. Discussion, if any, on upcoming locations? First in-person meeting likelihood?
3. Contingency planning if COVID-19 is still eliminating the chance to meet in large-group, public forums?

	mtg type (expected)	host	Lead Partner	Facilitation costs	mtg location costs	possible mtg location
2021						
• Apr 1	Zoom	NPT	NPT	NPT	na	na
• Jul 21	Zoom	NPT	NPT	NPT	na	na
• Dec 1	in-person	NPT	NPT	NPT	NPT	Lapwai?
2022						
• Spring	in-person	ITBC	ITBC	ITBC	ITBC	Bozeman?
• Summer	in-person	CSKT	NPS	NPS	CSKT	Pablo?
• Winter	in-person	NPS	NPS	NPS	NPS	Chico?

2023 -- return to Partner Protocol schedule for Lead Partner MDOL (who also acts as host for each meeting)

2024 -- per Partner Protocol schedule (USFS is Lead Partner) ...

11:55 - noon -- Final thoughts from Lead Partner Quincy Ellenwood

ADJOURN

....

Meeting opening

Lead Partner Quincy Ellenwood from the Nez Perce Tribe welcomed everyone, said he hoped everyone was being safe, and noted that he hoped the group would meet in person at one of the next meetings. Kayeloni Scott of the NPT, who was running the Zoom call, provided some guidance on Zoom chat, speaker presentations, and so on. Partners started the meeting by declaring the *draft* meeting summary from their December 2020 as *final*, and instructed the facilitator to mark it as such and post to the IBMP website.

Short overviews from multiple agenda topics

PARTNER WELCOMES

Partners and treaty hunting tribes each took ~3 minutes to greet everyone, and spent a bit of time discussing how the COVID-19 pandemic is continuing to impact their work and work groups. Partners initially welcomed Marina Yoshioka as a new Partner in her role as the head of Region 3 of MFWP. Most Partners and treaty hunting tribe representatives spoke of still operating in full pandemic-safe mode (though some mentioned coming out of the more rigorous protocols), most indicated a ramping up of vaccinations for their group, and many said they looked forward to meeting in person again. Some spoke of the difficulties of losing members of their work or social communities. RC said veterinarians from APHIS recently have been helping give human vaccinations for COVID-19.

FOLLOW UP ON POTENTIAL FOR CARCASS MANAGEMENT HANDLING OPTIONS FOR NORTH SIDE

(Nathan Varley Bear Creek Council, Shana Drimal Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Mike Thom CGNF). Lots of ideas have been generated but no consensus really on if there is an agreed upon action. Nathan that he feels about 1/3 would like of people would like the carcasses left in place, 1/3 would like to see them cleaned up but with hunters or non-community members cleaning up, and 1/3 would like carcasses cleaned up with the community pitching in to do so. Shana said GYC has the funds available for creating the dumpster, but not the ability to manage the dumpster, maintenance, hauling and dumping. Mike said it is worthwhile to keep the conversations going, including considering expanding horizons (he noted CGNF tried for the first time working with a group called Buffalo Bridge who helped in gut clean up).

2020/21 WINTER OPS UPDATE

MFWP provided a summary of the IBMP harvest for the 2020/21 season to date. Table 1 shows the data discussed though is not final, and does not include demographics breakdown.

Hunter from	North side	West side
State	6	10
CSKT	0	6
NPT	76	1
SBT	6	0
CTUIR	20	0
CTBYN	7	17
BN	15	5
NAT	0	0
Totals	130	39

*Additionally, 2 bison were wounded and agency dispatched.
0 bison were trapped this season.*

Some key comments from Partners or staff follow:

- Great job from each group providing weekly harvest updates this year.
- CSKT did hunt orientation differently this year. Potential for change in timing for the CSKT hunt.
- Harvest has gotten later and later over recent years; some groups have moved seasons later and others are considering doing so.
- COVID caused some changes, for example hunter training/orientation for the Yakama was done online
- Multiple groups mentioned that communication and coordination went well between state, tribal, and federal partners went well.
- Thanks to the USFS for help on the safety and still need to work
- Thanks to Tribal MOA tribes for hunting coordination; multiple statements that the MOA has been, and continues to be, a positive agreement.
- Very little trapping going on during the hunt this year. Few animals coming out of the Park. Few conflicts with private land owners or highways. Park decided to not trap or bring animals into the quarantine program given the hunt trust goals with the tribes and state hunters.
- Expect population to get bigger (perhaps 5100 or 5200 animals) this year.
- Renewed call to keep adapting? We need to take the next step—for example, how do we get animals further out into the tolerance zone; how do we make hunting an even more useful tool.
- Good effort on transparency and communication; we are making progress and developing and expanding trust.
- Potential to improve MOA with respect to line of guns as animals exit the Park (especially for Beattie Gulch). Hope to pull in other tribes that are not in the MOA.
- NPS thanks to: 1) the tribal hunting groups for the timely reports on harvest; 2) USFS for monitoring on the West Side.
- Limiting hunting on West Side is a double edge sword: 1) better place to hunt (more area to spread out), but 2) hunting slows bison exploration into the tolerance area.
- NPT (EHolt) — We limited hunters to the West Side. We have an MOA, perhaps we can discuss that we put a quota (for each hunting group) on the # of bison taken on the West Side. That could protect the resource and all bison to move into the new tolerance zone.
- TM — West side ideas: 1) Protect the migration by having no hunting in the travel corridor; 2) no hunting males.

- USFS has 3 projects that have a likelihood of increasing forage on the landscape for bison. In litigation but if no issue results there are likely to be three projects starting up this summer.
- *Quarantine:* Right now Park is holding 25 males in Park quarantine facility — expect by December those will transfer to Fort Peck for assurance testing. Also holding 64 females within the Park. We will work with APHIS to break up this group to live in smaller groups for calving. Park expects those females will qualify for transfer by December 2022.
- NPS is initiating a partnership with GYC and Yellowstone Forever to increase the number of animals that can go through quarantine at once. Goal is to have the ability to handle 200 animals in the Park in the quarantine program at once. (Doubtful that Park would expand BCTP beyond this, at least for the foreseeable future.) The Bison Conservation Transfer Program has been successful. If it grows, important for all to realize that more bison will need to be trapped. Recall that not all animals trapped qualify for the quarantine program (about 1 in 3 qualify).
- *Successes:* RC reported that 50 bison graduated from the quarantine facilities in December and APHIS transferred 50 animals to Fort Peck February 5th for assurance testing (Ft Peck has the ability to handle many more animals). While these animals were calved out at Corwin Springs, they also spent some time at Stephens Creek facility thereby again demonstrating the power of positive collaboration and cooperation.
- With no animals trapped for slaughter or for quarantine, we are at ~35% of harvest needed to meet the low end of the population removal goal for this year. Issue is not shortage of hunters but lack of bison leaving the Park where they could be hunted. Transfer of 160 bison since Aug 2019 have distributed bison from Ft Peck to 15 tribes across the country a big success.
- Important to recognize that increasing bison that go to quarantine program may decrease bison that go to slaughter and impact the tribes that count on that program.
- Park seeks to support hunting, quarantine, consigned to slaughter. We need to get better at estimating what we can expect to accomplish in each of the three categories (of these three, predicting quarantine #s is probably the easiest). CS noted that ultimately he hopes to reduce or eliminate # of bison consigned to slaughter each year. This year may prove the point that we can't rely on a single method for controlling bison population.
- ITBC and Ft Peck Tribe big fans of BCTP. ITBC up to 72 member tribes. Trust responsibility to some of the tribes have hunting rights and/or rights to buffalo to promote their sovereignty. When bison graduate from Ft Peck program, ITBC sends out RFP for the animals.
- Ft Peck can handle up to 600 animals. They are splitting their pastures for more management options. Yes, there is a possibility that Yellowstone bison could go from the Park to other assurance facilities someday besides Ft Peck (if all trust responsibilities met, all other rules met, etc).

STATUS UPDATES

Partners provided key status updates on several items: status of updates on a) bison-related bills in the Montana legislature; b) anything further on the Ft Peck quarantine assurance testing facility; c) update on removing *Brucella abortus* from the CDC select agent list; d) description and current status of new bison EIS (expect progress this spring and summer); e) updates on two IBMP-related lawsuits. Interested parties in any of these items are directed to the video recording of the meeting on the meeting website.

Action items identified during the meeting

MIKE THOM

- Collect data from Buffalo Bridge and report at next meeting. Also possible to report on Buffalo Bridge potential to manage the carcass handling program.
- Meet with **Carl Scheeler** (also possibly **Brad Bolte** and **Brian Helm**) on safety and posts—possibly add some more posts?—in the Beattie Gulch area.

BRENDAN KEENAN

- Provide updated harvest numbers to MFWP for the Yakama after talking to Laurel to verify #s.

JASON BREY

- For next meeting, provide update on potential startup of and progress on three habitat manipulation projects on the West side that might increase bison forage (Hebgen Flats, Fir Ridge/Teepee Creek, Red Canyon).

SCOTT BISCHKE (COLLECTION OF ACTION ITEMS)

- change listing on IBMP website of Dec2 IBMP report to "final"
- Work with NPT team to determine if July meeting will be held in person
- Add concept of changing the spring meeting to later since many folks are ending hunt Mar 31. So perhaps next year better if April meeting is later.

Planning for 2021 (and beyond) IBMP meetings

Lead Partner Quincy Ellenwood would like to have an in-person meeting for the summer meeting. He would like to have it in Lapwai (and a winter meeting in Bozeman or Chico Hot Springs) with all safety protocols each group wanted to have (NPT follows strict "EOC" pandemic-protocols). The NPT could provide some sort of written statement of protection protocols.

A discussion followed where Partners expressed agreement and support for such a meeting, but stated concerns that they could not commit at this moment due to the uncertainty of the COVID-19 status.

A suggestion was made to plan for the meeting, but then revert to a Zoom telecom if needed.

A related discussion went to determine if the May hunt managers meeting should be held. Could it be combined with the summer meeting. Options; 1) don't hold the meeting, 2) postpone the meeting, 3) have meeting by Zoom, 4) have the meeting at or before the summer IBMP meeting. No certainty on which of these 4 to pursue.

Tough to do a hybrid meeting with mic'ing people and having a hybrid meeting

QE says that knowing that in mid to late June. As stated by Mike V, plan as an in-person meeting, switch to Zoom as needed.

A suggestion was made to select a second, alternate date, and the 11th of August for the IBMP meeting. The hunt management date could come as Zoom meeting in May or before or after the IBMP summer meeting.

Plan for the July 21st. (Keep August 11th as the backup.) If later Partners change their minds they can push into August. Keep hunt meeting on May 26th, goal is in person but also can swap to the 26th.

Meeting close

The facilitator thanked Kayeloni Scott for running the meeting. Lead Partner Quincy Ellenwood of the NPT thanked everyone for their time—including other entities and especially law enforcement and how well personal relations have improved. Most importantly, he said, I want to keep it safe. We need to speak from our own perspectives, but also we need to listen to each other and do the best we can to come up with good decisions. He wished everyone a good spring and said he hoped to see everyone in person.

Public comment

The following public comments were received through a Google Form that was available before the IBMP meeting until midnight the day of the meeting. Each bullet is from a separate commenter.

- *Comment #1 (Kerry Gunther):* For public safety concerns in regards to gut piles and grizzly bears the Forest Service prohibits leaving gut piles within 200 yards of trails and roads after March 15. How come this regulation is not enforced during the bison hunt? There is almost always law enforcement present during the hunt including tribal game wardens, Forest Service Law Enforcement, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Game Wardens, and National Park Service Law Enforcement Rangers. Most of the time there is law enforcement from more than one agency present, yet nobody enforces the 200 yard regulation. Last summer I watched a jogger have an encounter with a grizzly bear along the trail littered with offal. In this case the bear moved off. However, if someone does get mauled, it will be a Wrongful Injury Lawyer's dream case. A safety regulation in place, but not enforced despite multiple law enforcement being present and witnessing the violations, yet not enforcing the regulations. In this case the safety problem could be solved by simply enforcing existing regulations.
- *Comment #2 (Sue Oliver) :* I live in the Residential Neighborhood in Beattie Gulch adjacent to where the Bison hunt takes place. Killing 100 - 300 bison, elk, deer, and pronghorn on just 20-30 acres adjacent to a residential neighborhood creates problems for local landowners. Much of the offal from the hunt is carried into my yard by scavengers. My yard and the yards of my neighbors become littered with udders, trachea's, fetus parts, fist sized chunks of rancid meat, maggot infested pieces of hide, and pieces of ruemen coated stomach. I can't let my dogs outside in my own yard because they eat the offal which they latter vomit in the house. My dog got a severe bacterial infection from eating offal in the yard. It cost me \$300 in vet bills. If my dogs can get an infection from it, I assume I can too. The udders are likely a hotbed resevoir of brucella. If you are going to kill that many animals on 20-30 acres of land you need to devise a method to remove the tons of offal that is left behind. Thank you in advance for addressing this issue.
- *Comment #3 (Sabina Strauss):* Safety, road usage on the Old Yellowstone Trail and unethical hazing practices remain issues. Trucks continue to block both lanes, preventing travel. When locals try to get home, obscenities are shouted. One Yakama driver tried to back his truck into my vehicle when I wanted him to stop blocking travel so I could get home. Trucks are used as blockades to prevent bison from escaping. Drivers speed on the road. Shooting at others and at the road continues. Armed men stand in the closed area to harass animals. Large rocks are lodged at bison heads and hit them to harass them across the road. Animals lie on the field suffering for over 30 minutes before they bleed out. Animals are shot in the clean zone. Gut piles are left. "A good and clean landscape"? Seriously? Your definition is not mine for good and clean. You may say things are better, but I've not observed that. What will happen when 600 to 800 shooters from one tribe will be on the landscape? Beattie Gulch can't hold that many shooters.

**** Meeting adjourned ****

Abbreviations

- AM—Adaptive management
- APHIS—Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
- BCC—Bear Creek Council
- BCTP—Bison Conservation Transfer Program
- BFC—Buffalo Field Campaign
- CG—Chris Geremia
- CGNF—Custer Gallatin National Forest
- CSh—Cam Sholly
- CSc—Carl Scheeler
- CSKT—Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribes
- CTUIR—Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- CV—Clay Vines
- CWG—Citizens’ Working Group
- DSA—Designated Surveillance Zone
- DW—Dan Wenner
- EA—Environmental Assessment
- EC—Ervin Carlson
- EH—Eric Holt
- GAO—Government Accountability Office
- GW—Germaine White
- GWA—Gallatin Wildlife Association
- GYA—Greater Yellowstone Area
- ITBC— InterTribal Buffalo Council
- 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
- ML—Mike Lopez
- MOA—Memorandum of Agreement
- MOU—Memorandum of Understanding
- MR—Majel Russell
- MSGA—Montana Stockgrowers’ Association
- MSU—Montana State University
- MV—Mike Volesky
- MZ—Marty Zaluski
- NAS—National Academy of Sciences
- NEPA—National Environmental Policy Act
- NGO—Non-governmental organizations
- 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
- RTR—Royal Teton Ranch
- SB—Scott Bischke
- SEIS—Supplemental EIS
- SG—Stephanie Gillin
- SK—Salish Kootenai
- 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