

IBMP Briefing Statement

Agency: Yellowstone National Park
Issue: Transfer of Surplus Bison under the IBMP
Date: August 11, 2009

In April 2009, the IBMP Technical Committee was tasked with evaluating opportunities and constraints for transferring “surplus” Yellowstone bison to distant quarantine facilities for further surveillance and eventual release onto suitable restoration sites (i.e., brucellosis test-negative bison) or to terminal destinations on tribal or other lands for periodic harvest for food or ceremonial purposes (i.e., untested or test-positive bison).

Summary of Findings and Progress:

- The Secretary of the Interior is authorized to dispose of “surplus” bison from the Yellowstone herd (16 USC 1V § 36).
- The interstate transfer of Yellowstone bison is feasible, but constrained by numerous regulatory (e.g., 9 CFR 78; UMR, Chapter 1, Part II), logistical (e.g., expense, long-distance transport, minimum quarantine periods and testing requirements), political (e.g., participation of recipient states), and social (e.g., acceptance of bison) hurdles.
- Many animal health authorities in potential recipient states are unwilling to accept Yellowstone bison, regardless of the extent of testing or assurances regarding quarantine facilities or pastures. Livestock officials and operators do not believe that bison recipients will maintain separation from livestock or that bison “graduating” from quarantine are disease-free.
- The preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement by APHIS and the NPS would likely be required because the proposed transfer of “surplus” Yellowstone bison could have highly controversial environmental effects and involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources (NEPA section 102(2)(E)).

Areas of Consensus:

- IBMP managers intend to increase the use of, and allocation of resources to, management actions that reduce the number of bison sent to slaughter (December 2008 IBMP Adaptive Management Adjustments).
- Some Tribes and public conservation entities are interested in obtaining live Yellowstone bison for food, ceremonial purposes, and to establish new herds or supplement genetic variation of existing wild herds. Some Tribes have also expressed an interest in developing a process to transfer Yellowstone bison to other Tribes.
- Yellowstone bison have ecological, genetic, and cultural values that would facilitate conservation efforts for the species.
- The quarantine feasibility study demonstrated it is possible to certify bison as free from brucellosis. These protocols could be modified to operationally move brucellosis test-negative bison to distant quarantine facilities for further surveillance, certification as brucellosis-free, and eventual release onto suitable restoration sites.
- Difficulties with finding a recipient for bison from the initial cohort in the quarantine feasibility study highlight issues regarding acceptability. If few parties are willing to accept the disease-free cohort of “graduating” bison from this study, demand may be limited for brucellosis-exposed bison. Thus, parties willing to accept disease-free bison from quarantine need to be identified before the bison enter quarantine and meet yet-to-be-defined translocation criteria.

Areas of Concern:

- Consideration of the shipment of “surplus” Yellowstone bison is premature until the quarantine feasibility study is completed.
- Transfers of “surplus” Yellowstone bison could shift focus from reducing seroprevalence to disposition of diseased bison.
- Perceived risk may be minimized by translocating neutered bison that would eventually be slaughtered or hunted by tribes at alternate locations. However even in this scenario, there are potential concerns about the consequences of unrestricted contact between brucellosis susceptible livestock and bison.
- The IBMP managers need to discuss the appropriate/necessary level for briefings and decision-making before embarking on substantive and time-consuming efforts to develop processes to transfer “surplus” Yellowstone bison.
- APHIS needs to begin identifying changes to the CFR that may be necessary to implement the transfer of bison.
- NPS and APHIS need to begin working with the Tribes, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and interested NPS units to discuss potential locations and processes for establishing quarantine facilities for Yellowstone bison on tribal and other lands.

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