Public meeting of the Interagency Bison Management Plan Partners (IBMP) to address Citizens' Working Group (CWG) Recommendations

24 Feb 2012 -- C'Mon Inn, Bozeman, MT

2011/12 Lead Agency: Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks (contact: Andrea Jones; 406.994.6931)

Brooklyn Baptiste—Tribal Chairman; Nez Perce Tribe
Ervin Carlson—President; Inter Tribal Buffalo Council
Mary Erickson—Forest Supervisor; Gallatin National Forest
Pat Flowers—Region 3 Supervisor; MT Fish, Wildlife, & Parks
Christian Mackay—Executive Officer; Montana Board of Livestock
Brian McCluskey—Director; Veterinary Services; W. Region Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
Tom McDonald—Division Manager; Fish, Wildlife, Recreation, and Conservation Division; Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
Dan Wenk—Superintendent; Yellowstone National Park
Marty Zaluski—State Veterinarian; MT Department of Livestock

CWG meeting of 13 Feb 2012

Timeline IBMP Partner decision on CWG Recommendations

- ✓ 2011—CWG met through much of the year (~monthly) to develop recommendations to the Partners
- ✓ Nov30/Dec1 2011—CWG presented recommendations to the Partners at the regular IBMP meeting
- ✓ Jan 2012—IBMP subcommittees met and created list of 34 clarifying questions to the CWG regarding the CWG's recommendations
- ✓ Feb 13, 2012—CWG met all day to respond to IBMP subcommittee questions
- ✓ Feb13-23, 2012—IBMP Partners and subcommittees meet to discuss and formulate near-final responses to CWG recommendations
- Feb 24, 2012—IBMP Partners meet with CWG to present tentative decisions (yes, no, timing) on CWG recommendations
- Feb 24-Apr 9, 2012—CWG opportunity to develop appeal to decisions (yes, no, timing) made by IBMP Partners. A single, unified response requested from the CWG to the IBMP Partners.
- Apr 9-10, 2012
  - CWG opportunity to present appeal(s) to IBMP Partners
  - IBMP Partner final decision on CWG recommendations

Agenda

8 AM	*Scott Bischke, facilitator; all present*	**Welcome, meeting overview** • Introductions of all present • Meeting logistics, format, process, expectations
815	*Subcommittee Chairs*	**Risk reduction [10 recommendations]**
10:15	***	***Break*** *(here or as called for by the Partners)*
10:30	*Subcommittee Chairs*	**Population Management [16 recommendations]**
12:00 noon	****	**Lunch**
1 PM	*Subcommittee Chairs*	**Population Management (continued)**
2:30		***Break*** *(here or as called for by the Partners)*
3:00	*Subcommittee Chairs*	**Habitat Effectiveness / Habitat Expansion [7 recommendations]**
5:00	***	***Adjourn***

Process for the 3 meeting sections associated with each section of CWG recommendations

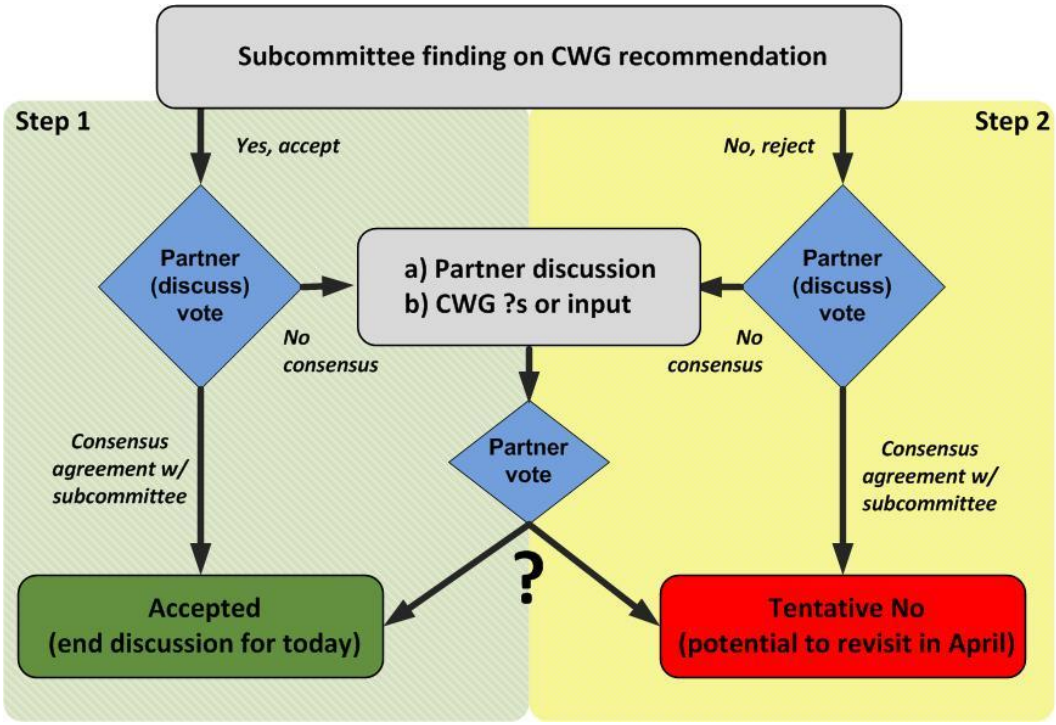

Table 1.—Process slide for subcommittee recommendations

CWG Rec#	Sub-comm priority for implementation	If accepted	If rejected
RISK REDUCTION first, then repeat for POPULATION MANAGEMENT and HABITAT EFFECTIVENESS / HABITAT EXPANSION…			
1		☐ already in progress ☐ to be implemented ___	☐ not possible now due to ____ ☐ potential date & conditions for revisiting ___
2		☐	☐
etc	etc	etc	etc

November 30th, 2011
Chico Hot Springs

Citizens Working Group on Yellowstone Bison

Presentation of Recommendations to IBMP Partners

INTRODUCTION

These Citizens Working Group recommendations are the result of a collaborative effort among diverse interests seeking responsible management solutions for Yellowstone bison. After nearly a year of discussions, we were able to come to consensus on many significant issues, as laid out in this document. We strove to find both broad and detailed solutions, as we were not bound by fragmented agency authority that sometimes precludes an integrated approach to assessment and management of landscapes. We hope these recommendations will serve as a starting point for agency action involving continued public discussion.

BACKGROUND

At the August, 2010 meeting of the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) Partners, the agency Partners reaffirmed their desire to see the creation of an open citizens' process. Several Partners noted that they would be open to, and highly motivated to listen to, input from a diverse, citizen-formed working group (CWG) that included strong representation from livestock and bison conservation interests. In response, Matt Skoglund of the Natural Resources Defense Council and Ariel Overstreet of the Montana Stockgrowers Association convened an initial CWG meeting in November, 2010. Their assessment was that the time was ripe for a CWG to provide input to the IBMP process with the goal to get a diverse group of Montanans together to try to move the issue of Yellowstone bison forward. The IBMP Partners agreed to provide funding for professional facilitation of a CWG.

The first public meeting of the Yellowstone Bison Citizens Working Group was convened on February 22, 2011 in Bozeman. This and all subsequent meetings were facilitated by Virginia Tribe. The initial and subsequent meetings were open to any and all interested citizens, however continued attendance over the course of the series of meetings was expected. The group's ground rules included welcoming any and all participation by citizens, but with the recognition that late comers would need to integrate into the state of the discussions, i.e., late comers could not reset the process but must accept where the group has arrived at from its past deliberations and be willing to go forward from there. Meetings were held monthly from February through November, with all but one occurring in Bozeman (the May meeting was held in Gardiner). Typically 25-30 citizens attended, and in every meeting there was a diversity of interests that included local residents living with bison, business owners, livestock producers, sportsmen, bison conservation advocates and other interested citizens. The group operated by consensus.

The Yellowstone Bison Citizens Working Group discussed a large range of issues relating to bison and cattle management, and brucellosis. Ultimately, the CWG focused its discussion on three major topic areas:

I. Brucellosis risk reduction,
II. Bison population management, and
III. Bison habitat.

This report describes the actions we were able to reach consensus on within these three topic areas. In addition, an education group was formed to suggest approaches to create and implement well-designed education programs covering a number of topics and with a variety of useful approaches.

Several overlapping actions were recommended repeatedly in separate discussions by the three different working group subcommittees (risk reduction, population management, and habitat) because each group recognized the value of that action to achieving the desired end results in their topic area. For example, these overlapping recommendations among the three topic groups included completion of the statewide Montana bison conservation plan, the importance of fair chase hunting as a management tool, the need to emphasize risk reduction efforts in livestock, and the need to remove obstacles to further research on *Brucella abortus*. We recognize that many of the CWG recommendations are not new, and indeed many are already underway. What is new is the degree of agreement about prioritization and the willingness to work openly toward mutually satisfactory solutions.

The participants in the CWG are pleased to present our consensus recommendations. We appreciate the financial support provided by the IBMP Partners to professionally facilitate our meetings, without which progress would have been difficult if not impossible. We recognize that the IBMP Partners cannot implement all of these recommendations on their own, but that continued progress on bison management will require the active participation of all interests.

I. RISK REDUCTION

Issue Statement and Rationale

Although many people would *like* to eradicate the disease in wildlife, we recognize that it is not possible to do that in the foreseeable future. Therefore it makes sense to focus primarily on reducing risk of transmission. We don't want debate and disagreement about the theoretical possibility of eradication to displace or distract from the more immediate, practical, cost-effective, and manageable obligations to minimize brucellosis occurrence in livestock. We believe that this strategy is proportionate and well-targeted because actual transmissions of brucellosis from wildlife to livestock are infrequent considering the presence of exposed elk in the Greater Yellowstone Area and bison in and near Yellowstone National Park for decades. We recognize that disease transmission is not the sole concern but believe that responsibly, explicitly addressing brucellosis risk will be a valuable prerequisite for an honest, constructive strategy for addressing other bison-related concerns.

Guiding Principles

a) Minimizing the risk of brucellosis transmission is desirable.

b) Risk of transmission is greater when animals are concentrated.

c) Vaccination of livestock is the most valuable available tool for reducing risk of disease transmission and for protecting public health.

d) Bison represent cultural and spiritual values to many people.

e) Our society's management of wild bison reflects important value judgments about wildlife and our relationship to it.

f) Range management strategies may help reduce risk.

g) We recognize that there are critical time periods (seasonality) for economic viability of livestock producers.

h) Although many people would like to eradicate the disease in wildlife, we recognize that that is not possible in the near term. Therefore it makes sense to focus primarily on reducing risk of transmission.

i) We recognize that even if risk of disease transmission is effectively eliminated, there will be other sources of conflict relating to bison management.

j) Best management practices with regard to livestock are the responsibility of producers.

Recommendations

1. Reduce risk of transmission of brucellosis from wildlife to livestock by improving implementation of currently known livestock vaccine protocols, and through further research and refinement of livestock vaccination.
2. Work with livestock industry to work toward adoption of mandatory statewide Official Calfhood Vaccination (OCV).
3. Lobby to modify the Select Agent List (Homeland Security) to enable improved livestock or other vaccine research on *Brucella abortus.*
4. Strongly encourage continued funding and research to develop a practical test on live animals to distinguish between infected and resistant animals. Given the epidemiological importance of building 'herd immunity,' it is important to develop the tools to allow us to stop managing animals as if seropositive is equivalent to 'infectious.'
5. Provide a clearinghouse and other opportunities to gather and report on research related to *Brucella abortus* and management tools from various research institutions to present to the public annually.
6. Reduce livestock/wildlife interactions at key seasons. This will include building upon and improving techniques already in use as well testing and application of other innovations (e.g.

strategic hazing using low-stress animal handling methods; targeted fencing; guard dogs to keep wildlife off feedlines/haystacks/calving areas; trained dogs to locate fetal material to enable cleanup, and so forth).

7. Reduce artificial concentrations of animals (elk or bison) that may be exacerbating transmission. This principle applies to a variety of locations, and will require a variety of implementation strategies (e.g. at Stephens Creek where bison are intermittently confined; on private lands with restricted hunting where elk congregate; bison crowding in/near the Park; Wyoming feed grounds).
8. Remote vaccination of wild bison using the current vaccine and delivery method as a means of reducing risk of transmission should not be a priority at this time.
9. Education – to be addressed by the education group.
10. Advocate for completion of a Statewide Bison Management Plan. This is an overarching and persistent theme within the CWG. It is necessary not only as part of population management and habitat planning, but is also a sensible step toward developing risk management that is consistent with what we know about both bison and elk, in the interest of both livestock producers and wildlife advocates.

Desired End Result

If risk reduction and education are successful, there will be:

i. Better understanding among public and interest groups about actual risks of disease, economic risk of disease, and other risks associated with bison in the current environment.

ii. Reduced risk.

iii. View of bison as more asset than liability.

iv. Improved discussion of finding habitat for wild bison inside and outside the Greater Yellowstone Area.

v. Greater likelihood of agreement on improved population management approaches.

vi. More constructive and direct discussion of how to address concerns about management of the range resource.

vii. Development of an ongoing program of monitoring bison and human behavior. This learn-as-we-go approach will influence management decisions.

viii. Landowners and residents will have an improved understanding of how to live with bison.

II. POPULATION MANAGEMENT

Issue Statement and Rationale

There is disagreement among agencies and the public about a population target for Yellowstone bison, what a target means, how it is determined and how management will occur given a target. There are sustainable, manageable bison populations in and around Yellowstone National Park. Federal and state agencies have different responsibilities when it comes to managing bison, and populations targets will depend on available suitable habitat both inside and outside the Park. Successful population and risk management strategies can facilitate making additional suitable habitat available for bison.

Guiding Principles

a) Bison can be an asset for Montana and other interests, such as Tribes, and an informed public is better able to see bison as an asset.

b) Population management means not just population levels but also populations in designated areas, and consequently, population management has a strong connection to both available, suitable habitat and risk reduction.

c) Herd dispersal is a legitimate population management tool. At the same time, bison may not be tolerated in all areas. Acceptable population levels will depend on risk management strategies.

d) Wild bison are wildlife, not livestock, and should be managed more like wildlife. One factor in their management is the concern about brucellosis being transmitted from bison to cattle.

e) Seasonal weather events are important factors influencing population management.

f) Hunting is an effective tool for managing bison populations and offers sport hunting opportunities.

g) Translocation (capture, transport and release) is an effective tool for managing the Yellowstone bison population, improving genetic diversity and allowing for establishment of bison conservation herds.

h) Translocation should not result in brucellosis seropositive bison being put in new locations outside the current Designated Surveillance Area (DSA) or along the edges of the current DSA.

i) Legal mandates and administrative policies for managing natural resources, including bison, differ between the National Park Service and the State of Montana.

Recommendations

1. Modify the Interagency Bison Management Plan Zones 1, 2, and 3 with an eye to finding better habitat solutions particularly in light of changes that have occurred since zones were designated in 2000. Identify habitat that can alleviate population pressure, including available public and private lands, and potential habitat acquisition as well as potential funding sources.
2. Strive to manage bison as wildlife, and complete, implement, and support a Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks management plan that includes setting bison population objectives and hunting strategies as a priority population management tool.
3. Make hunting a bigger component of bison management and consider different seasons or other opportunities to increase the impact of hunting. Outside the Park, the main means for controlling bison abundance and distribution should be state-administered and tribal hunting. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks should test new methods for dispersing hunting in time and space. A late-winter hunt for yearlings only should be tested for hunter interest and public acceptance. "Depredation" hunts should be available throughout the year and used to manage bison distribution. Other means of population control should include fencing bison out of areas where they are not welcome, and using fire, fertilizers or other habitat management to attract bison to areas where they are welcome. Lethal removal by agency personnel should be a last resort.
4. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the Tribes hunting Yellowstone bison should work more closely together to set collective hunt targets and to document the hunting success numbers.
5. Agree on and establish a target population range that is biologically and ecologically acceptable and accounts for a variety of public interests. As Interagency Bison Management Partners, agree on criteria for evaluating and determining a population range and appropriate management tools, such as:
    a. Winter range outside the Park (target population range could change to reflect changes in habitat availability),
    b. Risk factors,
    c. Individual agency management mandates, constraints and responsibilities (such as the National Park Service's mandate to manage its resources unimpaired for future generation and its natural regulation policy),
    d. Genetic diversity, population structure and demographics, reproduction, and distribution,
    e. Realistic opportunity for addressing private land owners' concerns, and
    f. Hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities.

6. When bison have to be removed because of high migration numbers, management constraints, safety, etc., the priorities should be (in order):
    a. Hunting outside the park,
    b. Moving them to nearby appropriate available lands,
    c. Translocation from the Yellowstone area (capture, quarantine, transport and release), and
    d. Lethal removal by managing agencies.
7. Quarantine should be economically justified in comparison with other means of producing *Brucella*-free Yellowstone bison for conservation purposes.
8. In order to locate bison to lands elsewhere, Montana should develop and implement a translocation process for bison leaving quarantine. The quarantine process should minimize infrastructure requirements for places receiving bison.
9. Determining where bison completing quarantine will go and *how* they will be restored and conserved on the landscape, with the highest priority on managing them as public and tribal wildlife, must precede capturing bison and implementing quarantine. Recipients of quarantined bison must be identified and an acceptable, appropriate translocation process must be in place prior to quarantining Yellowstone bison. This determination of where bison will go should be integrated with all Fish, Wildlife and Parks or other assessments of relocation possibilities for wild bison in Montana.
10. Bison translocation and bison movement should not include moving seropositive animals outside the current DSA, and may preclude relocating seropositive animals to new areas within the DSA with the intent of establishing new herd ranges. The intent is to avoid establishing new sources of disease and new disease risks to cattle.
11. Hazing of bulls should be minimized, unless there are issues with property damage or safety, because they are not a factor in the issue of brucellosis transmission. Hazing of newborn calves should be minimized for humane reasons.
12. Discuss expected adverse weather events (similar to fire management) and work with involved entities (public and private) to develop and agree on contingency plans.
13. Develop and work with the livestock industry to implement an effective cattle vaccine and protocol to reduce the risk of transmission and make bison presence/translocation more acceptable. Support/secure funding for ongoing vaccine research.
14. Lobby for removing the significant barriers that exist for *Brucella abortus* research because of the select agent listing.
15. Develop and implement a strong, factual education component so an informed public is involved in the discussions.
16. Outside the Park, hazing and removals should be minimized in selected, suitable areas to establish year-round populations of Montana bison. This approach should be pursued incrementally in a “learn as we go” fashion. This will be a public process that identifies the boundaries of the area and a contingency plan if bison leave that area.

Desired End Results

i. Bison population targets are agreed-upon and explained. In order to discuss bison population targets, we need to have agreed-upon target ranges and be able to explain all the factors that are considered in establishing target ranges that ensure, sustainable, and manageable populations of bison.

ii. The unique genetic diversity of Yellowstone bison is protected. There is significant interest in protecting and conserving the genetic diversity of the Yellowstone bison, and that diversity can be affected by how we manage the bison.

iii. The DSA is not expanded. (Any expansion of the current DSA will create additional hardships for producers and the recommendations are intended to ensure the DSA is not expanded.) The rights of private property owners are respected. Issues relating to bison presence on private property should be resolved.

iv. A variety of tools are used for managing bison. Hunting; moving bison to nearby areas; translocation of brucellosis-free bison to nonadjacent areas; and lethal removal are possible tools if bison must be removed when population targets are exceeded. Agencies are working together to minimize and eventually eliminate the mass slaughter of bison. Hunting opportunities are available for State-authorized and tribal hunters.

v. Translocation target areas must be determined if that tool is to be used. Translocation may be an appropriate tool when bison must be removed from the areas immediately north and west of Yellowstone. Since translocated Yellowstone bison must go through quarantine first, Montana should ensure that before an operational quarantine is fully implemented, translocation target areas are identified and an acceptable, appropriate translocation process is in place that only moves brucellosis-free bison.

III. HABITAT EFFECTIVENESS/HABITAT EXPANSION

Issue Statement and Rationale

The rationale for our habitat recommendations is based upon the fact that the current bison population does not have access to enough year-round habitat. Significant habitat, however, exists outside Yellowstone National Park which includes National Forest lands. We'd like to see bison have access to more of this habitat allowing for more fair-chase hunting as a management tool which is more desirable than the expenditure of taxpayer dollars for haze, capture, and slaughter practices. That said, we think that local public input (i.e. residents and private property owners) is critical to habitat expansion and should be given a high priority in the process. The habitat exists, win-win solutions to protect landowners exist, and we hope to see the winter and year-round habitat expanded for the bison population.

Guiding Principles

a) We believe that bison should be managed. We recognize that some bison are wildlife and some are commercially owned.

b) We believe that Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks has a right and a responsibility to manage brucellosis-free bison as wildlife in the State of Montana.

c) We recognize that there are varied economic and cultural interests associated with bison.

d) Yellowstone National Park bison need year-round habitat and the Park has limited year-round habitat. We believe there are year-round opportunities for bison outside the Park.

e) We recognize that there are public and private property rights issues associated with bison habitat and bison management.

f) We believe that agencies should acknowledge their responsibility to allow bison on State and Federal lands managed as wildlife habitat.

g) We believe that feed grounds are not legitimate alternatives to wildlife habitat.

h) We believe any translocation of Yellowstone bison to an area where they would be geographically separate from Yellowstone herds should be brucellosis free.

i) We believe brucellosis-free bison should be available to entities/localities that desire them and are adequately prepared to accept and manage them as wildlife.

j) We acknowledge Tribes' cultural and other interests in restoring bison to Tribal lands and life ways and recognize that their management strategies might be different than ours.

Recommendations

1. Identify public lands that could/should be open to bison year-round in accordance with state and federal law.
2. Systematically identify suitable, available habitat outside Yellowstone National Park in the Greater Yellowstone Area (i.e., Federal, State and Private lands)
3. Develop and implement strategies that manage bison as wildlife on those lands, specifically:
    a. Hebgen Basin
        i. Designate Horse Butte Peninsula and the Flats as year-round bison habitat by May 2012 following an adequate public process for this management change.
        ii. By the end of 2012, interview and map landowners to identify where bison are welcome, unwelcome, which landowners are on the fence and what their reservations are.
        iii. By the end of 2013, implement adequate fencing or acceptable alternatives.
    b. Gardiner Basin

i. By the end of 2012, interview and map landowners to identify where bison are welcome, unwelcome, which landowners are on the fence and what their reservations are.

ii. By the end of 2013, implement adequate fencing or acceptable alternatives.

iii. Following the interview process and implementation of fencing/alternative strategies, consider designating the Gardiner Basin year-round habitat using an adequate public process.

c. Beyond the Gardiner Basin

i. Based on a minimum of two years of bison experience in the Gardiner Basin, and

ii. Using adequate public process, consider allowing bison to roam on Dome Mountain Ranch, Dome Mountain Wildlife Management Area and surrounding lands with landowner concurrence.

d. Upper Gallatin/Taylor Fork/Cabin Creek/Porcupine/Buffalo Horn Creek, etc.

i. Begin a public process to evaluate opportunities for reintroduction and management of bison in this area, including within Yellowstone National Park.

ii. Start work to amend/alter State and Federal Management Plans and other decisions to account for the presence of bison on the landscape and take responsibility/be accountable for successfully implementing those plans regarding bison.

e. Additional Habitat Areas

i. Immediately initiate and complete by the end of 2013 the statewide bison management plan to restore wild bison to additional biologically suitable, socially acceptable areas.

Desired End Results

i. Expanded habitat with private land-owner concerns addressed.

ii. Habitat expansion and use modification that results in minimal use of management tools such as hazing, capture, slaughter, invasive procedures, etc.

iii. Measurable, annual results.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Although the CWG has chosen to focus first on areas of agreement in the interest of fostering constructive action as soon as possible, we understand that areas of uncertainty and even disagreement will arise as implementation of recommendations and longer-term planning get underway. That is the essence of dialogue. We recognize as well that some key players are not yet fully engaged in our conversation. By acknowledging that this document represents a beginning more than a conclusion of dialogue, we anticipate that discussion with the IBMP partners on November 30th and within the CWG will lead to planning for ongoing mechanisms for citizen involvement with the future of bison management. This could include a variety of activities, including, for example, involvement with: educational items listed above; development of the State-wide bison management process; collaboration with tribes and agencies to develop sound hunts and neighborhood living-with-bison assistance, and so forth. Although it is premature to spell out the details of a possible future role of the CWG or its members, this document does provide a foundation for shifting our region's bison management from reflexive conflict to respectful, informed change.

At one of our early meetings, a CWG member predicted, “we will all be changed by this process.” It is now our duty to share the lessons from that change with a broader circle, in the best interests of wildlife, people, livestock and our shared landscape.