

Summary Report from the Interagency Bison Management Plan Meeting November 19, 2015



First draft presented 30 November 2015 by meeting facilitator Scott Bischke

The following summary report reflects activities at the November 19th, 2015 meeting of the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) Partners, held at Chico Hot Springs Resort in Pray, MT. This report comes from the notes of facilitator Scott Bischke¹. The report will be marked “Draft” until formal Partner agreement before the start of their next meeting. The nine Partner attendees were Don Herriott (APHIS), Tom McDonald (CSKT), Ervin Carlson (ITBC), Rob Tierney (MBOL), Martin Zaluski (MDOL), Sam Sheppard (MFWP), Quincy Ellenwood (NPT), Daniel Wenk (NPS-YNP), and Mary Erickson (USFS-CGNF). In addition to those at the deliberative table, ~25 staff members from across IBMP organizations and ~30 members of the public were present at various times during the day.

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Action items identified

Table 1.—Action items identified during this meeting

| # | Who | What | By when |
|---|----------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | SB | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post August 2015 meeting notes to IBMP.info as final • Make facility reservations for 2016 IBMP meetings • Post to ibmp.info—presentations and other materials from this meeting, listing of 2016 meetings • Update Partner Protocols to reflect recent changes in personnel | ASAP |
| 2 | MFWP | MFWP agrees to take on hosting the weekly phone calls in support of winter operations. SS expects these will occur on Tuesday mornings to better allow groups to collect and analyze data from the weekend. SS requests that Partners send him the email of those whom they want involved in these calls. | As appropriate to need |
| 3 | Habitat Subcommittee | Forest Service and YNP work with treaty hunting Tribes to develop landscape analysis and habitat restoration recovery efforts | Before next IBMP mtg |
| 4 | All Partners | Actions associated with completing the 2015-16 Winter Ops Plan | Via timelines as shown in this report |
| 5 | All Partners | By Dec 10—All Partners provide Final input on the Draft 2015 Annual Report (ver091515) to NPS (to PJ White, with CC: to Scott Bischke). | |

Agreeing to previous meeting minutes

The facilitator asked if there were any objections or changes to the draft meeting report from the August 2015 IBMP meeting, and noted the report has been available in draft for review since shortly after the August meeting. No objections were brought forth. Thus the facilitator, per Partner Protocols, is to post the August 2015 meeting notes to IBMP.info as “final” (** **action item 1**).

2015-2016 Bison Hunt

BACKGROUND (WALT ALLEN / RICK WALLEN)

- Review USFS proposal regarding Beattie Gulch area (Lapwai meeting)
- Tribal hunt subcommittee formed to review issues/make recommendations
- Presentation can be found at <http://www.ibmp.info/Library/20151119/20151119.php>

Walt Allen began by reminding Partners of the five alternatives for managing the hunt in Beattie Gulch that he presented in Lapwai at the Partner’s August meeting. The five alternatives, described narratively below, are

- (1) Alternative #1 : No Hunt Closure (no shooting/field dressing/attractants)
- (2) Alternative #2 : Alternative #1 with no hazing (as *specifically* related only to the hunt)
- (3) Alternative #3 : Total Beattie Gulch closure
- (4) Alternative #4 : Designed & Adaptive constraints at Beattie Gulch
- (5) Alternative #5 : “Fence-off” Alternative #1 Closure

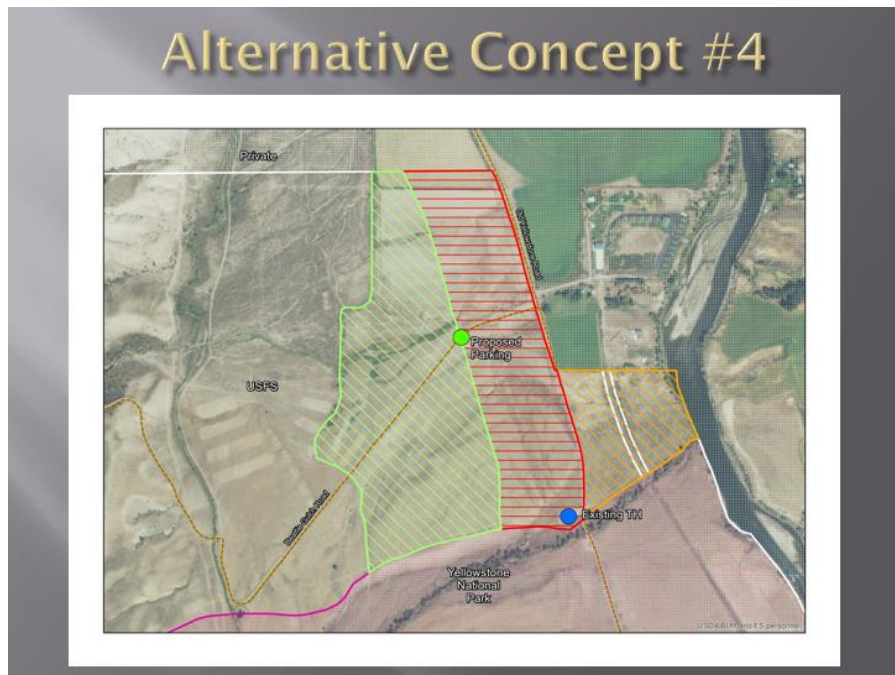


Figure 1.—An example of one of five alternatives for managing the hunt in the Beattie Gulch area, as presented to the IBMP Partners by Walt Allen at their August 2015 meeting and referred to again at this meeting.

Rick Wallen noted that among the many concerns voiced among Partners, staff, public, and hunters about the problems of hunting in Beattie Gulch, two are preeminent:

- *Public safety/relations*—issues of public and nearby resident safety due to gunfire, traffic snarls, visceral impact of bison being killed and remains being left behind, grizzlies feeding on carcasses
- *Firing line effect*—occurs as bison move out of YNP and into Beattie Gulch, driving bison back into the park where they can't be hunted and preventing dispersal to a larger area available to bison throughout northern portion of the Gardiner Basin

Carl Scheeler (CTUIR) said that dispersal of animals would address many of the issues noted. However, those animals, per Carl, are stopped short at the trap. And whether real or perceived, Carl noted, bison in the trap can't be hunted and many others don't move beyond that point. Use of the trap reflects old thinking, he said, not the current situation. Carl's thoughts led into the following presentation.

TRIBAL TREATY HUNT SUBCOMMITTEE (CARL SCHEELER)

- Mutual goals
- Long-term and short-term measures
- Proposal and conditions
- Carl's presentation, which is largely repeated here, can be found at <http://www.ibmp.info/Library/20151119/20151119.php>

At their August meeting in Lapwai, the APHIS, MDOL, MFWP, NPS, and USFS all stated acceptance of the 2015-16 harvest recommendations provided by NPS (i.e., removal of 1000 bison). The tribes—Partners CSKT and

NPT, as well as treaty tribes CTUIR and ShoBan—all stated disagreement with the plan. As a result the Tribal groups met in September to develop an alternative proposal, as presented by Carl.

The Tribal Treaty Hunt Subcommittee proposal focused on the Gardiner Basin, and particularly the Beattie Gulch area. It noted these challenges:

- Small, dissected hunt areas
- Long history of hazing and limited herd memory for use of habitats outside the park
- Unpredictable weather and movement of bison
- Hunting areas close to housing and in the public view
- Hunting activities near park boundary that limit bison movement out of the park and can cause health and human safety issues
- Multiple hunt parties pursuing a limited number of animals
- Risk of USFS continuing to take unilateral action to restrict the hunt area due to real or perceived health and human safety issues associated with hunting near homes and attraction of grizzly bear

The Tribal Treaty Hunt Subcommittee proposal recognized six mutual goals:

- Expand harvest opportunities for tribal treaty hunters throughout the hunting season by increasing the number of bison available and expanding their distribution on open and unclaimed lands outside of YNP.
- Improve bison use of habitats available outside YNP including lands in open and unclaimed status where treaty harvest is permissible.
- Establish bison “herd memory” of the extensive and prolonged use of public lands outside YNP.
- Improve hunter safety and the quality of the hunt by expanding bison distribution into all available hunt areas and better distributing hunters.
- Reduce health and safety concerns created by concentrating harvest at Beattie Gulch.
- Reduce the likelihood that the USFS may place further restrictions on bison hunting in portions of the Beattie Gulch area or elsewhere where health and human safety issues may arise.

The tribal groups set an objective for their proposal to develop mutually acceptable regulations that provide for regular predictable periods for bison to migrate out of the park on the west side of the Yellowstone River while minimizing restrictions on treaty and sport harvest. Under that objective, any regulation proposed should:

- have a high probability of achieving the objective of improved bison distribution and improved availability to hunters;
- maintain some opportunities for hunting open at all times within the Gardner Basin and West Yellowstone hunt areas;
- be simple and clear to limit any enforcement issues and eliminate the possibility of misunderstandings by hunters;
- be predictable to permit hunters surety and confidence in planning their hunts; and
- would be reevaluated annually for effectiveness and level of realized benefit to the involved tribes and adjusted accordingly.

The group then put forth four short term and four long term measures for addressing bison distribution and hunter safety and hunt quality (Table 2):

Table 2.—Proposed short- and long-term measures for bison management (Tribal Treaty Hunt Subcommittee)

| Proposed <i>short-term</i> measures | Proposed <i>long-term</i> measures |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address barriers to natural migration on west side of Yellowstone River caused by hunting through implementation and monitoring of special hunt regulations • Stop use of trap during hunting season • Expand hunting as primary tool to manage population through increased success of tribal and state harvest • Pursue better access to retrieve game from USFS lands and YNP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address habitat quality both within and outside the park through partnerships between Tribal co-managers, with NGO’s, Federal agencies, and States • Encourage movement of bison within the park to facilitate distribution outside the park (habitat enhancement and hazing into under or unutilized habitats and migration corridors) • Get rid of trap in YNP and move trap to a more appropriate location at the limit of bison migration/tolerance zone on USFS lands • Address barriers to natural migration on west side of Yellowstone River caused by human development and ownership patterns with focus on the narrow corridor on the west side of the Yellowstone River |

With the proceeding materials as backdrop, Carl then presented the Tribal Treaty Hunt Subcommittee’s proposed state and Tribal hunting regulations for the remainder of the 2015-16 season, as follows:

Curtail all hunting activity in the Gardner Basin on the west side of the Yellowstone River every other week (Monday – Thursday) beginning the second full week in September and continuing through March 31st with exceptions for holidays. The following conditions apply:

- (1) *YNP must agree to keep trap closed until March 31st*
- (2) *Forest Service and YNP work with Tribes on access to retrieve game*
- (3) *Forest Service and YNP work with Tribes to develop landscape analysis and habitat restoration recovery efforts*

A great deal of discussion followed Carl’s presentation of the Tribal proposal, and continued throughout the day. Key points of those discussions not captured elsewhere are recorded under the section of this report titled, “2015-2016 Winter Operations Plan (PJ White).”

DISCUSSION OF HUNTING ISSUES (PJ WHITE AND OTHERS)

PJ provided an NPS response to the tribal proposal, with thoughts and questions about the ramifications of accepting that proposal. PJ’s presentation, while largely repeated here, can be found at <http://www.ibmp.info/Library/20151119/20151119.php>.

Considering Treaty Hunt Tribes’ Proposal: No hunting west of the Yellowstone River during Monday—Thursday every other week; September 15th through March 31st, with exceptions for holidays

- Implications
 - Hunting 19-24 days per month means a 36% reduction in hunting west of the Yellowstone River
 - Number of bison in Gardiner basin increases?

Condition 1: NPS keep Stephens Creek trap closed until the last tribal hunt is complete (March 31st)

- What is the social tolerance and feasibility for hunting?
 - Certainly not 800 bison at present
 - Maximum harvest (322) in 2014 (258 north)
- Impact = NPS needs to do all shipping of bison during late pregnancy and calving or, more likely, no shipping at all

- Result = a growing bison population (5,000+)
 - Growth not sustainable without more habitat
- Currently, few captures on weekends (Friday—Sunday) or holidays when most hunts occur
- What is the real need or request: (1) more bison available for harvest, (2) no capture and shipping, or (3) both?

Condition 2: NPS and USFS work with tribes on access to retrieve wounded bison (~10 per year?)

- Not discussed in depth at the meeting
- Lacey Act of 1894
 - Prohibits hunting and the possession or removal of wildlife from Yellowstone (16 USC 26)
- As necessary, NPS will kill wounded bison, which will provide food for other animals

Condition 3: NPS and USFS work with tribes to evaluate and restore habitat

- Use prescribed burns and other treatments to attract bison to certain areas
- Many fires allowed to burn in interior of park
 - Consider prescribed burns near boundary
- No shortage of grass in park interior
 - Fewer bison and elk in Hayden/Pelican
 - Frequent, repeated grazing in Lamar Valley
- Need long-range planning regarding bison use of landscape and hunting in more dispersed areas
 - NPS: Resource selection function analysis (habitat)
 - Habitat Subcommittee

Other items under discussion were many and varied. One item that came up repeatedly as a goal from the Tribal Treaty Hunt Subcommittee and others was that the Partners stop using a population goal as the foundation of their management actions.

The idea of hazing bison inside YNP, from the North to West Side, has come up on many occasions, as a way to better distribute bison on the landscape, both inside and outside YNP. Included by some is the idea that bison could be hazed from inside to outside of the Park to make them more accessible to hunters. PJ provided these thoughts:

- Difficult; Disruption of park mission/visitors/operations
- Cannot haze bison out of park to harvest
 - Lacey Act of 1894: "... prevent their [wildlife] being frightened or driven from the park ..."
- Willing to consider transferring some bison to suitable areas in Montana (e.g., Taylor Fork) if requested by state officials
 - Yellowstone bison cannot be released without adequate protection from premature hunting (Title 36 CFR: Parks, Forests, and Public Property; Part 10 – Disposal of Certain Wild Animals)

As with Carl's presentation, much discussion occurred during and following PJ's presentation, and continued throughout the day. Key points of those discussions not captured elsewhere are recorded under the section of this report titled, "2015-2016 Winter Operations Plan (PJ White)."

PUBLIC HUNT (SAM SHEPPARD)

Sam reported that MFWP is considering an increase in female bison permit percentage in support of the recommended removal guidelines provided by NPS. They are also considering a proposal for a backcountry hunt period—it would likely be short and duration and start with a low number (7) of permits.

PLANNING FOR WEEKLY PHONE CALLS REGARDING BISON HUNTS (SAM SHEPPARD)

Sam said that MFWP agrees to host the weekly phone calls in support of winter operations (****action item 2**). He expects these will occur on Tuesday mornings to better allow groups to collect and analyze data

from the weekend. Sam requests that Partners send him the email of those whom they want involved in these calls.

2015-2016 Winter Operations Plan (PJ White)

PJ's used the same presentation noted earlier for this part of the discussion. That presentation can be found at <http://www.ibmp.info/Library/20151119/20151119.php>. (Note that another topic on the agenda for later in the meeting titled, "Other Discussion Topics Raised by Tribes" was largely covered during this 2015-2016 Winter Operations Plan discussion.)

REMOVAL RECOMMENDATIONS (PJ WHITE)

- NPS proposal (1,000 bison)
- CSKT recommendations (800-900 bison)

With respect to population and removals, PJ provided two slides that described (a) real data since 2000 on the levels of bison harvest and culls (Figure 2); and (b) Park modeling efforts showing the number of bison removed and resulting expected 2016 summer population (Figure 3; note that these modeling results are dependent on a specific ratio of cows, calves, and bulls removed). These slides were referred to multiple times throughout the day.

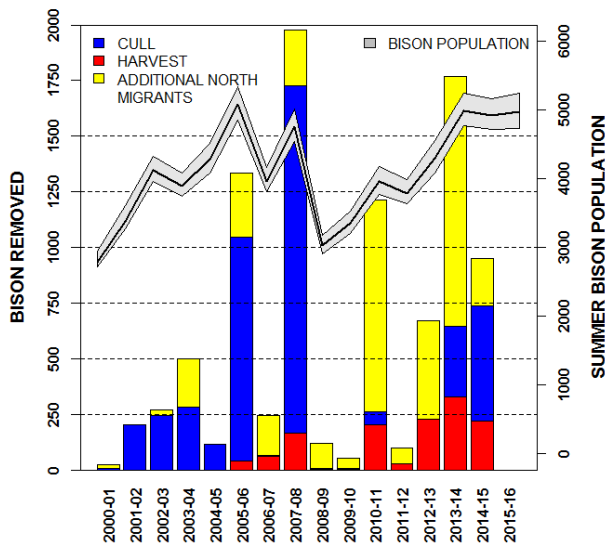


Figure 2.—Record of bison culls and harvest, 2000-2015. In 2013: (a) no culling; (b) harvested 148 north (81 west). Slide from NPS.

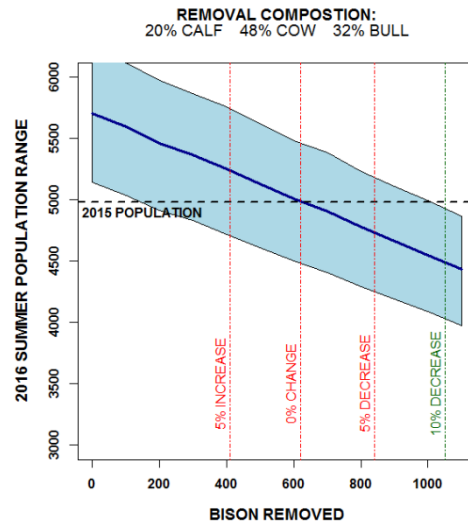


Figure 3.—Removal recommendations for 2016 and resulting modeled impact on bison population in YNP. Note the projections are dependent on a specific ratio of cows, calves, and bulls being removed. Slide from NPS.

TRANSFER OF BISON TO PROCESSING FACILITIES (RICK WALLEN)

The CSKT had requested that NPS offer bison to treaty hunt tribes before other tribes, organizations, and agencies. Both EC and MR of ITBC stated opposition to this idea. They said that the tribes represented by ITBC are not currently allowed to harvest bison like the treaty hunting tribes, so they would like to have first chance at the bison being sent to processing facilities. NPS provided these thoughts:

- NPS: We initially coordinate with CSKT, NPT, and ITBC to offer them available bison for direct transfer to processing facilities
- If no takers or responses, then look elsewhere

TRANSFER OF BISON TO RESEARCH FACILITIES: PRESERVING YELLOWSTONE BISON GENETICS USING ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY (RYAN CLARK; DR. JENNIFER BARFIELD, COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY)

Ryan Clarke of APHIS introduced Dr. Jennifer Barfield of CSU. Ryan noted that in part Dr. Barfield's presentation demonstrates the importance of designating some animals each year be set aside for research purposes. At the end of Dr. Barfield's talk the facilitator asked if any Partner objected to animals being set aside for research purposes, as described in the Draft 2015-16 Winter Ops Plan. No objections were brought forth. Dr. Barfield's presentation, as described below, can be found at <http://www.ibmp.info/Library/20151119/20151119.php>.

Jennifer described her work as part of a team to produce genetically pure Yellowstone bison via embryo transfer. The long-term goal of the project is to preserve Yellowstone bison genetics, as well as produce such calves for conservation herds (also potentially for wild herd re-establishment, zoos, tribal groups, domestic producers, and others). The work takes technologies from assisted reproductive technology developed at CSU and applies them to achieve outcomes of species conservation and disease control. The team artificially inseminates bison with cleaned semen (i.e., brucellosis free), either in vitro or in vivo with subsequent embryo transfer. Eggs, also cleaned, may come from the gestating female bison or be transferred from another (generally purebred) female bison.

One part of Jennifer's work was just a few weeks earlier releasing a dozen brucellosis-free bison—the Laramie Foothills Bison Conservation Herd—on 800 fenced acres at Soapstone Prairie Natural Area, north of and owned by the city of Fort Collins. The city provided \$100,000 for fencing. The bison will be fed at least initially, but the team will watch to see if they are able to forage naturally. The natural area is in northern Colorado, where bison once roamed freely.



Figure 4.—Dr. Jennifer Barfield of Colorado State University spoke to the IBMP Partners, staff, and public regarding preserving Yellowstone bison genetics using assisted reproductive technology.

In response to questions, Jennifer provided a number of thoughts including:

- They would like to continue getting animals from YNP regularly to continue bringing in new genetics.
- With their process, they can start with sero-positive or sero-negative bison.
- The genetics of animals that will be sent to slaughter can still be preserved.
- They have the facilities to handle 50 live animals per year in quarantine in Fort Collins.

- It is tough to estimate the cost per animal. They partner with APHIS, the City of Fort Collins, and others so costs for transportation, fencing, etc. are spread around. Dr. Barfield's program has run on an \$80,000 grant over two years.
- They have already had lots of requests for animals and expect some for embryos, as well.
- In response to a question on how far can we ethically go, treating these wild animals like livestock, Jennifer responded: "Yes, today it is surely a compromise. But if we are to maintain genetic diversity, and hope to return to wild herds of bison, then this is probably a necessary step."



Figure 5.—This image from Dr. Barfield's presentation shows a scene from early November 2015, when a dozen bison, the Laramie Foothills Bison Conservation Herd, were released onto the Soapstone Prairie Natural Area north of Fort Collins, Colorado.

Summary of the day's discussion on the IBMP 2015-2016 Winter Operations Plan

CAPTURED DISCUSSION ITEMS NOT COVERED ELSEWHERE, GROUPED BY TOPIC

- **On management goals.**—Tribal Partners described a desire to move from a management paradigm focused on population to one based on habitat.
- **On the Tribal proposal.**—
 - **Can it be phased in?**—The Tribal approach is a long-term approach to managing bison in a different way than today. The tribes also believe that how bison are managed inside the Park is as important as how they are managed outside the Park. Some Partners provided push back, saying that it is tough to make dramatic changes in one fell swoop, hence the question, can the Tribal proposal be phased in? A counter to the phasing in question was put forward: can we try not using the trap for just one year and see the results, then base future management on those results?
 - **Will the goal of bison dispersal outside the Park work?**—Will four days without hunting in 14 days be enough for the bison to disperse away from the park boundary? What if those four days are, for example, good weather days where the bison don't leave the park anyway? Or even if they do leave the park, won't the hunting still drive them back in? RW suggested it will depend largely on factors we don't control. He also noted that bulls are more likely to pioneer farther away from the park.
 - **On hunting.**—The Partners are currently managing to a level of 3000 bison as stated under the 2000 ROD. Can we remove enough animals via hunting alone given closure of the Stephen's Creek Trap until March 31? Even if the new goal is decreasing the bison population, will hunting be

enough to remove the greater than 600 animals needed to show even a modest population decrease (see Figure 3)? SS noted that the most hunters have ever harvested is about 340 animals. All Partners stated a goal of minimizing ship and slaughter while maximizing the hunt, yet the question persists—how many bison can realistically be harvested by hunting and what are partner options if hunting success is low? NPS specifically noted that they do not want to run the trap, either, but 5,000 bison are not sustainable within the park in the long-term without access to additional habitat in surrounding states. CSKT noted, as in the past, that the partners have not exhausted all potential for the hunt. In their tribe alone, they have 700 hunters this year who have gone through their orientation.

- **Weather**—No matter what, we don't control the weather and that is a major factor pushing bison to move outside the park where they are accessible to hunters. This year is expected to be an El Nino year, meaning mild winter and potential short hunting season with bison returning to the park early.
- **Trap and sex selection.**—Question: Can't animals in the trap be assessed as to sex and pregnancy status, eliminating the issue of shipping pregnant bison to slaughter if the trap is kept closed until after March 31? Response: we need to harvest a certain proportion of females to make population goals and most females are pregnant by that date.
- **Transport to processing facilities.**—Can distances be reduced?
- **Other tribes hunting.**—ITBC requested that it be made part of the Treaty Hunt Subcommittee. They noted on multiple occasions that some of their members are considering exercising their treaty hunting rights in the area, as well.
- **Do something...**—Multiple Partners and staff noted the need to make an effort to do something new and find out if it works, otherwise the group would be in danger of not completing the Winter Operations Plan, nor making any progress toward their shared goals. One Partner urged the others not to take a "lines in the sand" approach because coming to an impasse simply means nothing will be done.
- **Beyond ship and slaughter.**—EC said that the ITBC wants to see live animals get out to the tribes, not just those made available via ship and slaughter. Ultimately, ITBC seeks to get bison back on the landscape.
- **Timing of management issues.**—These occur most often in late March through May, after most hunting is completed.
- **Quarantine.**—Not available as a tool to reduce population this year (see Quarantine EA description under status update section)
- **Tribal rights.**—Multiple statements were made that tribal treaty rights are declared between each tribe and the federal government, yet the IBMP process incorrectly allows the state to be in the discussions and decision loop.

PLAN OF ACTION

The Partners agreed in principle to accept a portion of the Tribal recommendation that Carl Scheeler presented, as follows. Actual acceptance comes upon signing the Winter Operations Plan, with a December 31 goal for completion. For clarity, the proposal as described earlier in this report is repeated here:

Tribal proposal: Proposed state & tribal hunting regulations for remainder of 2015/16 season

- *Curtail all hunting activity in the Gardner Basin on the west side of the Yellowstone River every other week (Monday – Thursday) beginning the second full week in September and continuing through March 31st with exceptions for holidays.*
- *Conditions:*
 - (1) *YNP must agree to keep trap closed until March 31st*
 - (2) *Forest Service and YNP work with Tribes on access to retrieve game*
 - (3) *Forest Service and YNP work with Tribes to develop landscape analysis and habitat restoration recovery efforts*

Condition #1 was not accepted for at least three reasons: (a) a commitment to hunting alone would likely not remove sufficient numbers of bison, in part because of (b) the inherent uncertainty in knowing how many bison will exit the park and be available for the hunt due to weather and other factors; and (c) that operating the trap after March 31 would lead to shipping pregnant bison to slaughter.

Conditions #2 was not discussed by the Partners. .

Condition #3 was accepted, with the Partners taking an action item to re-convene their existing Habitat Subcommittee, with Tribal additions if not already in place, to develop landscape analysis and identify specific habitat restoration recovery efforts (****action item 3**).

After much discussion—including some Partners agreeing to the 1,000 bison removal proposal, some suggesting a ranges of 800-1,000, some 600-700—the Partners settled on two key points of consensus: (a) Given current conditions as well as guidelines of the EIS under which they operate today, all Partners stated agreement to the goal of reducing the bison population this winter—thus, they decided it acceptable to drop the goal of removing 1,000 animals in the Draft Winter Operations Plan and replace it with a goal of a decreasing bison population; and (b) All Partners also agreed the goal that they seek to increase bison distribution and dispersal across available habitat.

The NPS developed a counter proposal for the treaty hunt tribes to consider, which was supported by USFS, MFWP, and MBOL after some modifications. The items that follow essentially replace condition 1 in the Tribal proposal:

- (1) *Manage for a decreasing population*
- (2) *Hunting as a primary tool*
- (3) *Have to manage social issues around hunting*
- (4) *Agree to not operate trap until February 15 provided hunting harvest success*
- (5) *Weekly calls on progress with Partners*
- (6) *Rapid (within 7 days) report of hunting harvest from all Partners*
- (7) *Trapping operation in proportion to hunting harvest*
- (8) *Goal is no shipping after March 15*
- (9) *No shipping after March 31*
- (10) *Issues of social tolerance may drive management actions*

A key point brought up repeatedly is that adding these conditions to the Tribal proposal keeps open the possibility that if the hunt is highly successful, the trap will not have to be operated (see especially items 2, 4, 7). At the same time, it keeps the trap available as a tool for the Partners to meet their agreed upon goal of managing for a decreasing bison population.

The Tribal groups agreed to take this proposal back to their respective Tribal Councils to determine if agreement to proceed under the amendments to their proposal could be obtained.

The Lead Partner stated that the contingency plan if all Partners did not agree was that the Partners would operate under the last Winter Operations Plan signed by all (2014-15 season).

PROCESS FOR COMPLETION OF OPERATIONS PLAN BY DECEMBER 31 (SCOTT BISCHKE)

The remaining actions associated with completing the 2015-16 Winter Operations Plan (****action item 4**) are as follows:

- by November 24—Lead Partner NPS provides info to all Partners regarding trapping activity versus hunting success over the past few years. Note: This action has been completed.
- by December 8—All Partners provide final input, agreement to Draft 2015-16 Winter Operations Plan to Lead Partner NPS (to PJ White, with CC: to Scott Bischke)
- by December 11—Lead Partner NPS rewrites the Winter Operations Plan to reflect the additions and changes of the Tribal proposal and subsequent amendments, as just described, plus completes any final

adjustment to Draft Ops Plan, then resends the now Final 2015-16 Winter Operations Plan out to all Partners

- by December 14—Facilitator, with NPS go-ahead, sends out a request to all Partners for electronic signing of the Final 2015-16 Winter Operations Plan (simple directions will be included)
- by December 30—All Partners complete electronic signing of the Final 2015-16 Winter Operations Plan
- by December 31—Facilitator posts 2015-16 Winter Operations Plan to ibmp.info and informs all Partners
- Date TBD—MFWP to institute weekly Winter Operations calls, expected to be on Tuesday mornings

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

Status of NPS Quarantine EA—Jennifer Carpenter

- What—The use of quarantine to identify brucellosis-free Yellowstone bison for relocation elsewhere
- Environmental Assessment evaluates establishing quarantine program for bison at one or more facilities within YNP, on tribal lands, or elsewhere
- Currently under regional office review
- Decision hoped for by spring

Status of new Bison Management Plan/EIS—Jennifer Carpenter

- NPS-State of Montana are co-leads on plan with five cooperating agencies: CSKT, CTUIR, ITBC, NPT, USFS). Several NGOs requested that the USFWS also be invited to be a cooperating agency. NPS did submit such a letter of request to the USFWS but the USFWS declined the invitation to serve as a cooperating agency.
- A public scoping period was held March through June of this year. NPS received 3,500 individual responses. Those were compiled for review and the report on that compilation is being released today. There were over 8,000 comments. Two reports were created: (1) a summary grouped by comment theme and demographic information, and (2) a more comprehensive, in-depth report.
- NPS will meet with state cooperators soon.
- Web information on the EIS can be found at www.parkplanning.NPS.gov/yellbisonplan.

Status of State-wide Bison Management Plan—Sam Sheppard

Expect release of final Record of Decision in early 2016.

Status of MEPA process for year-round tolerance of bison on west side—Sam Sheppard

Sam stated that the EA remains in process, much as he reported at the August IBMP meeting. There is hope that the final decision will be released soon.

Status of bison-coexistence/fencing project

Shana Dunkley of GYC, now the project lead organization, reported 32 projects have been completed since the program started. In 2015, nine projects have been completed with one more expected. Three projects are already planned for next year. The program is a big success in helping increase or maintain public tolerance to bison outside YNP.

Update on NAS review of brucellosis in wildlife in the GYA—Don Herriott

The National Academy of Sciences panel was selected (ten individuals) and had its first meeting in early July in Bozeman, then another in September in Jackson, and the third in Washington DC. They will submit their report in early spring 2016. (Meeting notes and project announcements are available on the NAS website at <http://dels.nas.edu/Study-In-Progress/Revisiting-Brucellosis-Greater-Yellowstone/DELS-BANR-14-03?bname=banr>).

Update on Gonacon trials—Ryan Clarke

All animals captured have now been enrolled in the study. There are females in both the treated and control groups. All animals have been bred. Researchers will begin looking in midwinter to judge pregnancies. Abortions due to brucellosis will occur beyond that time.

Annual Report Completion

The Draft 2015 Annual Report was first sent to all Partners on September 15th. The Lead Partner received effectively no input on the September request for review and input. The 2015 Annual Report is being done in the new format as described in the adaptive management change agreed to by the Partners in August 2015, with a goal of making the report more concise.

The facilitator provided a couple of reminders on the annual report:

- Partners retain responsibility to report on those items where they are called out as lead in the Adaptive Management Plan, but in the new scenario that reporting is synthesized into a more streamlined format.
- The Lead Partner has final say on any disputed text.
- The document requires no signature per Partner Protocols.

The report, per facilitator estimate, is perhaps 80+% done but still requires input by all Partners, either in a review capacity or for specific input as called out in the Draft 2015 Annual Report. Following are the remaining actions associated with completing the 2015 Annual Report (****action item 5**):

- by December 10—All Partners provide Final input on the Draft 2015 Annual Report (ver091515) to NPS (to PJ White, with CC: to Scott Bischke). The Lead Partner requests that Partners read, edit, add to, and comment as needed. Areas definitely in need of work are highlighted in yellow, with callouts on who should provide the needed information. Recall that appendices can be employed, per the new Annual Report format, though the report will likely refer readers to the IBMP website to find those appendices. Partners are asked to use Track Changes in Word regardless if you are adding information to the Annual Report or editing the text already presented.
- by December 30—NPS completes 2015 Annual Report
- by December 31—Facilitator posts 2015 Annual Report to ibmp.info and then informs all Partners

What's next? Partner Planning and Forthcoming Tasks

CHANGING OF THE GUARD

The Partners provided outgoing Lead Partner Dan Wenk a round of applause for his efforts on behalf of the IBMP. Dan, in turn, thanked his staff for all of their efforts, particularly during the period of 2015 when he was on detail away from Yellowstone National Park. The Partners also welcomed Marty Zaluski and MDOL as Lead Partner for 2016.

MEETING PLANNING FOR 2016

The Partners decided on the dates and locations for their three meetings in 2016 as follows: (1) April 6th in Bozeman; (2) August 3rd in West Yellowstone; and November 17th in Chico. The facilitator took the ****action item 1** to make room and meeting space reservations for these meetings.

Public comment

The following notes on public comment to the IBMP Partners are not intended to be complete, but rather reflect the facilitator's best effort to capture key statements. The facilitator has especially attempted to capture those comments from the public that appeared to be solution oriented and have the potential for inclusion in adaptive management planning and/or process improvement. These items, as well as other potentially actionable public input, are called out with a **"**"** in the listings that follow.

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 during the middle of the afternoon in reaction to numerous past public comments about public input being of less value at the very end of the day.

- We need to consider cost and efficiency of increasing brucellosis free bison. There are multiple methods including operational quarantine and using existing herds where animals are available (at least five locations, including YNP, Turner, Wind Caves). Use of existing herds would be the least expensive—and nicely it can be used when needed and not if not needed.
- The definition of wild bison is important. “Wild” includes the preponderance of natural selection. I worry that we are removing too many animals from bison and interrupting natural selection.
- A discussion of the history of cohort 2 of the YNP study.
- Bison were slaughtered in the late 1980s in full view of the nation. It was filmed. Montana had a big loss of tourism.
- We need to expand habitat. A perfect example is the area north of West Yellowstone where MFWP and MDOL came together to agree to a location. And then it only took the Board of Livestock 5 minutes to give it the thumbs down! We need to pass this EA.
- We have many places of 100,000 acres available across the state for bison. If we truly have an overpopulation of Yellowstone bison they could be taken and deposited at the CMR Wildlife Refuge, with the USFWS managing them.
- Thanks to YNP. This has been a productive discussion today. It is a complex issue.
- Bison should be managed for fair chase hunting. We advocate for use of spatial and temporal means to allow bison further to roam and hunters greater success.
- Bison need year round habitat to expand into.
- We look forward to the EIS process and believe we should be managing based on science-based range, not on population goals.
- There should be no hunting in the park.
- Yes we need habitat expansion outside the park and we need the EIS decision soon.
- We need to develop common ground and common sense.
- ****We have a perceived lack of tolerance. But is it real, or is it really just a few people? Is it general intolerance? How do we deal with these people? We would like to know how the bison gateway study is going. Could we get an update?**
- ****The NGO community can act as a resource for habitat restoration.**
- There is only so much that can be done without year round tolerance.
- We need Governor Bullock’s leadership to ratify the EA for increased tolerance on the West Side.
- I have been in Bozeman for 40 years and have a great love of YNP and bison.
- I am appalled by the inhumane treatment of bison. I have seen hazing first hand and hate seeing this public relations nightmare.
- Montanans want bison on their public lands.
- I fully support tribal hunts.
- This is very frustrating—progress yes but at an incremental rate. We need bigger steps.
- I am embarrassed for the state that they are treating native bison this way.
- I appreciated this morning’s discussion, including about tribal hunting.
- We are focused on the tool for bison management but constrained our old management plan and the focus on bison population.

- Seems everyone is ready to move forward with the new EIS given all the new info gathered over the last 15 years. Our group appreciates that planning process and wants to move forward ASAP.
- We strongly oppose hunting in the park. Other opportunities make more sense, especially expanded tolerance outside the park.
- We appreciated the discussion this morning, also, especially the focus on trying to manage the bison population through hunting.
- It was 5 years ago at this meeting that the Partners decided to go ahead with the CWG. A lot of people volunteered to help the Partners. The GAO report had said that one of the problems with the IBMP was the lack of citizen input. We worked hard and came up with recommendations. Many of those go back to the idea of year round habitat and a learn-as-you-go approach.
- We need to do something different, and the first that should be tried is expanded tolerance and habitat.
- We are still waiting for a decision from the Governor's office. We need to push for this expanded area of tolerance and it should not be tied to population numbers.
- Thanks to the tribes for their hard work on the recommendations that they provided. It is an excellent starting point.
- ** As a Montana sportsman, I would love to be part of the discussion with tribes, and as a representative of my group.
- In terms of the plan, it is built upon a flawed foundation. I hope that we can fix this in the new EIS. The flaw is that it is based on Zones 1, 2, and 3 which puts us into cow pasture mentality. This approach is not respectful of the rights of private property holders, hunters, or tribes.
- We need objectives for bison in Montana far outside the park for Wildlife Management Areas etc. Those objectives as of today are zero.
- I am pretty impressed with how far this meeting has come. Still the Partners remain constrained by old planning.
- We should be talking about a landscape focus, not "head" of animals. That's not respectful.
- We ask, why not haze elk? DOL said that's next.
- We should reconnect with the buffalo instead of artificial insemination and reproducing in unnatural ways.
- Our group had a report today of hunters hazing bison out of a private neighborhood to be shot. The residents in this area outside of the park are upset. People outside the park are actually mostly tolerant of bison.
- I am a veterinarian and I have worked with cattle producers. Cattle, dogs, cat. But I love bison. I love this animal. I don't believe in the idea of domestic buffalo.
- YNP has lots of manmade sideboards.
- I think about what makes for a happy buffalo. I think about the American Prairie Reserve, some tribal herds, YNP, etc.
- People have been associated with this animal for thousands of years. I question whether hunting or trapping is better. Trapping is disrespectful. Don't do in late spring, instead do in the fall.
- I advocate that we be more proactive with dealing with the feelings of the animal.

*** Meeting adjourned ***

Abbreviations

- 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
- CWG—Citizens’ Working Group
- DH—Don Herriot
- DSA—Designated Surveillance Zone
- DW—Dan Wenk
- EA—Environmental Assessment
- EC—Ervin Carlson
- GAO—Government Accountability Office
- GNF—Gallatin National Forest
- GW—Germaine White
- GWA—Gallatin Wildlife Association
- GYA—Greater Yellowstone Area
- ITBC—Inter Tribal Buffalo Council
- JH—John Harrison
- JS—Jim Stone
- LG—Leonard Gray
- MBOL—Montana Board of Livestock
- MD—Marna Daley
- MDOL—Montana Department of Livestock
- MDOT—Montana Department of Transportation
- ME—Mary Erickson
- MEPA—Montana Environmental Policy Act
- MFWP—Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks
- ML—Mike Lopez
- MO—McCoy Oatman
- MOU—Memorandum of Understanding
- MR—Majel Russell
- MSGA—Montana Stockgrowers’ Association
- MSU—Montana State University
- 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
- 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