

Summary Report from the Interagency Bison Management Plan Meeting August 3, 2017



First draft presented 14 August 2017 by meeting facilitator Scott Bischke

The following summary report reflects activities at the August 3, 2017 meeting of the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) Partners, held at the Gran Tree Best Western Hotel in Bozeman, MT. This report comes from the flip chart notes of facilitator Scott Bischke¹. The report will be marked *Draft* until formal Partner agreement to making it final before the start of their next meeting. The nine Partner attendees were Don Herriott (APHIS), Ron Trahan (CSKT), Ervin Carlson (ITBC), Mike Honeycutt (MBOL), Martin Zaluski (MDOL), Mike Volesky (MFWP), Daniel Wenk (NPS-YNP), Quincy Ellenwood (NPT), and Mary Erickson (USFS-CGNF). In addition to those at the deliberative table, ~25 staff members from across IBMP organizations and ~45 members of the public were present at various times during the day.

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Action items identified

Action items identified during this meeting

#	Who	What	By when
1	Scott Bischke	Post the Apr 2017 meeting report to the website as "final"	ASAP
2	Scott Bischke	With the understanding that change would be made, the discussion ended with agreement from the Partners that the effectiveness report describing their deliberations is final. The facilitator was tasked with posting the report to the IBMP website page for this meeting for a) public review and b) as a declaration of Partner agreement on near-term focus areas (** action item 2).	ASAP
3	Mike Volesky Mike Honeycutt	We need the state agencies to give us guidance on whether they think the arrival of bison in the Taylor Fork can be via assisted migration (and what is that?) of an experimental population, or must it occur naturally? (the state agencies, MV of MFWP and MH of MBOL, agreed to seek guidance on this question from the Governor's office, and to inform the Partners of the results of those discussions; areas (** action item 3).	ASAP
4	MFWP	Convene the Technical Committee (MFWP to lead; **action item 4**) with goals and timelines shown: ... [please see report text for multiple actions and deadlines requested]	First deadline Sep 30
5	PJ White	The annual NPS bison count, which was underway as this meeting at the same time as this meeting, is a key driver of the Winter Ops Plan. NPS agreed to send out the results of the count by the end of August (** action item 5).	By Aug 31
6	Scott Barndt	Scott Barndt said he expected to move the Winter Ops Plan and the Annual Report along similar timelines. As such he plans to send an email request to Partners by mid-September requesting their input / changes / edits to both (** action item 6).	By Sep 15 (followed by other milestone dates)
7	ME, SB, SB	Partners agreed to consider setting aside the morning of Nov 29 th for a continuation of their meeting given the large number of items expected to be covered. The Lead Partner will put forward a formal request, if developed, as soon as possible given the needs of Partner travel plans, conference room reservation, and similar (** action item 7).	ASAP

Agreeing to previous meeting minutes

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



Figure 1.—Roughly 75 people attended this meeting of the IBMP Partners.

Considering IBMP effectiveness, Part II

How can the IBMP evolve to be more effective, efficient, and successful?

At their April 4, 2017 meeting, the Partners completed a self-assessment under guidance of the Lead Partner. The goal of the session was to determine how to better make their interactions *as the IBMP Partnership* more effective, efficient, and successful. The Lead Partners said that while the Partners had achieved many successes, of late they seem to be at a stalemate. She hoped the self-assessment might set the stage for evolutionary, not revolutionary, change. She also hoped the exercise would lead to a set of priority projects they could all agree to working on in the near-future.

To aid in this self-assessment, the Partners answered four questions in a one-by-one, round-the-table fashion:

- Q1.—How do the Partners perceive they are working together? What works in the IBMP? What doesn't?
- Q2.—What are Partners top two concerns for the IBMP? What are Partners top two areas you believe viable progress can be made?
- Q3.—What better methods of organization, structure, or interaction might make the Partners more productive?
- Q4.—Next steps? Organization/effectiveness subcommittee or similar?

At the conclusion of this April 4th discussion, the Partners gave the facilitator the task of capturing the materials recorded in a report back to them. That report was submitted in draft roughly a month later. Partners provided modifications, then met by telecon May 25th to discuss the resulting second draft. That discussion led to the draft under consideration at this meeting, which included three areas that all Partners agreed should be a) focus areas for progress, and b) had opportunity for short-term progress (a fourth, longer-term project area was also identified).

At this meeting the Lead Partner asked the Partners for agreement to post the report they discussed on May 25th as a record to the Public of Partner agreement on the three areas of priority work. She stressed that the agreement was to the goal and topic of the priority work, *not* to the method to accomplish that goal.

Partners discussed the areas of priority work briefly with direction to the facilitator to make some wording changes. In particular there was some push back, resulting in some wording changes, on the 4th item regarding a longer-term goal of managing a sustainable bison population.² With the understanding that change would be made, the discussion ended with agreement from the Partners that the effectiveness report describing their deliberations is final. The facilitator was tasked with posting the report to the IBMP website page for this meeting for a) public review and b) as a declaration of Partner agreement on near-term focus areas (**** action item 2**).

The full report, which can be found at the meeting website (<http://ibmp.info/Library/20170803/20170803.php>), includes an overall summary, observations from the

² A new first sub-bullet was created under that goal from what had been a stronger declaration in the goal itself about dropping managing bison to a strict population number.

facilitator, an IBMP conceptual model, and a summary of the May 25, 2017 telecon. A small subset of that report—the part describing the Partner-agreed-upon priority goals—is provided below. The first three goals are short term and formed the basis for the next three topics on the agenda for this meeting. The Partners consider the fourth goal to be longer term in nature.

The Lead Partner then requested that each Partner describe up to 3 projects they thought progress could be made on soon. There was solid agreement on 3 as shown below, with agreed upon priority shown. Sub-bullets provide Partner thoughts on projects in this realm, either ongoing or possible to start soon. A fourth project area also received endorsement, though having a longer likely time frame for action.

1. Create a bison quarantine facility

- In conjunction with creating the quarantine facility, the endpoint for bison translocation must be determined.
- Work already happening with NPS, APHIS, MDOL. They will report at August meeting.
- For this task Partners could modify the quarantine management action (2.2c) now in their AM Plan.

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

- All agreed it would be possible to explore many actions (e.g., fire) for promoting bison movement.
- Can we get together an ad hoc group to discuss bison distribution? This group could develop a list of possible methods of distribution, plus assess suitable bison habitat. The group might include Julie (MFWP), Rick (NPS), Steph (CSKT), Scott (CGNF), Neil (NPT), Carl (CTUIR), Leander (SBT). No commitment was made, other than that Julie Cunningham and Scott Barndt would meet.
- Partners need to recognize that this issue is sensitive with land owners and that Partners are *only identifying possibilities*. Much more work needs to go into partnering with and understanding needs and concerns of landowners (some NGOs have started such work).
- CGNF will lead a field trip at the Aug IBMP meeting, with central topic being bison distribution.

3. Improving safety, quality of the north side hunt/improving boundary issues

- Topic includes issues of bison population and distribution, plus tribal and state hunts and enforcement
- Tribal hunt managers can make presentation on their ideas and progress at August meeting including at least a) law enforcement and safety, and b) how to reduce hunting pressure in Beattie Gulch

4. Longer term focus item—Managing to a sustainable bison population

- Consider moving away from a strict population goal number.
- Balance the needs of hunters, availability of habitat to support bison, people wanting to witness sustainable migration, and so on.
- Consider possible use of rolling averages to measure bison population
- Some discussion that while most agreed this is a valuable topic, the idea might be more appropriate in new EIS

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

Improving IBMP effectiveness—topic of agreed near-term Partner interest

REPORT ON AUG 2 FIELD TRIP

The Custer-Gallatin National Forest and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks co-hosted a field trip up the Taylor Fork for Partners, staff, and public. The Taylor Fork is near the northern extent of the increased tolerance area that resulted from Governor Bullock’s November 2015 EA decision.

Following self-introduction of the ~70 people present, Lead Partner Mary Erickson provided a short overview on why the group was here, and particularly how the Governor’s decision made this tour different from a similar tour held in August of 2012. Bison now can migrate to this area whereas in 2012 any bison seeking to move here would have been stopped far to the south. Mary emphasized at the welcoming (Figure 2) and throughout the day that no plan exists for bringing bison to the Taylor Fork. The goal for the field trip, repeated

many times through the day, would be to try to discover concerns, solutions, and next steps associated with the *possibility* that bison may soon begin to use the new tolerance zone, including the Taylor Fork drainage.



Figure 2.—IBMP Partners, staff, and public met on August 2nd for a field trip to consider concerns, solutions, and next steps for the now available (i.e., post-Governor’s West Side EA decision) possibility of bison migrating to the Taylor Fork drainage. (top: initial gathering and welcome at the Sage Creek Trailhead, CGNF; bottom: looking at habitat after a walk to ridge on the Albino Lake trail, with discussion led by Julie Cunningham and Dr. Clayton Marlow)

Scott Barndt and Jason Brey of the CGNF provided the group a set of safety and travel logistics for the day. The group got into cars and traveled up the Taylor Fork with an eye to considering the area—the habitat suitability, the potential for human conflicts, and more—in the valley. Led by Julie Cunningham of MFWP, the group then went on a hike up into a ridge part way out to Albino Lake (Figure 2). There Julie led a discussion on habitat, forage, potential bison migration routes into and away from the Taylor Fork, and more. Dr. Clayton Marlow, of the Animal and Range Science Department at Montana State University, also provided great insight to local plant communities (native and invasive), and the role that fire, natural grazers, and livestock management could have on both the productivity and make up of those communities. Following the field trip, the group returned the 9 Quarter Circle Ranch to use the ranch mess hall for a ~2 hour meeting. The group expressed great appreciation to their host Kameron Kelsey for extending them this kindness—including cookies and cold drinks!—just as he and his family had done for the 2012 IBMP field trip to up the Taylor Fork.

At the start of the meeting of the 9 Quarter Circle, Lead Partner Mary Erickson again provided some background on the IBMP, as well as the Governor’s EA decision on expanded habitat, including the Taylor Fork, and how that decision made this gathering different than that the similar one held in 2012. Mary stressed that there is no plan under the IBMP for bison movement into the Taylor Fork, that this field trip is an open look at the possibility of bison coming to the valley and what that might mean. Someone pointed out that even while the group is talking, it would be fully legal under the Governor’s decision for a bison to walk up the Taylor Fork on this very day.

The facilitator pointed out that while all were welcome in the discussion, that being here “on-the-ground” the Partners were especially interested in hearing the concerns, solutions, and next steps that people local to and living and/or working in the new, expanded West Side tolerance area had to say.



Figure 3.—The field trip to the Taylor Fork included an afternoon stop kindly hosted by the 9 Quarter Circle Ranch in the Taylor Fork. While the discussion was open to all in attendance, the IBMP Partners specifically solicited input from local landowners on their consideration of concerns, solutions, and next steps regarding the possibilities of bison expanding into the new West Side tolerance area.

The facilitator took notes throughout the field trip, as well as during the public discussion at the 9 Quarter Circle Ranch, with a charge from the Lead Partner to capture any concerns, solutions, and next steps that were put forth. A compilation of those three items, as collected across the day and lumped by topic, follows:

- *Habitat*
 - Complex! Interplay of species, fire, grazing, water and more
 - Be cautious & protect native grasses
 - Can bison grazing help?
- *Safety issues*
 - Highways, Ophir School
 - Broken fences, bison eating livestock feed
 - Lack of law and/or wildlife enforcement for current needs
 - —> Cattle guards, NGO fencing programs can help
- *Winter issues*
 - Bison head to the Gallatin and Hwy 191
 - Lack of feed? What will bison eat in the Taylor Fork?
- *Adaptive management approach*
 - All tools available—learn then modify management
 - Lots of speculation until bison on landscape
 - Proceed slowly and with humility
- *Need for education*
 - To share socio-cultural-historical-ecological beliefs between interests
 - Need to identify common ground and shared values between interests
- *West Side (area of Governor's EA decision) is not the same as the North Side*
 - Homes at park exit are less of a concern (re: firing line)
 - Fewer (?) cattle re: brucellosis transmission
- *How do bison get to Taylor Fork?*
 - Natural or “assisted” migration or something else?
 - And when can we expect them?
- *Will bison put land owner USFS horse allotments at risk?*
- *More tourists, more pressure*

- Good business? Or is bison bringing more people bad?
- Remember land owners protect wildlife habitat
- *Bison hold incredible value to many*
 - To our Native American communities
 - Across the country, around the world
 - Who decides where bison are allowed?
 - Many believe wildlife and people can co-exist

Throughout the field trip discussions, and during discussions of the field trip during the IBMP meeting, the Partners asked for questions from local landowners and said they would be happy to have and address a listing of such questions. On August 7th, four days after the IBMP meeting, Daphne White of the Elkhorn Ranch provided such a question set via email to the facilitator. Given local landowner concerns were one of the key items of focus for the West Side field trip, that full letter to the Partners is reproduced below:

Daphne White's Questions about bison in the Upper Gallatin

We do understand that it is a privilege to live and work in the Upper Gallatin and to share this landscape with a wide variety of wildlife. We work hard to be good stewards of the land and good neighbors. The Elkhorn has been here for 95 years and we hope to be here for many more generations. We are asking you all to understand that we are scared of the potential impacts bison will bring to doorstep. Increasing our unease is the fear of the unknown. As we discussed on the field trip and meeting just last week we would like to know what would happen if some bison came to our area.

Here is a listing of the many questions we at the Elkhorn came up with. Answers to these questions would help us understand the situation better and might alleviate our fears regarding bison coming into our area.

Yours,
Daphne White

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If 6 bison walked up HWY 191, what if any management of the bison or the traffic will there be?

- We have family, employees, guests and friends driving HWY 191 and it's a very dangerous road as it is today. I am concerned that Bison are going to make it more dangerous without meaningful management changes
- I often drive HWY 191 into YNP at dawn and dusk as I am a birdwatcher. There is lots of car and truck traffic and I almost never see any speed limit enforcement. How often is this road patrolled? How many tickets are handed out? How many animals are hit per year that you know of?
- How would the road be managed if there were bison on the Highway? I don't consider a sign that says "bison on highway" to be effective management. If there are reduced speed limits will they be enforced? How often?
- I drive HWY 191 north of YNP regularly in Gallatin County. Folks leave the park and hit the gas often passing as many people as possible before the canyon narrows farther to the north. How often does law enforcement patrol from the south of Ophir School to the YNP line? How many tickets are handed out? How many animals are hit per year that you know of? How would the road be managed if there where bison on the Highway?

As a local rancher/landowner what happens when the 6 bison come for a visit?

- Is there some sort of guidelines or training for landowners on living with bison? If it's going to take 12-24 hours to get FWP folks out to haze the bison the damage will already be done. Can we haze them? Can we use flash bangs on them? Are there guidelines on hazing them and are there fencing guidelines?
- We have just under a mile of frontage on HWY 191. We use Jack fencing to keep our horses off the highway. Will Bison respect our fencing or walk right through to get to our irrigated pastures? What if one of the bison breaks our fence and our horses get out on the highway and cause a wreck?
- What if the bison come up around our cabins? How quickly can the dangerous situation be managed? I have been told FWP could take 12-24 hours to respond. We have around 40 guests including many kids and over 25 employees that need to walk around our cabins. Again in the park there seems to be a ranger watching each bison around populated areas and keeping people at a safe distance.
- What changes to our fence would be needed to keep the bison out? How tall? Electric fence has been mentioned.... Cost? Maintenance issues? We would continue to maintain our Jack Fence as it contributes to our Historic District listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Can we add electric to the jack fence or would we need two fences? (Note that the \$1000 that has been given to impacted landowners for fencing would buy about 100 feet of jack fence and we have around 5,000 feet of fencing along the highway)
- Our fence directly adjoins the Gallatin River for part of its length. What if a fisherperson touches our electric fence and gets hurt? What if our electric fence causes a fire to start?

What about folks that use the Upper Gallatin and Taylor Fork for recreation?

- When folks drive into YNP they are given all sorts of information on the dangers of bison, how will that information gotten out to folks using the forest and river up this way?
- When we travel into YNP there is almost always a ranger in attendance whenever there are bison near pedestrian areas or roads. Will bison/public interactions be managed in the Gallatin?
- How will campers/bison issues be managed on Taylor Fork?
- How will snowmobile users in the area be impacted?
- If Bison are hunted in the area how will the gut piles impact the behavior of our other wildlife or will the gut piles be packed out?
- Will the Native American hunter be hunting other species than bison?

What if 20-25 bison arrived in Taylor Fork by truck? In addition to the questions above we have additional questions below.

- Who would manage them?
- Would they be monitored or tracked?
- What behaviors would be acceptable and what specific management steps would be taken?
- Would there be a hard cap on population growth?
- Would there be meaningful help for local ranchers for fencing or livestock management?
- Would the bison be removed/shot/... if they repeatedly crossed onto private lands or damaged fences?
- Would there be additional rangers to monitor folks coming up to see the bison?

REPORT ON WEST SIDE DISCUSSION AT THE AUG 3 IBMP MEETING

The Partners held an open discussion, including members of the public, regarding the field trip the previous day. A listing of points made during that discussion follows (the list seeks to focus on items not already captured in the field trip notes above):

- (1) The Lead Partner highlighted that there is no IBMP "plan" for the Taylor Fork, and that bison occupancy is not tied to numbers of bison in YNP (see Governor's EA decision, page 9).

- (2) Buffalo have been here longer than people. It is time for the people to adapt. We created this situation and can solve it.
- (3) Treaties matter.
- (4) We must remain aware to the fact that aborting bison can also impact wildlife, not just cattle.
- (5) The Governor's decision allows "permissiveness" of bison on the West Side, and as such is the beginning of the conversation, *not* a declaration of how it can or will happen. We worry about civic and safety issues. And there are clearly big recreational impacts likely as we learned yesterday.
- (6) Is there taxpayer impact as someone asked yesterday? That is a reasonable question.
- (7) FWP is required to manage the state's fish and wildlife resources and to encourage public access; and FWP works to promote private landowner interests. It requires thought and creativity to balance and meet both goals.
- (8) We have a great start and already lots of information available about the West Side. Next we should
 - a) ask the technical committee to study the landscape for suitable habitat, especially in the winter;
 - b) working with land owners, delineate areas of potential conflict and determine how to mediate those conflicts;
 - c) determine likely bison pathways of migration into the Taylor Fork.
- (9) How will bison first get to the Taylor Fork on their own ("naturally") or via assisted migration (e.g., introduced by truck, driven by horseback, something else)?
- (10) In a Taylor Fork that includes bison, visitor numbers will increase and opportunity for outfitters will increase. The landscape is missing bison but how can we assure that the addition of bison will not hurt the special landscape they will return to being part of? We should be concerned that people management, not bison management, is the toughest thing we are dealing with here.
- (11) Am I correct that the area in the Taylor Fork is ~200,000 acres of public land, 5000 acres of private land? < Facilitator's note — no one in the room knew for certain but several suggested that the answer was likely in the Governor's EA decision >
- (12) Bison in the Taylor Fork will help spread hunting farther and wider for safer hunt.
- (13) Our own experience with bison is that they are good for grasslands.
- (14) We should recognize again that bison could walk up into the Taylor Fork today and we have no plan.

I struggle with the all the tension around bison in the Taylor Fork:

 - a. The fears — we can't answer them all, and shouldn't expect to.
 - b. I encourage us to start very small and move slowly.
 - c. I worry that one can set up barriers that can seem so overwhelming that if that's all one focused on one would never start anything.
 - d. Also worry about the idea that we would have lots of bison in the Taylor Fork.
 - e. We need more information.
 - f. We need the state agencies to give us guidance on whether they think the arrival of bison in the Taylor Fork can be via assisted migration (and what is that?) of an experimental population, or must it occur naturally? (the state agencies, MV of MFWP and MH of MBOL, agreed to seek guidance on this question from the Governor's office, and to inform the Partners of the results of those discussions; areas (** **action item 3**)).
- (15) We need to develop ideas for landowners — what can we do if 6 bison land on our door step tomorrow? What kind of fences will work, etc? We need a specific proposal.
- (16) Seeing bison on the landscape is really important to people. Public lands belong to all people. I like the idea of having a specific proposal about the Taylor Fork and bison.
- (17) Depending on the season, what happens if all the bison end up in one tolerance zone at once?
- (18) If bison head up to Big Sky, what happens?
- (19) If we have hunting are we going to have problems with poaching? Will there be enough law enforcement? We are worried about issues with our cabins.
- (20) We always talk about the "good of the public." In that discussion I hope we keep in mind that we have 5 ranches in the area, 4 of which are for guests. We employ over a thousand people and pay lots of property taxes.
- (21) Bison won't stay in the Taylor Fork, they will end up at our ranches.

- (22) We might be able to help with containment areas for bison along rivers.
- (23) We have nothing against bison. But I fear for my business, family, and livelihood. Bison don't act like any other animal, including grizzlies — they run from you but bison don't.
- (24) The most likely place bison will come to in the winter is our land.
- (25) We will have thousands of people in the Taylor Fork and it will be trashed even though my family has worked for 75 years to keep it pristine.
- (26) I am concerned we will lose our horse grazing allotment when someone decides the bison need the grass more than our horses.
- (27) The CWG and many NGOs stand ready to help. We could work with local landowners.
- (28) We need to be clear: no one wants bison in the Taylor Fork to be a failure. The goal is that it be a success. We have done a good job defining the problems but need to do the same with the solutions, as well. All tools are available. And there are new tools to explore.
- (29) Let's look forwards, not just backwards. I encourage a plan for a small number of bison in the Taylor Fork to learn the answer to some of the questions put forward. Let's do that instead of all the speculation.
- (30) I worry about the safety of people on Highway 191—it is really crowded with fast-moving vehicles.
- (31) Regarding how bison will get to the Taylor Fork—and we have seen lone big bulls there in the last 20 years—we always want bison to do what we want them to do. For once, why don't we listen to the animals?
- (32) We don't need more study. We need a small test group of bison on the ground so we can see what they will do.

Following a break, the discussion returned to just Partners and staff and turned to the question of what to do next. Multiple ideas emerged, were compared and contrasted, tried and rejected, modified and accepted. The results from those discussions follow:

- (1) **Convene the Technical Committee** (MFWP to lead; ****action item 4****). The Partners provided a starting point for the makeup of this committee in their report on improving IBMP effectiveness. Those names are repeated here: *The group might include Julie (MFWP), Rick (NPS), Steph (CSKT), Scott (CGNF), Neil (NPT), Carl (CTUIR), Leander (SBT)*. (MH noted that if this is a wildlife only issue [i.e., not a livestock disease issue] that MDOL would support MFWP as needed, but would not expect to be core to this manifestation of the Technical Committee). Technical Committee goals and timelines shown:
 - a. *By Sep 30*—Determine membership of Technical Committee. Write own charter using Partner guidance on areas of interest in the next bullet. Send to Partners by Sep 30.
 - b. *By Nov 15* —Focus on two areas with these initial areas of interest put forth by the Partners (while the Technical Committee will be science-focused, the Partners recognized they are asking for some items more social-political in nature):
 - i. Science issues:
 - 1. Model/determine suitable **habitat** for bison, especially in the winter, and the number of bison the area could hold
 - 2. Determine the most likely **migration route(s)** from YNP into the new West Side tolerance areas, including the Taylor Fork
 - ii. Policy issues:
 - 1. Write a strawman set of alternatives for future management of the Taylor Fork if bison arrive in the Taylor Fork on their own.
 - 2. Write a strawman plan for future management of the Taylor Fork if an experimental group of bison are artificially moved into the Taylor Fork.
 - 3. For either scenario 1 or 2, Partners provided guidance to and/or questions for the Technical Committee to address:
 - a. Will there be hunting in the Taylor Fork?

- b. Request that the Technical Committee answer landowner questions delineated in this meeting report.
 - c. Delineate areas of conflict (e.g., issues of safety, hunting, private property).
 - d. Verify and build off the current IBMP adaptive management plan, which already incorporates IBMP management practices associated with the Governor's EA decision
- c. *At Nov 28 IBMP meeting*—Provide results of items described above
- (2) Have MDOL and MFWP provide guidance on if the Governor's EA decision allows natural migration, assisted migration of an experimental population, or something else
 - (3) Partners — Determine what management actions, if any, to undertake if bison arrive in the Taylor Fork on their own and soon (i.e., what is the plan that addresses the questions generated during the field trip and discussion presented just above).
 - (4) Partners — Create a strawman plan for introducing a small, experimental population to the Taylor Fork drainage.
 - (5) Opportunity for the CWG to meet with or add local landowners into their discussions and focus on solutions to the questioned being posed regarding bison moving into the Taylor Fork. The Partners endorsed the idea that should the CWG and local landowners meet, they could be given a place on the Nov 28 IBMP agenda to discuss their deliberations.

Bison quarantine and translocation

Improving IBMP effectiveness—topic of agreed near-term Partner interest

DW noted the NPS is making steps upgrade the Stephens Creek facility into a certified brucellosis quarantine facility, as delineated by MDOL and APHIS. The upgrade is considered a temporary step until a quarantine facility could be built outside the Park. That possibility has been initiated, though pending resolution of the Quarantine EA currently in progress. Work on that EA includes several collaborators: NPS, MDOL, the Fort Peck Tribe, and APHIS.

DW said that NPS considers quarantine as another tool for the Partners to use in their management of bison. Quarantine can help decrease the number of bison sent to slaughter and move bison to tribes. In response to questions, he said that

- the trap, whether serving as a quarantine facility or not, is not intended to interrupt the out-of-the-park migration of bison that makes them available to hunters;
- the Park has allocation of bison to tribes under the ship-to-slaughter program does not occur until after tribal groups sign an agreement with NPS; and
- discussions are active, and that he was hopeful that there would be progress to report at the November meeting.

Improving safety, quality of the north side hunt/improving boundary issues

Improving IBMP effectiveness—topic of agreed near-term Partner interest

JW reported that the Tribal Hunt Managers group reported met in May to work toward coordinating hunt management efforts, and met again yesterday. As part of their collaboration efforts, they are working on a joint communications MOU. The MOU is expected to be complete and signed in November.

The tribes believe they have done good hunts. They believe that education is the number one most important issue for assuring safe hunts, as well as to assure mutual understanding between interested parties. They believe that space and time are an issue, particularly in Beatty Gulch, as the bison hunt is currently defined.

A member of the Tribal Hunt Managers group said he thought that bison would only be caught in the Stephen's Creek trap when returning to the Park but that he understood bison were caught on their way away from the Park, as well. He asked for that policy to be clarified in the Winter Ops Plan for this year.

EH said that tribal hunters are placed with all other hunters and that the NPT have conformed to every rule set forth, and done everything requested of them. But he harkened to the 1855 treaty rights the tribe signed, and how that meant they had a right to hunt. He continued that treaty rights are the law of the land. We want to be compatible through education, he said, we want to conform, but you need to understand that we are conforming to your ideas. Some tribal members are upset; this is sacred to us.

QE noted that treaty tribes are always adapting. He said that the USA and treaty tribes have a government-to-government trust responsibility, and that the NPT are at the table to preserve our way of life and honor our culture. If NPS only allows so many bison out of the Park, then we can't be as successful as we could be. The NPT are here for the long haul to look out for bison.

Finally, a member of the Tribal Hunt Managers group said that they would have a meeting in October slated at setting common rules and regulations.

Highlights from an NAS review titled “Revisiting Brucellosis in the GYA”

Dr. Ryan Clarke, APHIS

Ryan Clarke reviewed the findings of a National Academy of Sciences (NAS) panel regarding the status of brucellosis in the Greater Yellowstone Area. APHIS first approached NAS about doing this review in early 2015 because of many changed conditions, including:

- Increased occurrence of brucellosis transmission from wildlife to livestock.
- The recent expansion of brucellosis in non-feedground elk.
- Factors that greater concern not only APHIS but also the regional and national livestock industry.
- This area is the subject of great interest to many citizens of widely divergent backgrounds and experience.

Ryan noted that since the publication of *Brucellosis in the Greater Yellowstone Area (NRC 1998)* there has been an explosion of research conducted on brucellosis and brucellosis-related subjects specifically related to the GYA. Those include brucellosis diagnostics, brucellosis vaccines/vaccination, economics of controlling brucellosis, and wildlife movement/behavior.

The charge to the NAS Committee on revisiting brucellosis in the GYA came, then, on 1 July 2015. Here, per Ryan, is part of the charge APHIS provided to the NAS:

Through the lens of your experience, knowledge, and research we would like you to assemble and analyze the information relevant to brucellosis in the elk, bison, and cattle of the Greater Yellowstone Area. Taking this information, we would like you to lay a scientific foundation for any future actions that could be applied to contain or suppress brucellosis across the region.

The NAS convened a multi-disciplinary panel of experts from across the country to undertake the requested review. Their charge included, then, a request to review and evaluate new, extensive research that has been undertaken since the 1998 analysis. This new research is extensive and needs to be evaluated (time factors, costs, feasibility) in the context of what future actions could be employed to limit or curb the spread of brucellosis from wildlife to cattle.



Figure 4.—Ryan Clarke of APHIS updated Partners, staff, and public on the findings of an NAS panel review of brucellosis in the Greater Yellowstone Area.

The NAS panel provided their results in May of 2017. Ryan stepped through the panel’s 12 conclusions and 7 recommendations, many of which are detailed and multi-faceted. Due to length concerns, we provide only the first three of each here as examples:

- Examples of panel conclusions (first 3 of 12)
 - *Conclusion #1.*—a) Elk now viewed as the primary source for new cases of brucellosis; b) Brucellosis control efforts--sharply focus on approaches that reduce transmission from elk to cattle and domestic bison
 - *Conclusion #2.*—No single management approach can independently result in reducing risk to a level that will prevent transmission of *B. abortus* among wildlife and domestic species.
 - *Conclusion #3.*—Reducing elk group sizes and/or density may decrease elk seroprevalence over time, and potentially decrease the risk of elk transmission.
 - ... and 9 more.
- Examples of panel recommendations (first 3 of 7)
 - *Recommendation 1.*—a) Prioritize efforts on preventing *B. abortus* transmission by elk; b) Modeling should be used to characterize and quantify the risk of disease transmission and spread from and among elk.
 - *Recommendation 2.*—a) For reducing the risk of *B. abortus* transmission from elk, federal and state agencies should use an active adaptive management approach: i) iterative hypothesis testing, ii) mandated periodic scientific assessments; b) Management actions should include multiple, complementary strategies over a long period of time, and should set goals.
 - *Recommendation 3.*—a) Use of supplemental feedgrounds should be gradually reduced; b) A strategic, stepwise, and science-based approach should be undertaken to analyze and evaluate the impacts of feedground reductions.
 - ... and 4 more.

Ryan’s presentation, provided in two PowerPoints, can be found on this meeting’s web page at <http://ibmp.info/Library/20170803/20170803.php>. Ryan’s presentation provides the full listing of the NAS panel’s conclusions and recommendations. That information can also be found at the NAS web page that provides the panel’s full report; see <http://www.nap.edu/24750>.

< Facilitator’s note: Dr. Clarke’s presentation was scoped *only* at presenting the NAS panel findings. Dr. Paul Cross, who served on the panel, is scheduled give a full presentation on the panel’s findings at the November

28, 2017 IBMP meeting, and to go into detail on the panel's deliberations, reasoning, conclusions, and recommendations. >

Preparations of 2017 Annual Report and 2017/18 Winter Ops Plan

<Facilitator's note: a session of the final agenda labeled "Discussion of 2017/2018 Winter IBMP Operations Plan" was subsumed into this section of the meeting >

The Partners and staff held brief discussions regarding the preparation of their 2016/17 Annual report and the 2017/18 Winter Operations Plan. Emily Kaleczyc of MDOL, who was responsible for both documents in the previous year, responded to several questions regarding how she completed the documents. Emily reported starting with and working off the previous year's report and plan, then sending out requests to Partners to fill in the gaps. Scott Barndt of the CGNF, responsible for spearheading the Annual Report and Winter Operations Plan for this year, said he would follow Emily's suggestion.

A couple of ideas were put forth regarding the Winter Operations Plan for the coming year, particularly on what changes can be expected from last year's plan:

- Last year's Winter Ops Plan referred to the Yakama tribe as potentially hunting. As the tribe is now expressing its tribal treaty hunting rights, that part of the Winter Ops Plan needs to be updated.
- DH said that APHIS does not expect to ask any bison to be committed to research this year.
- Transfers of bison to tribal members are expected to continue and information on this year's transfers will come from NPS.
- The interplay of ship-to-slaughter and quarantine cannot yet be defined but should become clearer before the November IBMP meeting. NPS will provide definition on how the Stephen's Creek trap will be employed.
- A request was made that Partners assure that the Governor's EA decision on expanded habitat and how bison will be managed in that habitat be included. It was noted that the Governor's decision is already written into the IBMP adaptive management plan.
- The annual NPS bison count, which was underway as this meeting at the same time as this meeting, is a key driver of the Winter Ops Plan. NPS agreed to send out the results of the count by the end of August (** **action item 5**).

Scott Barndt said he expected to move the Winter Ops Plan and the Annual Report along similar timelines. As such he plans to send an email request to Partners by mid-September requesting their input / changes / edits to both (** **action item 6**). A sketch of milestones for writing both the Winter Ops Plan and Annual Report follows:

- Before Sep 15—CGNF to prepare preliminary draft of both Winter Ops Plan and Annual Report
- Sep 15—request for input for both documents goes out to Partners from CGNF including either sending last year's version or initial draft
- Oct 1—Partners return their edits / additions to CGNF for incorporation
- Oct 15—CGNF sends out first draft of Winter Ops Plan and Annual Report with issues identified by Partner
- (Nov15 — *[optional]* If needed, CGNF may have requested further input to the Winter Ops Plan and/or Annual Report to better identify issues for the Nov 28 IBMP meeting. If requested, those changes would be required by Nov 15)
- Nov 28—Partners discuss both Winter Ops Plan and Annual Report status. Timeline set for completing both documents.
- Dec 15—goal date for starting electronic signature page of Winter Ops Plan.
- Dec 31 (per Partner Protocols)—
 - Winter Ops Plan, signed, posted to IBMP website.

- Annual Report (does not require Partner sign off) posted to the IBMP website. Lead Partner, per Partner Protocols, has final say in any disputes on material presentation.

Status of CGNF Habitat Studies: North Side results and West Side planning

Dr. Clayton Marlow, Montana State University

Dr. Marlow provided an summary of the work he and his team are doing under contract to the Custer-Gallatin National Forest in a talk titled “Ecological Sustainability of the Gardiner Basin.” A short summary of the presentation follows. Dr. Marlow’s full presentation can be found on the meeting website at <http://ibmp.info/Library/20170803/20170803.php>.

Dr. Marlow began by describing the project goal as being to develop a series of ecological site descriptions that would serve as the foundation for future assessment of extended bison presence on US Forest Service lands outside of the Park. The work, then, included:

- Soil and vegetation inventory sites within the Gardiner Basin (this area was later amended to include the Horse Butte and Red Canyon areas near West Yellowstone on the West Side of the Park).
- Plant community production measures at inventory sites.
- Establish ecological reference metrics for the non-forested communities inventoried in this effort.

As he had done at the field trip on the Taylor Fork the day before, Dr. Marlow described that the makeup, amount, productivity, and geographical extent are determined by the complex interplay of fire, grazing, climate, geology, and landscape. He described these factors and more as determining the dynamic equilibrium that grassland ecosystems maintain.



Figure 5.—Clayton Marlow spoke to Partners, staff, and public about his team’s habitat findings from field studies on forest service lands outside of the North Side of Yellowstone National Park. He also spoke briefly about planning for similar habitat studies on national forest lands on the West Side of the Park.

Study sites were selected as good bison habitat based on many factors, including aspect, geology, and % tree cover. For the sites studied, the team of researchers collected data on landscape (slope, aspect, elevation), vegetation (cover, shrub density, frequency, production), and soils (depth, texture, organic matter). The sites included five major community types:

- Abandoned Agricultural Lands
- Basin Big Sagebrush
- Black Sagebrush (2 phases)
- Grasslands (2 phases)
- Mountain Big Sagebrush (5 phases)

To assess community production metrics, the researchers took clipping data from 58 sites.

Dr. Marlow then provided results from a number of sites, for example for the subset of sites (6) described as abandoned agricultural fields, they found:

- Makeup
 - Dominate vegetation species – smooth brome and Kentucky bluegrass
 - Native grasses < 5%
 - Sagebrush < 3%
- Productivity Potential
 - Level to moderately steep
 - Soil Organic matter - 5%
 - Soil Depth – up to 30”
- Biomass Production
 - 329–942 lbs/acre

Dr. Marlow also described similar results for four other distinct subsets of their study sites: big basin sagebrush, black sagebrush (level phase), black sagebrush (steep phase), grassland (steep phase), and mountain big sagebrush. One result he presented showed that gently rolling areas showed lower productivity, even though one would expect them to have higher productivity. He attributed this discrepancy to the fact that while big grazers can utilize steep areas for grazing, they greatly prefer level ground. Thus the gently rolling areas of the study are seeing “too many mouths.”

Dr. Marlow provide an equation for estimating carrying capacity, though qualified that by saying it was the best estimate he could provide given the sample sites include few or no exclosures to provide a baseline that would help assess grassland productivity in the absence of grazing. Instead, the work is all based on standing crop at the time of measurement. He provided the idea that with regular monitoring herd size could be adjusted to match plant community makeup and productivity.

Dr. Marlow concluded his talk by describing similar work for CGNF that his team already has underway around Horse Butte (field data collected at 11 of 19 sites), and some preliminary planning they have done considering sampling sites in the Taylor Fork.

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

Status of new EIS process—Jennifer Carpenter

The new EIS is still on hold. Items still being worked through include the quarantine issue discussed elsewhere in this meeting. NPS expects to have more to report at the November 2017 IBMP meeting.

Status of lawsuit regarding access to Stephens Creek facility—Jennifer Carpenter

No new information to present.

Update on NPS Quarantine Environmental Assessment—Jennifer Carpenter

NPS provided a short update on the status of the quarantine EA earlier in the meeting.

Status of lawsuit suing USFWS over not listing Yellowstone bison under ESA—PJ White

The parties filing the lawsuit have filed a motion for summary judgment. No trial date is set to date.

Update on bison coexistence/fencing project—Shana Drimal

No update (though fencing was a point of discussion multiple times during Taylor Fork field trip).

Update (if any) on proposed management action to vaccinate bison in the western management area—Marty Zaluski

No update other than it is still under evaluation. If there is any proposal put forward, it will have full public comment period.

Administrative items

The Partners verified the meeting times and locations for their remaining IBMP meeting in 2017: November 28th in Pray MT (Chico Hot Springs). Upon a question from the Lead Partner, Partners agreed to consider setting aside the morning of Nov 29th for a continuation of their meeting given the large number of items expected to be covered. The Lead Partner will put forward a formal request, if developed, as soon as possible given the needs of Partner travel plans, conference room reservation, and similar (** action item 7).

Public comment

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

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

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

- We need to get rid of any quarantine facilities and stop cow towing to the MT Stockgrowers and the governor’s future ambitions.
- ** We need to allow bison to migrate north into the new tolerance area. We can do that with loose herding up Red Canyon to Cabin Creek corridor, into Wapiti Creek and down into the Taylor Fork.
- Getting animals there will provide a lot of buffalo for hunting and for tribes.
- The Big Open should be the final part of our plan — getting bison up on the short grass prairie. There should be no cattle. Let’s not call it a monument but instead call it the National Bison Conservation Area of Montana. That’s the answer to the large number of bison we want and need and Montana is the only state where it is possible. The nation is looking at Montana.

- I was quoted today by Marty Zaluski and just wanted to note that fact.
- So much here is mismanaged — for example why hunt in February and March when the fat is off the animals.
- Management calls for a capacity of 3000 animals but that level will never feed the people, including now a growing hunter population with the addition of the Yakama and possibly more this year. We need to get out of the box of having a population limit on bison.
- Last year’s thought that we needed to kill more than 1000 bison was crazy. The interior/central herd was hit hard with less than 300 animals there when it used to be 500-700 coming out of the West Side.
- This is our national mammal. It is an icon to our entire country, not just to Native Americans.
- ** We are imposing a double standard — why are bison the only one that suffer with special management, not elk.
- As long as brucellosis is considered an agent of bioterrorism we will fail. Can’t you, the Partners, just all write a letter to get brucellosis off of the bioterrorism list?

- I currently chair the Bear Creek Council. We work on local issues around Gardiner and bison is

- our #1 goal.
- We have been working on this issue for a long time and have argued and debated. Our stance is
 - 1) We seek more tolerance for bison;
 - 2) We believe the slaughter should be decreased and that live bison should be shipped to tribes to support their own herds and hunts;
 - ** 3) that MCA 81-2-120 should be repealed;
 - 4) We want to improve the mechanics of the hunt in Beatty Gulch (and elsewhere): a) we believe there needs to be improved dialogue with the community of Gardner as it is pretty vitriolic right now, b) safety is our biggest concern
- Let's be creative — let's let the bison migrate farther from the Park boundary.

- I am encouraged with the idea of reviving the Citizens' Working Group. If that happens please make sure that it is as diverse as possible.
- ** I am glad to hear about hunting meeting in Gardner in October. I request that hunt meeting includes businesses and residential owners and talks about how they can help make the hunt safe.
- As a Gardner resident I have had bison on my property and have had very little issue with them. If they are not hazed they are not a danger.
- ** We should focus on managing people, not bison.

- I am frustrated with how painfully slow this process is.
- We have talked about bison on the Taylor Fork since 2002. The Taylor Fork was selected because of less conflict between bison and cattle, not because the habitat was the best. It may not be the best winter habitat, but we picked it in part because it is not a place with livestock, meaning brucellosis is not a critical concern.
- We should collar some bison and let them go.
- Left alone bison would go to the Madison Valley.
- ** Please don't limit the Technical Team to considerations of just the Taylor Fork.
- I want us to get back to managing bison as wildlife.
- ** We already know where winter range is because we know where elk go.
- If citizens could get together with landowners then I want to do so, but I am not confident in the outcome.

- We need to honor this animal.
- I believe in the quarantine process — we have the protocol so let's do it.
- We can better manage the hunt but we need to realize that Beatty Gulch is too small.
- People have taken away bison winter range.
- We need to get rid of the law that doesn't even allow bison to be shipped out. We can change that and even do it this season.
- I am aware of what slaughter is. I think that it is extremely disrespectful.
- ** Instead, we could have a harvest pasture.
- Harvest in winter when the animals are at lowest weight is a bad deal.

- My family has been in the valley for a long time.
- We have no quarrel with wildlife but you also need to walk in our moccasins.
- It is the middle of our high season and I need to take 2 days off my work to attend these meetings.
- I don't see any positive for landowners if bison come.
- ** There is nothing on paper. Why don't we have a plan in writing of what the Partners will do?

- There is no plan and no solution to what is happening.
- ****** On page 9 of the Governor's Plan — what is meant by “unacceptable human conflicts”? We need a list — we need a list we can share with landowners before something happens.
 - I appreciate the encouragement regarding having the Citizens' Working Group get together and meeting with landowners in the Taylor Fork. It might be possible — I have talked with Kameron and Daphne. NGOs might be able to fund a facilitator.
 - But I want to set expectations. The idea of the CWG working on the West Side is not an apples-to-apples comparison with the original CWG. The original CWG was a blue sky process that went on for a year. The idea that we could have one meeting in the Taylor Fork and get to solutions is unrealistic.
 - I want to say that it was great that all the people in this room sang to Joe (Gutkowski) for his 90th birthday.
 - The next speaker read an article or opinion piece that he said was put out in a local publication. The article was from a Nez Perce hunter. It described how important the hunt was to the tribe, and the great pride the hunter felt in being both a Nez Perce Tribal member, and being a bison hunter.
 - I serve as the chair of the Natural Resources Committee of the Montana House of Representatives.
 - I try to represent all the people of my district.
 - This is a tough and emotional issue.
 - ****** Please look at page 9 of the Governor's decision, the second bullet where it says will manage “within ranges or limits that avoid unacceptable human conflicts.” What is meant by unacceptable? Would that include injury to a child at Ophir School?
 - Topography is restrictive. I don't think bison will go into the Taylor Fork.
 - ****** We need to define assisted migration. If migration is assisted, will you violate the bioterrorism laws?
 - ****** I agree, we should have a field trip up the Taylor Fork in mid-February.
 - ****** The subcommittee that looks at the Taylor Fork should have a landowner on it.
 - I represent The Fort Peck Tribe.
 - We should be able to move disease-free bison to the Fort Peck Reservation.
 - The key thing is how important it is to restore bison to Indian Country.
 - Fort Peck spent ½ million dollars to create a quarantine facility to be ready for Yellowstone bison but now that space is just sitting empty.
 - We are trying to get restriction to transport bison lifted but have not yet been successful.
 - At Fort Peck, the bison are far more remote from cattle than in the DSA.
 - Perhaps if we called it a “research station” maybe bison could be transferred there.
 - ****** I am frustrated. To date the tribes have mostly been involved in IBMP via hunt issues but the Fort Peck location allows tribes to help in other ways.
 - ****** Can we create a new DSA around Fort Peck?
 - We need to get bison out alive to tribes.

**** 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
- EH—Eric Holt
- GAO—Government Accountability Office
- GNF—Gallatin National Forest
- GW—Germaine White
- GWA—Gallatin Wildlife Association
- GYA—Greater Yellowstone Area
- ITBC—Inter Tribal Buffalo Council
- JC—Jennifer Carpenter
- JH—John Harrison
- JW—Jeremy Wolf
- LG—Leonard Gray
- LW—Leander Watson
- MBOL—Montana Board of Livestock
- MD—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
- MH—Mike Honeycutt
- 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
- 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