

**Bear Creek Council Presents: Gardiner Field Trip for the Interagency Bison Management Partners
April 24th, 2019**



Bison walking down Old Yellowstone Trail. Photo by Mary Strickroth.



AGENDA

8:45 AM meet at Gardiner Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center - 216 W Park St.

Parking is available between the Chamber of Commerce/Visitor Center and the North Entrance of YNP.

- 24-hour bathrooms are available through the side door of the visitor center.
- Welcome and introductions begin at 9:00 AM
- BCC members welcome everyone, establish group norms of decorum.

The purpose of this field trip is information exchange; we hope to share concerns and opportunities for the partners to collect, and there will be no unbridled emotion). A BCC member will review the agenda for the day.

9:15 AM Depart by bus – The bus capacity is 28 people. We have a smaller bus that can accommodate 10 more. Some participants may choose to drive separate vehicles, but please note that BCC will present some field trip content on the bus between stops.

9:30 AM – 11:00 AM Stop 1: Beattie Gulch

- Nathan Varley, Bear Creek Council President presents stakeholder
- Nathan will facilitate discussion on a carcass management conversation with the partners. BCC defers to the partners on what can be done on this issue, but will offer suggestions of what could help.

11:30 AM – 12:20 PM Stop 2: Eagle Creek and/or Travertine (dependent on road conditions)

- Ilona Popper, Bear Creek Council member

12:30 PM – 1:30 PM Break for Lunch at the Community Center

- Lunch provided by Bear Creek Council for those who attended the field trip – Thanks to Yellowstone Grill!



1:30 PM – 3:30 PM Gardiner-area citizens' panel – facilitated by Scott Bischke


- Nathan Varley (Bear Creek Council president) will recap field trip, and introduce panelists.
- Q&A reserved for IBMP partners and the panelists only.


IBMP Field Trip Route


April 24, 2019

Legend

-  Gardiner
-  Stop

 Stop 2 Beattie Gulch

 Stop 3 Eagle Creek

 Stop 1 Chamber of Commerce

Google Earth

2 mi



Contact information: Nathan Varley, nathan@wolftracker.com
Sabina Strauss, sstrauss14@zoho.com
Makenna Sellers, makenna@northernplains.org

Bear Creek Council (BCC) formed over 35 years ago to protect the integrity of our environment, its wildlife, and our community at the north entrance to Yellowstone National Park. BCC is an all-volunteer, grassroots affiliate of the Northern Plains Resource Council. BCC currently has about 65 active members, who offer a 'local's voice' on the issue of bison management. Gardiner locals are the most affected stakeholder in the issue that does not have a seat at the table. Ultimately, BCC wants to see wild bison afforded greater tolerance on public lands outside the park, and fewer bison dying when they come to the boundary.

Since the 1980's when bison first began leaving the park to the north, BCC members have engaged on the issue. For decades since, we have generally opposed the management of bison as conducted by the partners of the IBMP. It's our contention that **bison management** as currently practiced is **(1) not safe, is (2) not prudent, and is (3) not in the interest of conservation, local industry (tourism), and our community.** We detail these points below.

NOT SAFE: Through the testimony of witnesses, we intend to convey the conditions of the bison hunt as unsafe for hunters and bystanders in the area. Due to the highly concentrated, "firing-line" manner in which the harvest takes place, coupled with high numbers of hunters in proximity to public roads, homes, and businesses, there have been a significant number of alarming incidents throughout the years. Some of these have been harrowing, "near-miss" events.

NOT PRUDENT: It is our position that the removal of bison from the boundary area, under all current means (hunting and capture) is not prudent from a number of perspectives. Experts have argued the current "lifeboat" approach of keeping relatively small herds contained in relatively small reserves is a deeply flawed paradigm for wild bison conservation.

The removal of bison by capture and slaughter is not humane because it involves packing them in trucks where they gouge and bloody one another. BCC has long felt that hunting is part of the solution but it has become our regular experience that hunting is often not safe, results in high wounding loss, and leaves behind a lot of carcasses, gut piles, and/or remains. The carcasses pose the following hazards:

- The potential for transmission of brucellosis to bison and elk has not been alleviated.
- The ugly nature of the hunt includes an alarmingly high number of shots fired, even at night.

- A resulting high number of carcasses are then left close to public roads and homes where they constitute a visual blight and general affront to local residents and visitors to the area.
- Collateral damage is common where carcasses concentrate scavenger species that are vulnerable to being shot or trapped. Scavengers risk lead poisoning by consuming the remains of hunter-killed bison. Recent studies revealed that scavenging eagles often have toxic levels of lead (see the 4/15/19 press release from YNP about the first golden eagle fitted with a transmitter killed by lead poisoning a few days ago.). The carcasses create opportunities for poachers to kill protected species. Bears may be roaming near homes where they pose a safety risk.

We urge the IBMP partners to address the concerns around carcass accumulation. Partners should remove these as they accumulate (disposed of by the hunters and enforced by the authorities that patrol these areas).

NOT IN OUR BEST INTEREST: While BCC is not a partner in any official capacity, our community is arguably one of the most affected stakeholders on the issue of bison management. We are not saying, “not in my backyard.” Rather, we believe the incidents that have occurred here through the years do not belong in any backyard of anybody’s community.

We do not oppose hunting, but rather, plead with the partners for it to be conducted differently. Our community has long been a renowned destination for hunters, and we celebrate that distinction and welcome hunters every year. In the past, a similar “firing line” hunting situation associated with the park boundary was successfully mitigated by a series of closures that allow elk to move out of the park and disperse into remote areas where hunting has no impact on bystanders. All hunting that occurs should meet modern standards for safety, integrity, and fair chase.

In summary, we urge the partners to quickly move toward a different approach to bison management than we have experienced. This approach should be a thoughtful assessment of hazards imposed by current approaches. The resulting model should demonstrate an improved and lasting stewardship befitting a world renowned wildlife resource on an iconic landscape. People’s safety and livelihoods are at stake.

Lastly, Bear Creek Council extends our gratitude to all partners and field trip attendees for listening to our concerns.

Photo Gallery



Photo 2, bison walk through the Roosevelt Arch on their way towards Stephens Creek and Beattie Gulch.

As winter progresses, the snow deepens and ice layers often form in the snow pack. At some point, bison in the higher elevations of the park (Lamar Valley and the interior) can no longer push through the ice and snow to reach dried grasses. They begin migrating to lower elevations in search of more food and less snow.



Photo 3 Bison often stop to graze on the football field at Gardiner School. Notice the number of piles of bison droppings.



Photo 4 - Bison on Old Yellowstone Trail on their way to Beattie Gulch.

Once bison have passed through Gardiner and continue north, they often travel on Old Yellowstone Trail, the narrow, 2-lane, dirt road that connects the Roosevelt Arch with **Beattie Gulch**.

Photo 5 -Once hunters have killed a bison, they park their trucks in one lane of Old Yellowstone Trail to load the bison or the parts they will take. As this photo shows, this significantly impedes traffic on the road. This creates a safety issue, especially in low light or snowy weather. The more bison that hunters take, the more often this traffic hazard occurs.



Hunting Area Recap

- Bison carcasses attract grizzly bears, which creates possibility of griz/resident interaction. This is dangerous for bears and residents.
- Carcasses attract eagles, owls, bobcats, foxes, coyotes and other scavengers. We have seen remains of bobcats, foxes, and coyotes shot at carcasses.
- We want carcasses removed from Beattie Gulch.
- The current hunt is not fair chase, it's a firing squad. We implore IBMP partners to craft a better hunt.
- All of Gardiner basin (up to the Yankee Jim bison guard) is part of established bison tolerance zone. We want to see bison allowed to disperse onto public land throughout the tolerance zone.
- Once bison disperse, the hunt will be fair chase—as some of the tribal partners have also requested.
- There are very few cattle still grazing in tolerance zone.
- Conditions at Beattie present a danger to hunters and residents (FWP has called this hunt a public safety issue).
- One business along Old Yellowstone Trail has lost thousands of dollars of rental income because people don't want to rent her places during hunt.



The area where bison are shot in Beattie Gulch is adjacent to Yellowstone and small. In an average year, hunters may take 250 bison in this small area. Many of those hunters leave carcasses behind. A carcass can include a well-developed fetus given the time of year the hunt takes place. These carcasses can be within 100 yards of Old Yellowstone Trail. Houses sit just on the other side of Old Yellowstone Trail from Beattie Gulch. Carcasses attract predators and scavengers including grizzly bears, wolves, coyotes, foxes, bobcats, golden eagles, bald eagles, ravens and magpies.

The presence of grizzly bears in particular can create the potential for human-bear conflict. This is bad for both species.

The scavengers, especially ravens, can fly off with pieces of carcass and stash the pieces near homes. This can create the danger of a pet becoming sick if it eats one of the stashed pieces of carcass. The carcasses create an unsafe situation for wildlife, residents, and pets.



These two photos are an example of hunts and shots fired dangerously close to private property and private residences. These photos were taken by Rick Lamplugh who observed this shooting from start to finish in January of 2017.

Note how close the residences are to where the hunter is shooting. For reference, just behind the hunter, you will find Old Yellowstone Trail. To the right of hunter is a private property. The hunter fired shots up a corridor that is approximately 15 feet wide.



This photo shows bison leaving private property and entering Jardine Road. In their winter migration bison walk up Jardine Road to reach the Travertine Road or Eagle Creek areas.

Hunters have shot bison that were very close to Jardine Road and close to private residences.

Hunters leave carcasses and body parts along Jardine Road and this presents the same safety concerns for wildlife, residents, and pets that it does in Beattie Gulch.



This photo shows an NPS ranger armed with a rifle. He is walking back towards his truck after having gone into the Beattie Gulch area in search of a bison that he had learned was wounded by hunters and making its way back into the park. (Rick Lamplugh spoke to this ranger and this is what the ranger reported.)

Every year some bison are wounded by hunters yet still able to retreat into the park. Rangers then are dispatched to kill the wounded bison. NPS should have statistics on how many bison this happens to.

The bus in this photo is from a local tour company. The tourists on the bus are getting a view of an armed ranger. These tour buses also take tourists along Old Yellowstone Trail when the hunt is on and the tourists get a view of bison being shot. This gives Yellowstone National Park and the Forest Service a black eye.