



7/22/19

Dear IBMP Partners,

Bear Creek Council appreciates this opportunity to work with IBMP to help keep residents and hunters safe and to discuss the future of bison management. We look forward to discussing with you partners these proposed solutions to increase the safety of the bison hunt.

On the morning of April 24, 2019, Bear Creek Council (BCC) hosted a field trip for IBMP partners, tribal hunters, and Gardiner residents. About 60 people toured Beattie Gulch and Eagle Creek. In the afternoon, a panel of Gardiner residents shared their concerns about the hunt and answered questions. The following day IBMP held its regular meeting in Gardiner. During each of these events, attendees presented safety issues and brainstormed solutions to increase the safety of hunters and residents.

At the IBMP meeting, partners agreed that BCC would work with Mike Thom of Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF) and other representatives from IBMP who want to be involved.

BCC agreed to:

1. Prepare a list of solutions that could be implemented. (This list was discussed at the May 16 state-tribal bison hunt meeting and revised based on input from that meeting.)
2. Submit a brief report to IBMP and make a presentation about solutions to safety issues at the July 31 IBMP meeting.

On May 1, Scott Bischke, IBMP facilitator, suggested that in preparation for a 45- to 60-minute presentation with Q & A at the July 31 IBMP meeting, BCC should do the following:

1. Provide solution-oriented changes to methods of IBMP management.
2. Categorize solutions as either short-term (less than 1 year) or long-term.
3. Point out where suggested actions fit into the IBMP Adaptive Management Plan. (<http://www.ibmp.info/adaptivemgmt.php>)

Bear Creek Council's Position:

BCC supports the IBMP goal of maintaining a wild, free-ranging bison population. BCC is not against bison hunting, but we believe that the hunt can be safer for residents and hunters and the goal of free-ranging bison can be achieved by:

- Allowing bison to inhabit the entire legal tolerance zone.
- Allowing bison to disperse and populate the state.
- Allowing transport of bison to the tribes.

These shifts in management would increase hunter opportunities; increase the places hunters may find bison; and allow for wildlife watching, photography, and tourism throughout the state. BCC believes there are ways ranchers and citizens can live with bison, prevent the spread of brucellosis, and use proper fencing. Bison can be managed like other wildlife, such as elk.

SIX SHORT TERM SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE THE HUNT

(The number in parentheses indicates the relevant section of the IBMP plan.)

Solution 1: Make carcass removal required in Beattie Gulch. (1.3b)

While carcasses are a natural part of a hunt and important to scavengers, insects, and bacteria, the killing of 250 to 300 bison in this small area in a typical winter creates a carcass problem. Because the April field trip occurred after an unusual winter with light hunting in Beattie Gulch, fewer carcasses were observed. This may have downplayed this year's carcass problem. But after one winter hunt a few years ago, more than 8,000 pounds of remains were removed by state agencies from Beattie Gulch and hauled to Livingston.

Models for carcass removal include:

1. Greater Yellowstone Coalition has offered to help with the cost of the placement of a dumpster in Beattie Gulch. One way to use the dumpster would be to require hunters to drag their carcasses to the shoulder of the retrieval road. Since the shoulder of the retrieval road is already disturbed, a backhoe driving along it to collect carcasses would do little further damage to Beattie Gulch. The backhoe could carry carcasses to the GYC-supplied dumpster. Once full, the dumpster could be taken to Livingston. Other possibilities include incineration or composting as used by livestock producers. Greater Yellowstone Coalition has offered to help with creating a composting site or incinerator in or near Gardiner.
2. On the National Elk Refuge, a private company, Tag 'N Drag (tagndrag.com), is authorized to provide carcass removal service that individual hunters pay for. Finding a local company to do this in Gardiner Basin could reduce carcass problems and provide local jobs.
3. Individuals could be paid for carcasses. As a model, the state of Idaho pays fisherman who bring in their catch of certain fish (<https://idfg.idaho.gov/lake-pend-oreille-angler-incentive-program>). With an incentive program, hunters or locals could benefit financially from removing carcasses.

Solution 2: Expand the clean zone deeper into Beattie Gulch. (1.1, 1.4a)

Hunters cannot shoot while in the clean zone or shoot at wildlife that is in the clean zone. Hunters cannot leave carcasses in the clean zone but can move carcasses through the clean zone. BCC appreciates that the clean zone has been adhered to since its introduction.

Expanding the clean zone (by 100 yards to the west) moves the shooting and gut piles farther from Old Yellowstone Trail and reduces the possibility that a stray bullet may injure a hunter, resident, or tourist on or near Old Yellowstone Trail.

A possible downside of increasing the clean zone is compressing the hunting area. However, tribal representatives state that hunter safety has improved in Beattie Gulch with compliance with the MOA. So having hunters in a slightly smaller area may not create a problem.

A possible benefit of increasing the clean zone is giving bison a larger pathway through which they can reach other parts of the tolerance zone. This broader dispersal fits in with the IBMP mission of free-ranging bison and puts hunters in a larger area thus increasing hunter safety and hunter opportunity.

Solution 3: Create clean zones along portions of Jardine Road and Travertine Road. (1.3b)

Both these clean zones would operate like the one in Beattie Gulch. The clean zone along Jardine Road would start at the intersection of Hwy 89 and Jardine Rd in Gardiner and go east to the Penn Stock (building and pond located one-half mile east of Eagle Creek Road). This clean zone would be 150 yards wide on each side of Jardine Road.

The clean zone along Travertine Road would start at the intersection of Travertine Road and Jardine Road and continue along Travertine Road for 0.4 mile. This clean zone would be 150 yards wide and only on the east or north side of Travertine Road. The west and south side of Travertine Road are already closed to hunting due to the residences located there.

Both these clean zones increase safety, support mixed-use in the National Forest, and still allow significant hunter access. These clean zones decrease the likelihood of stray bullets hitting a resident, their animals, or their property. During one hunt, shots were fired too close to Eagle Creek Road. Bullets hit the ground next to parked cars and within several feet of hunters dressing a bison in the parking area at the intersection of Eagle Creek Road and Jardine Road.

Solution 4: Increase residents' awareness of the danger of certain areas during bison hunting season. (1.3b)

IBMP members stated—and Bear Creek Council agrees—that Gardiner residents and BCC can take steps to increase the safety of residents and their dogs. BCC can run public service announcements in the Gardiner community newsletter during bison hunting season. These announcements will encourage residents to:

1. Be aware of hunt dates, hunt areas, and clean zones so they may make choices about the safest places to recreate.
2. Keep dogs leashed or under close supervision when outside during hunting season.

Solution 5: Increase hunter awareness about residents' use of Jardine Road, Eagle Creek Road, and Old Yellowstone Trail and educate hunters in safe practices. (1.3b)

Hunter education and maps of residential areas can help hunters avoid firing shots near roads and dressing carcasses in the middle of roads.

Solution 6: Reduce parking congestion and trash along Old Yellowstone Trail.

At the May 16 state-tribal meeting, tribal representatives discussed that dealing with traffic congestion caused by hunter parking and reducing trash left by hunters are solutions they could address. Since Old Yellowstone Trail is a county road, BCC representatives could meet with the Park County commissioners and engage them in this solution. The county, perhaps in cooperation with the Forest Service, could widen the road in Beattie Gulch to provide for parking alongside the road rather than in the road. Park County could provide bear-proof trash receptacles in the Beattie Gulch area and along Jardine Road. The tribes and state agencies could make sure that hunters know to use them.

Sincerely,

Nathan Varley

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President, Bear Creek Council