

INTERAGENCY BISON MANAGEMENT PLAN



SPRING 2023 IBMP PARTNERS MEETING MEETING REPORT

Wednesday, June 7, 2023 ~ Gardiner, Montana

PARTICIPANTS

Lead Partner & Host: Montana Department of Livestock

IBMP Facilitator: Julie Anton Randall (ecomareterra@gmail.com)

IBMP Partner Primaries

Tom McDonald, Tribal Council Chairman, Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes (CSKT)

Ervin Carlson, Board President, InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC)

Mike Honeycutt, Executive Officer, Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL)

Marty Zaluski, State Veterinarian, Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL)

Dustin Temple, Director, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP)

Cam Sholly, Superintendent, Yellowstone National Park (YNP), National Park Service

Ashton Picard, Chaplain, Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee, Nez Perce Tribe (NPT)

Dr. Burke Healey, Senior Leader for Policy & Operations, USDA Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service

Mary Erickson, Forest Supervisor, Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF), USDA Forest Service

IBMP Partner Seconds

NPS – Tim Reid, Jennifer Carpenter

CSKT – James “Bing” Matt

ITBC – Majel Russell

MDOL – Brad DeGroot

MFWP – Marina Yoshioka

NPT – Erik Holt, Eric Kash Kash and Mike Lopez

APHIS – Rebecca Bigelow and Jennifer Siembieda

USFS – Mike Thom

Treaty Hunt Tribes (in addition to Partners)

Blackfeet Nation – Gerald “Buzz” Cobell

Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) – Andrew Wildbill

Crow Tribe – Leroy Stewart

Shoshone-Bannock Tribes – Tom Wadsworth

Yakama Nation—Riley Neff Warner
Northern Arapaho representatives not present.

Meeting Location: **Yellowstone River Gardiner Lodge (“The Barn”)**, 1037 US Highway 89 S, Gardiner, Montana 59030

Other Attendees: *Please see Attendance Record in Appendix A.*

I. MEETING OPENING

The Spring 2023 Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) Partners meeting started with a call to order by Lead Partners Mike Honeycutt and Marty Zaluski, Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL). New Chaplain of the Tribal Executive Committee (NPTEC) Ashton Picard was asked to open the meeting with a Tribal prayer, which Ashton sang with great enthusiasm. After, Mike and Marty welcomed all those in attendance and set the tone for a productive meeting day. IBMP Facilitator Julie Anton Randall asked the Partner Primaries and their Seconds to introduce themselves, followed by members of the public in attendance. Note: A copy of the Attendance Record is available in Appendix A. Julie also covered the day’s logistics and recognized the value of the venue, Yellowstone River Gardiner Lodge—located in the Northern Management Area (Zone 2) and situated in the Tolerance Zone to where Yellowstone bison migrate in the winter months. Julie/Facilitator reviewed the agenda (which had been posted online in draft form for two weeks after sharing with Partners for input in the months prior), available at the door for public participants. A vote was called to approve the agenda.

IBMP Partners Decision—**The Partners approved the agenda as posted.**

II. IBMP PAST BUSINESS

Former Lead Partner NPS had approved the draft Meeting Report prepared by the Facilitator, which was posted online as a draft in January 2023. Current Lead Partner MDOL asked if the Partners had any amendments, and hearing none, called for a vote to approve the Meeting Report. The final version will be posted on www.ibmp.info. Julie noted that the Meeting Report had been called various names in the past (e.g., Summary, Report), and requested that the Partners consider adopting an official name for the Protocols and for consistent use.

IBMP Partners Decisions—**The Partners approved the Fall 2022 IBMP Partners Meeting Report in final. The official name for the report-out from IBMP Partners Meetings will be “IBMP Partners Meeting Report.”**

III. PRESENTATION OF NEW MAPS

Marty/MDOL introduced the subject of new maps for use by the IBMP Partners, of value for their support of Adaptive Management Plan (AMP) operations and understanding the landscape as collaborative decisions are made. Julie had recruited the talented Randy Scarlett from the Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF) Hebgen Lake District Ranger’s office to create new maps of the seasonal Tolerance Zones, shared in draft form at the November 2022 IBMP Partners Meeting.

As Lead Partner, Marty/MDOL requested that the maps include specific reference points—helpful “landmarks of operational significance.” These could include milestones for the movement of animals, key intervention points to prevent bison from crossing into Zone 3, and historic/potential human-bison conflict sites. Julie/Facilitator had specifically requested that any geographical location noted in the AMP appear labeled on the maps (e.g., Zone boundaries, quarantine facilities, highways, cattle guard at the entrance to Yankee Jim Canyon, Hydrologic Divide, Horse Butte, Taylor Fork Drainage, South Fork of the Madison River, and “grazing leases seasonally occupied by cattle”). She shared via PowerPoint a list of map locations covered on the maps so far and prompted the Partners to think of any that might be missing from this list. Marty/MDOL noted how helpful it will be to be able to zoom in on locations with an interactive map tool for IBMP Partners.

The Western and Northern Management Area maps created and shown by Randy/CGNF include the requested site identifications and beyond that hunting closure areas, the buffer zone in Beattie Gulch, the Eagle Creek and Bear Creek campgrounds, and more. Randy showed how one can zoom in on these locations and also zoom out to the whole Designated Surveillance Area (Zone 3). Generally, possible bison winter and summer ranges can be viewed via the maps. On the Western Management Area (WMA) map, one can view the drift fence that restricts bison movement, as well as ranch areas off Highway 191. The Northern Management Area (NMA) map includes Stephens Creek and Corwin Springs, as well as places Partners requested to appear, like Travertine Flats.

Shooting closures, e.g., places in orange along Highway 89 in Gardiner, are identified on the NMA map. On the West side, a shooting closure might be indicated at a place like a cross-country ski area.

Randy/CGNF marked in red those active grazing allotments in or adjacent to the Tolerance Zone (the Hebgen Lake and Gardiner District Rangers know these).

Marty/MDOL requested that Partners view the maps and consider the landmarks essential to IBMP discussions of bison distribution and abundance. Julie /Facilitator has prepared a running list of landmarks to include on the maps. The Partners with staff on the ground during the Treaty Tribes Hunt operations and Tribal game wardens should be sure to review this list and provide input.

IBMP Partners Decision—The IBMP Facilitator will circulate a list of landmarks on the Western and Northern Management Area maps created by CGNF/Randy Scarlett to all Partners and the Treaty Hunt Tribes and request input so that the maps can be refined and used by IBMP.

Mary Erickson/CGNF noted that the significance of livestock allotments on the maps can be informed by data that indicates the type of stock eligible for the allotment, and whether the allotment is active or not and clarify the time duration of the allotment. It is useful to view these in the context of considering how to adjust Operation Plans.

IV. IBMP PARTNER PROTOCOLS

The IBMP Protocols Subcommittee created at the April 2022 IBMP Partners Meeting actively addressed their five-question assignment over the course of several months. The five questions (from the April 2022 IBMP Partners Meeting Summary) were:

1. *How does a group join the IBMP and who can join?*
2. *Should the IBMP Winter Ops Plan be renamed?*
3. *Verify IBMP decision spaces: what is an IBMP decision vs what is an agency or Tribal decision*
4. *Definition of consensus?*
5. *Ability of each Partner at the table to commit their agency or Tribe to an IBMP decision during a meeting.*
6. *Timeline review of the IBMP calendar—does it need to be modified?*

Julie/Facilitator had worked with PJ White and the Subcommittee to update the Protocols and also include the revisions that Partners had concurred on which (with question #4 unresolved and question #1 not yet addressed). There is currently a tracked-changes version showing all of the proposed Protocols changes that is available for Partners to review upon request. The Protocols revision updates the calendar back to two IBMP Partner Meetings/year and groups the existing decision-making protocols in a single area of the Protocols for clarity and assistance to the Partners in understanding their precedented agreement on the “consensus” term. The goal is to finalize the Protocols updates and amendments before the Fall 2023 IBMP Partners Meeting.

A. Protocols Subcommittee Report

Majel Russel/ITBC, Protocols Subcommittee Chair, overviewed the Subcommittee's progress. She noted that all Subcommittee members had an opportunity to review their own decision-making authorities as written up in summary form by PJ in a document called, "*Statutory Authorities*" and "*Bison Management Decisions Made Under Exclusive Authority and Jurisdiction*" circulated by the Facilitator. This document complements the AMP, which lays out the particular bison management actions agreed upon by the IBMP Partners when the AMP was finalized in 2016. It recognizes the distinct obligations of each Partner to take responsibility for its actions according to relevant law and policy and as such sets the stage for understanding "what is an IBMP decision" (made jointly by the Partners). The idea is each Partner has independent authorities and one Partner cannot infringe on the authorities of another. Thus, if one Partner does not agree with an action under another's authority, how do the Partners proceed? What is the process for agreement and how to the Partners come to it—or propose effective alternatives?

The first step is to improve on notice of independent Partner decisions that will be made, creating better coordination between MDOL, NPS, MFWP, and CGNF, as well as the Tribal Partners, and enabling a streamlined approach to generating the IBMP Operations Plan.

As Lead Partner, Mike Honeycutt would like to see Partners come to the Deliberative Table with the authority to make a decision, and if they do not, Protocols indicate this is considered "abstention." The Partners need to be serious about not leaving the Fall IBMP Partners Meeting without an Operations Plan. They should keep in mind that IBMP decision attempts cannot dismiss an individual Partner's authorities and directives from the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture or Interior or the Montana Governor. That said, it is important to respect what each Partner brings to the table.

Refining the "*Statutory Authorities*" and "*Bison Management Decisions Made Under Exclusive Authority and Jurisdiction*" documents is one path forward. Also, the new IBMP Calendar set forth by the Lead Partner for 2023 establishes timeframes for Partners responses on topics that require decision-making at Meetings. Moreover, agendas, now in table form, include columns headed with "Action Item (for IBMP Vote)" and "Discussion Item (Non-Vote)" as recommended by the Protocols Subcommittee.

In discussing how to finalize the Protocols, a discussion about the need to "sunset" the Protocols Subcommittee ensued. This will require responding to unmet Protocols needs, such as how an entity can become a new IBMP Partner. Moreover, the tasks assigned to the Subcommittee should have a deadline and the Subcommittee itself needs an expiration date. Topics will include:

- (1) **How does an entity become a new IBMP Partner.**
- (2) **Re-affirming the definition of "consensus" as unanimous agreement by the Partners on a decision (and clarifying and condensing in a single place the accompanying provisions about how to get there).**

Concerns raised about adding new Partners were that IBMP could become "non-functional" by virtue of the sheer numbers involved. Majel/ITBC emphasized that Tribes that were part of the Laramie Treaty have rights to hunt in the WMA and NMA. As sovereign governments, Tribes are distinct rank from a "special interest group." The Partners need to take an equitable approach and not shut out an interested Tribe. Marty/MDOL raised the point that Treaty rights do not automatically convey a seat at the Deliberative Table and that the Primaries should take care in aligning the two distinctive roles. Mary/CGNF noted that the Lead Partner role (rotated annually among the Partners) conveys a financial obligation. Moreover, there are jurisdictional challenges that could arise with each new Partner added. Mike/MDOL asked that the Partners not make a new Partner decision arbitrarily.

Erik Holt/NPT emphasized that Tribes depend on the trust responsibility of the Federal agencies. Court cases have affirmed greater accessibility for hunting by Tribes; meaningful Tribal government-to-Federal government consultation is required. NPT had wanted 3 IBMP Partner Meetings/year so that NPT could better understand what is changing on the landscape. He mentioned that NPT does not typically dialogue with the State of Montana about these issues; it is only in the IBMP forum that they have this opportunity.

IBMP Partners Decision—Partners must send their input on the draft 2023 IBMP Calendar prepared by Lead Partner/MDOL to the IBMP Facilitator within two weeks. The contents of this Calendar should convey a three-step process of presentation, review/input, and decision-making for topics under the IBMP. The date of the Treaty Hunt Meeting that occurs each spring after hunting season will appear on this Calendar.

The Blackfeet Nation (represented by Loren Monroe) asked to join IBMP at the April 2022 IBMP Partners Meeting. Cam Sholly/NPS suggested that perhaps the Tribal leadership of Tribes currently exercising Treaty hunting rights in Zone 2 should be at the Deliberative Table in order to establish accountability. If not part of IBMP decision-making, they might not feel bound by the decisions made. How can IBMP Partners and Treaty Hunt Tribes come to agree on bison population management in Zone 2? If clear agreement could be achieved, bison management will be easier on the ground. At the November 2022 Meeting, NPT had indicated that it could not tolerate more than 750 bison removed from the population, yet this number was surpassed by February 2023, with NPT hunters still actively hunting.

The route to achieving consensus is to examine the decision topic first, then decide if it is subject to an IBMP Partner's statutory authority or policy mandate or whether it is an IBMP decision to make collaboratively. At the recent Partner Meetings, the primary reason for not achieving consensus on the Operations Plan was a lack of agreement on what bison population management looks like in the NMA. Moreover, bison migrated effectively through much of the Tolerance Zone until the hunters showed up. Cam suggested getting Treaty Tribe representatives with authority to act at the table and figure out what clear course of action can regularly be agreed upon. Mike noted the clarity that comes with IBMP Partner conversation about population management.

Ashton Picard/NPT stated that a clear calendar would enable NPT to commit to actions at IBMP Meetings. The Tribes know the difference between formal government-government consultation (which has worked well) and IBMP decisions.

Majel/ITBC suggested that the Protocols should address how the obligation of government-government consultation plays out in relation to IBMP. Tim Reid/NPS added that showing up having "done the work" and "putting in a little sweat equity" is vital; "just opining is tacit abstention if a Partner is not ready to act."

B. Decision-Making Protocols

Pulling together the existing Protocols that have to do with decision-making by the IBMP Partners, Julie presented a suggested reordering/condensing of certain Protocols that would enable the Partners to clearly see when, where, and how IBMP decisions are made, and what to do if there is not consensus or a Partner abstains or does not respond or come prepared to vote on an IBMP decision. She will insert this into the current Protocols draft for Subcommittee review.

IBMP Partners Decision—During July 2023, the IBMP Protocols Subcommittee will address the updated/edited version of the Protocols provided by the Facilitator and create a clean Protocols version for review by the Partners and ultimately adoption at the Fall 2023 IBMP Partners Meeting.

V. IBMP PARTNER UPDATES

Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL)—Mike noted that the first part of the year has been focused on the passing of the MDOL budget.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP)—New MFWP Director Dustin Temple reported that there is no major legislation pending, the MFWP budget passed, and also Hank Worsech has retired.

Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF)—Mary reported that there is a YouTube video available covering restoration of the Slip 'N Slide area. Scott Barndt has been detailed to the Washington Office. Jenny O'Conner Card is the point-of-contact for

NPS on the EIS and will serve on the Protocols Subcommittee. Jason Brey, Hebgen Lake District Ranger, has taken a new position.

Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service—Burke Healy/APHIS reported that Dr. Jennifer Siembieda is replacing Ryan Clarke. APHIS is getting ready to publish the new brucellosis testing protocol in the Journal of Veterinary Medicine, so it will be out for peer review. APHIS is requiring the Brucellosis Rule, which will be published by January. It covers Veterinary Service Guidelines (VSG) process for bull bison. This creates an opportunity to decrease the period of bull bison quarantine, which will be written into the Rule. The Draft Rule is expected out by March of 2024.

National Park Service/Yellowstone National Park—Cam thanked APHIS for the acceleration of the quarantine process. The Park is busy working on the anniversary of the historic flood and moreover expects a large increase in the number of Park visitors this summer. It's taken substantial team work to get through a difficult year—facing the biggest incident to hit the Park with very little “bureaucracy” holding up recovery. The flood recovery process in Gardiner/Mammoth will take another 6-12 months and there is also clean up remaining at the Northeast Entrance road.

Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes (CSKT)—Tom acknowledged Kari Kingery, Wildlife Program Manager, in attendance. He shared that the Ken Burns documentary on bison is premiering soon in Missoula. CSKT will also host the Department of Interior's Bison Working Group (BWG) meeting, with a field trip to the CSKT Bison Range. Shannon Clairmont is now serving on the BWG, with Tribes represented for the first time since BWG formed.

Nez Perce Tribe (NPT)—Ashton reported that he was elected Chaplain of the Tribal Executive Committee in early May, and is the new IBMP Primary, replacing Quincy Ellenwood. Eric Kash Kash, Wildlife Program Manager, will serve on the IBMP Protocols Subcommittee.

InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC)—ITBC Board Chair Ervin Carlson noted, in response to the ITBC bison distribution map shared by PPT, that every year, 2-3 more new Tribes receive Yellowstone-origin bison from Fort Peck. So far, 140 have been distributed. Ervin apologized for missing the November IBMP Meeting while in Washington, D.C. pursuing passage of the Indian Buffalo Management Act (IBMA). ITBC is also now represented on the DOI BWG. Majel added that the draft IBMA has passed the U.S. House of Representatives, thanks especially to Representative Don Young (R-AK), who was personally attentive and “sat and listened” to ITBC reasoning for IBMA passage, just before he passed away. The idea of the IBMA is to achieve permanent U.S. government funding of buffalo restoration “only in Indian Country.”

VI. PREPARING FOR IBMP ANNUAL REPORT

A. Overview of Annual Report Process

Provided to the Partners both in Fall 2022 for their use and again in Partner briefing materials, the Annual Report Matrix tool created by the Facilitator incorporates the AMP and provides a chart that the Facilitator completes that includes prompts for Partner responses, as applicable, on the metrics and reporting required by the AMP. Prior to the Meeting, Marina Yoshioka/MFWP had asked that Partners take care to be realistic in expecting Partners with AMP responsibilities to report on every topic in detail each year. The Matrix has built in flexibility to note what report-out items might be missing or unavailable. Mike/MDOL noted that the Partner agencies are tackling floods, fire, visitor numbers...and cannot survey every week such as the AMP prescribes. It's important not to “overstress” the agencies. How should this situation be remedied?

B. Partner Roles in AMP Monitoring Metrics & Management Responses

Referring to the Matrix provided, Julie noted that missing from the AMP are clear indications of which IBMP Partner is responsible for what in places where there are blanks in the AMP. Also, the Partners could find value in reviewing the

AMP/Matrix to assess and collaboratively decide what are IBMP decisions and what are jurisdictional/policy decisions to be made by a specific Partner.

C. Report Out on Hunt Meeting & 2022-23 Hunt Season Overview

MFWP Region 3 Supervisor Marina Yoshioka initiated the Hunt Season report-outs by reading the bison reduction numbers by source. Kqyn Kuka, MFWP Tribal Liaison, noted that all but one Tribe came to the Treaty Tribe Hunt meeting in Missoula in May, and the meeting did include Tribes not currently hunting in Zone 2.

1. Treaty Hunt Tribe Reports

Each Treaty Hunt Tribe was asked to report their takes in the Northern and Western Management Areas in Zone 2 and season results. (Note that the Facilitator updates the Treaty Hunt Tribes Directory to ensure the Tribal representatives named are the most current.)

Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation— CTUIR's season runs December 1 to February 28, with bulls huntable until March 31.

CSKT—Tom reported that CSKT harvested 151 bison with a season ending February 1, 2023. There were two violations, but otherwise operations were smooth. The Memorandum of Understanding has enabled the Tribes to work together well.

NPT—Erik Holt reported hunting season ran December 14, 2022, through April 2023. A total of 417 bison were harvested, plus 5 elk. One citation issued. Erik told the story of NPT Chief Looking Glass in connection to the loss of bison hunting rights at Cedar Creek in 1855.

Yakama Nation—Riley Neff reported that 30 bison were harvested during the December 1, 2022 to February 28, 2023 Yakama hunting season, with no issues.

Shoshone-Bannock Tribes—The Sho-Ban will hunt through December 2023, and are pleased with the bison harvested for subsistence.

Blackfeet Nation—Buzz Cobell reported that 70 bison bulls and 101 bison cows (total of 171) were harvested by Blackfeet hunters, along with 9 bull and 9 cow elk (18 total). The Blackfeet hunting season was September 2022 to May 1, 2023.

Crow Tribe—Leroy Stewart, Bison Manager, reported that from the third week in January through April 1, 2023, the Crow have harvested 36 bison and 28 elk. The Crow have “stood strong” with ITBC and would rather see more live bison delivered to Tribes. The Crow have been monitoring their hunters, and “if cited here, will be cited at home.” Generally, the Crow found the LEOs to be cooperative and accommodating of Tribal hunters as they arrived.

The Northern Arapaho (NAT) Tribe was not in attendance and did not report (MFWP number harvested by NAT is 36 bison).

2. IBMP Partner Reports on Hunt

NPS—Chris Geremia reported that bison capture at Stephens Creek (SC) started in January and stopped once 500 bison accumulated. Weekly hunt coordination calls were held, with several Tribes participating regularly (but some not). In all, 1,213 bison were ultimately captured, with 837 in total held over the winter period then 282 into the Bison Conservation and Transfer Program (BCTP), 88 to CSKT for their food sovereignty program, and 6 bison fatalities at the SC holding facility. The total removal lands pretty close to 25% of the population upper removal limit recommended in the *Population Status Report to the Superintendent*.

About 2,000 bison moved north of YNP. About 430 were captured and held in outer pens then released in spring—they moved quickly back into the Park, and by May 1, only a handful remained outside the Park. Tim Reid reported on the BCTP: 80 bison went to the APHIS quarantine facility at Corwin Springs; 200 remain for testing at the SC facility.

John Harrison/CSKT emphasized that the weekly hunt coordination calls are key to knowing who's on the ground, what the current bison count is, and how they are moving. Call logistics were handled effectively by Andrew Wild Bill, and this enabled the Tribal representatives to report to their Tribal Councils. CSKT remained part of the calls even after its season ended, prepared to respond to any emergency situation.

Tim/NPS noted that while the 2023 snowfall was record-breaking for the decade, the northern migration of bison toward lower elevations is not. This season's experience reveals that two IBMP objectives have been met. (1) The Northern Tolerance Zone held up, as NPS worked with the State to identify pressure points. At one point, several bulls crossed the iced-over cattle guard; MDOL came in to haze them back. Mike/MDOL later noted Tribal hunters were called in to handle bison approaching the Zone 3 boundary, so MDOL did not have to haze. (2) 160 bison went up to Fort Peck to continue assurance testing, including the largest number of cows and calves to date.

CGNF—Mary reported on habitat and public safety measures during the hunt season. While not CGNF's responsibility per se, total hunt quotas are a major topic of CGNF inquiries from the public. Moreover, CGNF cannot commit to taking all the responsibility for the carcass clean up. While the bison are distributing in the NMA, the concentration of hunting still occurs at Beattie Gulch. It is important that IBMP think forward about successive seasons and what triggers action. Are there other actors (e.g., Greater Yellowstone Coalition) that might provide insights? Currently there is "no real plan for winter [operations]." What jurisdictions impact the operations and proactive IBMP decisions are needed, also accounting for the Treaty Hunt Tribes? Perhaps engaging the Tribal Councils makes sense.

Mike Thom, Gardiner District Ranger, reported on the physical reality of dealing with carcasses left by the season's hunters. He noted that the main destination landfill is Logan, located in the DSA.

Cold temperatures made conditions icy for equipment, but carcasses being frozen lowered the risk of brucellosis transfer to humans. USFWS' grizzly bear education team helped out, as well as members of the Crow Tribe and Sho-Ban. What can be planned for next year's operations to more evenly distribute the burden of carcass removal?

With the morning's order of business complete, Lead Partner Mike Honeycutt dismissed the group for lunch break.

VII. OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC FEEDBACK SESSION

The afternoon session launched with the Public Feedback Session. Individuals who had signed up by 11:00a that morning were given the opportunity to speak for a period of time determined by 30 minutes (as stated in the Protocols) divided by the number of presenters (for June 7, this was 15). The following members of the public spoke during this session.

- Edwin Johnson, Royal Teton Ranch
- Bonnie Lynn, Yellowstone Voices
- Nancy Schultz
- Glenn Monahan, Gallatin Wildlife Association
- Jaedin Medicine Elk, Roam Free Nation
- Stephanie Seay, Roam Free Nation
- Clint Nagel, President, Gallatin Wildlife Association
- Nancy Ostlie, Great Old Broads for Wilderness/GWA
- Angela Delapio, Buffalo Field Campaign

- Jackson Doyel
- Nicolas Dipreto
- Dagmar Kiddlo
- Alan Redfield
- Erik Holt, Nez Perce Tribe

VIII. IBMP OPERATIONS PLAN

IBMP Lead Partner Marty Zaluski gave an overview of the recent Ops Plan development processes that have failed to produce approval by signature of all Partners. The Partners have been resorting to Ops Plan “wordsmithing.” In doing some creative thinking, an improvement in the Ops Plan development process would be for:

- Each Partner to articulate their own operations from the standpoint of the roles they are “statutorily obligated to fulfill.”
- The Partners do not have to provide approval for the independent actions of other Partners, but the Partners’ roles and operational intent could be acknowledged in this way.
- Once that is done, a true collaborative effort could be undertaken on AMP matters not addressed to produce the Ops Plan—and the Partners would get to consensus quickly.

Erik Holt/NPT asked how it is that entities that are not IBMP Partners do not have to abide by provisions of the Operations Plan. A framework is needed to integrate tribes into the Ops Plan discussions so that a collective approach to managing bison by Treaty Tribe Hunts can be taken. Ops Plan measures do impact the take of IBMP signatories. The Protocols Subcommittee had discussed improved notice of Partner management intents [through use of the calendar]. However, that did not prevent Partners from failing to sign the Operations Plan. A solution is needed.

PJ offered that each Partner could list the various operational activities undertaken in coordination with other Partners when writing up their parts of the Ops Plan. Mike Honeycutt spoke of “strategies versus tactics,” and that the Ops Plan should be strategic whereas actions on the ground during the operational period should be tactical. Disagreement comes among the Partners when aspirations of Partners become the focal subject. The Partners should be conferring on AMP changes when due, but meanwhile understanding the authorities of each Partner—the why (i.e., “legal obligation or order with the merit of law” of their stated operational planned activity. Julie/Facilitator emphasized that using a structured format prepared ahead of Partners’ entering their planned operations could organize the Partners to focus on those decision points that right now are lost in the overall Operations Plan. John/CSKT pointed out that the Partners must be clear on what is an IBMP decision and avoid stove-piping their views/mandates when population reduction by the various methods (trap for brucellosis testing and quarantine/ship-to-slaughter, allow bison passage into the Tolerance Zone where hunting occurs) involves many actors, and as the hunt gathers more steam will require greater coordination and better focused decision-making. This can be built out in the Protocols discussions.

Mary/CGNF noted that the Ops Plan are just actions under the umbrella of the IBMP, and the contention used to be over whether an AMP change is needed. A significant change to operations in the Tolerance Zone shouldn’t occur by veto. Moreover, the IBMP forum is being used to play out disagreements between Partners on the overall population number (which relates to the pending EIS). It’s important that the positions are daylighted, but discussions seem like they are just for show and these topics should not cause for withholding a vote.

The Ops Plan should account for what Tribes will be on what part of the landscape for what period of time. Tribes can supplant hazing where effective. It is helpful to see in the Ops Plan who can assist. What is the non-IBMP Tribe’s role? What are their plans and how are these accounted for?

Items relevant to the Ops Plan could include reviewing the season's conditions, participation in the seasonal weekly hunt calls, managing the Zone 2 boundary, how and when to communicate, sharing the Ops Plan intents with the public. The Ops Plan could be deconstructed in the Subcommittee to align it better with the IBMP goals—like a simple charter for Ops that recognize its transboundary, multijurisdictional nature. Partners need to figure out how to coordinate while generating a leaner Ops Plan instead of the one that “morphed” out of the last decade.

Cam/NPS pointed out that a large percentage of the Operations Plan does not change from year to year and has served as a coordination framework. The largest disagreement has been over the recommended population size. Partners have developed into their distinct AMP roles. Meanwhile, this is the first year the bison used more of the whole of the Tolerance Zone (in December, bison reached as far as the site of the Meeting). The Partners have “managed to a range”—and multiple objectives have been met through their success. Likely the Partners won't agree perfectly on things like population targets or timing of the trap. Anyway, the tribes hunted well past the reduction number of 750 that became a sticking point preventing signage of the last year's Ops Plan. The bigger question may be, “What does ‘wild and free-ranging’” mean? How can management issues be actually addressed and what is the mechanism?

Julie/Facilitator asked how the AMP (and process for changing it) be used better by the Partners? Key is identifying and acknowledging the roles of each Partner within the AMP.

Marty/MDOL emphasized the importance of keeping the IBMP precedent of 100% consensus on decision-making, even though that may mean each Partner compromises.

Ervin/ITBC shared his sentiment that more IBMP discussion focused on quarantine and getting Yellowstone-origin bison out to the 83 ITBC-member tribes for tribal buffalo restoration on their lands. “Tribes on reservations—they can't leave, just like the [Yellowstone] bison.” Now it is “all about the hunt” for some tribes. Saving bison is about saving a part of tribal culture.

Tom/CSKT, who has been on IBMP since 2006, also sees a lot of successes. Keys are to communicate and coordinate and daylight the operations so as to move forward in a practical way, versus trying to manage for a number [ahead of time]. Managing for conflict is adaptive in nature. Carrying capacity will be revealed as the elk, big horn sheep, wolves, and grizzlies all have their effect. Through time, climate change impacts will also be defined. Ranches also need their benefits from the ecosystem. Moreover, while quarantine (so Tribes can receive live bison) is important, honoring Treaty rights to hunt is primary. While legislative acts do not occur at the IBMP Deliberative Table, the Operations plan should uncover and address those actions taken by Partners that are discretionary. Moreover, the Treaty Hunt Tribes need to coordinate before the “end up in litigation, Tribe versus Tribe.”

Dustin Temple/MFWP remarked that the idea of an Operations Plan template is reasonable—that it creates “room for conversations that need to happen.”

Majel/ITBC mentioned that ITBC would like to see more bison family groups go through the quarantine process.

IBMP Partners Decision—The Lead Partner will develop the Operations Plan template, with assistance from the Facilitator, and send the template out to Partners for review and use in developing this year's Ops Plan.

Mike/MDOL asked if perhaps the Hunt-Trap section of the Ops plan, once mutually agreed upon, should be amenable to revision once “we see the population” on the ground and noted that the Tribal authorities are ostensibly making decisions that affect population range in described in an Ops Plan. It would be helpful if those who are not IBMP signatories shared their hunting seasons and intentions with IBMP. More capacity for quarantine also impacts the Ops Plan as cohorts qualify.

A way to look at it is that each Partner provides a piece of the puzzle. Also, the evolution and growth of IBMP evidenced by major successes--Tolerance Zone, BCTP—was not established through the Ops Plan.

Can the Tribes work together and decide on a total number of bison to be hunted by Tribes in a season? How can ITBC help provide a prediction of activities for next season? How is the hunt balanced with the interest of Tribes like the Crow that would like for Yellowstone genetics to distribute and improve the herds of other Tribes.

IX. SPECIAL PRESENTATION: *Highway 191 Bridge over Cougar Creek in West Yellowstone Area*

As organized by Deb Wambach of the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), MDT Consultant Design Project Manager JR Taylor and Josh Springer from MDT's design consultant for the project HDR, Inc., presented plans for constructing a replacement of the current Cougar Creek Bridge from a span of 35 feet to 140 feet, incorporating 20-foot wide wildlife paths/floodplain benches on each side of the channel and increasing the vertical height under the bridge from 8 feet to 12 feet. The current bridge is scour critical and erosion of steep slopes and an active headcut will be addressed by the design, which is about 30-40% complete. Construction (with contributions from a USFS grant for replacement of the adjacent recreation bridge) will start in 2026. Normally now the opening under the bridge is taken up by water and steep armored banks. The goal is for the opening to be big enough for area wildlife including moose, elk, deer, bears to pass through and a reconnected floodplain with natural stream form and function. Wildlife exclusionary fencing and jump-outs (escape ramps) will be provided to guide animals in the riparian zone of Cougar Creek to the structure for safe passage. This site is unique in that there is both perpendicular movements by area wildlife, and parallel movements along the roadway and right-of-way by bison during winter migration.

In December 2022, one truck in this location killed 13 bison. MDT is working on driver behavior modification using an animal detection system from Crosstek Wildlife Solutions. A combination of radar and thermal imaging, and programmable software, it is experimental in the application to detect bison that don't behave like typical wildlife. If successful, it may be a good option to address bison-vehicle conflicts in other areas of this stretch of Highway 191. Bison will sometimes lay down in the road, and also, their eyes don't reflect headlights very well. Nearly all of the bison-vehicle conflicts occur at night, during hours of darkness. The animal detection system is intended to detect bison and other wildlife in the roadway environment and provide real-time warning to drivers, using flashing lights and signage.

Kari Kingery/CSKT asked about the relative appropriateness of the dimensions for grizzly bears. On the Flathead, CSKT guidelines are 16 feet of vertical height for an underpass and 60 feet of dry ground underneath, or a female grizzly with cubs may not use it. It's important to consider the perpendicular dimensions. The Cougar Creek Bridge design provides for two 20-foot dry horizontal paths and 12-feet of vertical clearance.

In response to a question about scour, the presenters noted it is water erosion which can be good for aquatic organisms. This bridge is too narrow for the channel and is on spread footings. The scour at the structure is undermining the footings, making replacement the most efficient option. Natural stream form and function will be provided through the new opening, and aquatic organism passage will be perpetuated.

X. NEW IBMP WEBSITE

In order to modernize the look and feel as well as navigability and functionality of the ibmp.info website, MDOL tasked the Facilitator with creating a prototype design for presentation to the IBMP Partners. The Partners viewed the format and style proposed, and Partners agreed a new design was due. Lead Partner Marty/MDOL led a Partner discussion of the problems with the current site. For example, the challenge in accessing documents—have to know the category of

the document in order to find it, for example) is undermining usability. He then asked the Partners to consider helping to fund execution of the new design, which would also include an opportunity for adding dynamic maps with landmarks. Documents showing on the website would date back three years, with the rest accessible in an archive. CGNF stepped forward to fund the new website design. Tom/CSKT mentioned a standard protocol should be in place to update the website regularly.

IBMP Partners Decision—The IBMP Facilitator will update the website within a budget worked out with CGNF. Partners will have an opportunity to review its format and navigational abilities, as well as content, as it is being developed and before finalization.

XI. PLANNING FOR FALL MEETING AND OTHER TOPICS TABLED UNTIL MEETING END

Lead Partner/Marty led a discussion of the wrap-up items, which included Fall IBMP Partners Meeting plans and a review of topics for this meeting, as well as Protocols Subcommittee assignments. In response to a request from Majel/ITBC, Burke/APHIS agreed to share the basics on what APHIS plans to do regarding quickening the pace of bull bison quarantine process. If the proposed rule is out for public comment, APHIS will be limited in what it can present.

Erik Holt compared a situation of fish in Washington, where Tribes have Treaty rights to fish, to the Yellowstone bison situation. Fish were translocated down-river so they could spawn and more would come back. The Partners should consider ways to transfer bison within the Tolerance Zone—and see if they would stay there. Mike/MDOL commented that review of the history of the public meeting with landowners in the Taylor Fork would be helpful. Another idea is for NPT to propose translocation as an AMP change. Cam/NPS noted that coordination of timing the start of the hunt would help; bison had dispersed throughout parts of the Northern Management Area before hunters concentrated in the usual Beattie Gulch area (the first place bison tend migrate to past the northern YNP boundary). Erik would like to see the herd grow on the West side. Past hazing of bison in the WMA is why bison now migrate north. PJ/NPS noted there is a natural migration of bison on Horse Butte; lead cows and bulls could help others find the migratory area.

XII. CLOSING

On a positive note of looking forward, Lead Partner Marty/MDOL closed the meeting, thanking the Partners and members of the public in attendance. Ashton/NPT was asked to deliver the closing Tribal prayer, which he sang with gusto. The meeting adjourned at close to 5:00p.

APPENDIX A

Attendance Record

(In addition to IBMP Partner Primaries and Seconds listed on page 1)

IBMP Partner Entities

CSKT—Shannon Clairmont, John Harrison, Kari Kingery

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks—Julie Cunningham, Kqyn Kuka, Adam Pankratz, Warren Hansen, Ryan Kovach, Alex Neill

NPS/Yellowstone National Park

- Chris Geremia
- Morgan Warthin
- P.J. White

U.S. Forest Service/CGNF

- Randy Scarlett
- Autumn Yeller

Others¹

AMB West Ranches—Peter Brown

Buffalo Field Campaign

- Angela Delapio*
- Jackson Doyle*
- Peter James
- Josie Salors

Defenders of Wildlife—Chamois Anderson

Gallatin Wildlife Association—Glenn Monahan*, Clint Nagel*

Gallatin Wildlife Association/Great Old Broads for Wilderness—Nancy Ostlie*,

Greater Yellowstone Coalition—Shana Drimal

HDR, Inc.—Josh Springer and JR Taylor

Idaho Conservation League—Jeff Abrams

Montana Department of Livestock—Jacqueline Cima; Clay Vines

Office of Montana Governor Greg Gianforte—Rachel Meredith

Roam Free Nation

- Jaedin Medicine Elk (Northern Cheyenne Tribe)*
- Stephany Seay

Royal Teton Ranch—Edwin Johnson*, Alan Shaw

Yellowstone Voices—Bonnie Lynn*

Concerned Citizens—Nicolas Dipreto*, Dagmar Kiddlo*, Alan Redfield*, Nancy Schultz*

¹ An (*) next to a name means that person provided public comment.