

INTERAGENCY BISON MANAGEMENT PLAN



FALL 2023 IBMP PARTNERS MEETING MEETING REPORT

Tuesday, October 31, 2023 ~ Pray, Montana

FINAL DRAFT ~ 12/22/2023

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)

Dr. Tahnee Szymanski, 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 (APHIS)

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

IBMP Partner Seconds

NPS—Tim Reid, Bison Program Coordinator; Jennifer Carpenter, Chief, Yellowstone Center for Resources

CSKT—James “Bing” Matt, Tribal Council Member, Arlee District Representative

ITBC—Majel Russell, Legal Counsel; Troy Heinert, Executive Director; Jason Baldes, Board Secretary

MFWP—Marina Yoshioka, Region 3 Supervisor

NPT—Erik Holt, Fish & Wildlife Commission Chair; Eric Kash Kash, Wildlife Division Director

APHIS—Rebecca Bigelow, Wildlife Biologist/Disease Specialist, Ruminant Health Center, USDA APHIS

USFS/CGNF—Kathleen Minor, Deputy Forest Supervisor; Jennie O’Conner Card, Ecosystem Staff Officer; Mike Thom, Gardiner District Ranger; Wendi Urie, Hebgen Lake District Ranger.

Treaty Hunt Tribes (*non-IBMP Partners*)

Blackfeet Nation—Brandon Kittson

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

Crow Nation—Leroy Stewart

Northern Arapaho—Devin Oldman

Shoshone-Bannock Tribes—Mr. Haskett

Yakama Nation—Riley Neff Warner

Meeting Location: **Chico Hot Springs Convention Center**, Pray, Montana

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

I. MEETING OPENING

The Fall 2023 Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) Partners Meeting started with a call to order by Lead Partners Mike Honeycutt and Tahnee Szymanski, Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL). Chaplain of the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee (NPTEC) Ashton Picard was invited to open the meeting with a Tribal prayer, which Ashton sang. After, Mike and Tahnee welcomed all those in attendance and set the tone for a productive meeting day. IBMP Facilitator Julie Anton Randall asked the IBMP Partner Primaries and their Seconds to introduce themselves, along with members of the public in attendance. Julie also covered the day's logistics and reviewed the agenda available to public participants. Mike/MDOL asked for any discussion of agenda amendments, and there being none, called for a vote.

IBMP Partners Decision—The Partners approved the Fall 2023 IBMP Partners Meeting Agenda.

II. IBMP PAST BUSINESS

The draft Spring 2023 IBMP Partners Meeting Report was posted online in June 2023. On 7/25/2023, Partners were asked to send Julie/Facilitator any desired edits by October 16; very minor edits were made by MFWP, MDOL and NPT and the Report was reposted as a second draft on 8/23/2023. Mike/MDOL asked the Partners for any further amendments, and hearing none, called for a vote to approve **Ref#3: Spring 2023 IBMP Partners Meeting Report (Draft)**. The final version will be posted on *www.ibmp.info*.

IBMP Partners Decisions—The Partners approved the Spring 2023 IBMP Partners Meeting Report in final.

III. IBMP PARTNER UPDATES

The Partners were asked to share any news and legislative, policy, or Tribal Council actions since June 2023 and how those might impact the IBMP.

Department of Livestock (MDOL)—Mike introduced Dr. Tahnee Szymanski as the new Montana State Veterinarian taking Dr. Marty Zaluski's place at the IBMP Deliberative Table. Mike noted that drought this year has generated high prices for cattle. Pathologic avian flu influences by migratory birds on commercial herds have become a concern. About

80K-100K brucellosis tests have been conducted. Chronic wasting disease surveillance continues. There is a new diagnostic laboratory in Bozeman with new animal health surveillance capabilities. Also, Clay Vines has taken another position; Mike Himmelspach is covering his position for the time being.

National Park Service/Yellowstone National Park—YNP Superintendent Cam Sholly had no updates.

Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service—Dr. Burke Healy/APHIS reported that the new brucellosis testing protocol has been published in the *Journal of Veterinary Medicine*¹. APHIS is prioritizing the Brucellosis Rule, which will be published by January. It covers the Veterinary Service Guidelines (VSG) process for bull bison. This creates an opportunity to decrease the period of Yellowstone bull bison quarantine, which will be written into the Rule. The Draft Rule is expected out by March of 2024.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP)—MFWP Director Dustin Temple had no updates.

Nez Perce Tribe (NPT)—NPTEC Chaplain Ashton Picard reported that the new bison hunting season has begun.

InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC)—ITBC President Ervin Carlson noted that 21 bulls have been distributed to 8 Tribes in 22 states. Also, ITBC now has 83 member Tribes.

USFS Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF)—Forest Supervisor Mary Erickson introduced Wendi Urie as the new Hebgen Lake District Ranger, taking the place of Jason Brey who took a position elsewhere.

Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes (CSKT)—Tribal Council Chair Tom McDonald noted that all CSKT hunters are required to go to orientation and a “reboot” on current hunting guidelines for the Tolerance Zone.

IV. PRESENTATION OF NEW IBMP WEBSITE

Julie/Facilitator and Bridget Burns updated the Partners on IBMP website progress, noting the initial design is complete, with access provided for Partner review online. Not all documents have been uploaded in case Partners would like the design changed. Marty Zaluski (IBMP Lead Partner at the Spring Meeting) had suggested that each subject matter page of the website provide viewers with an opportunity to access the past three years of documents directly with older documents available via an Archives button on that page. Cam asked for a Library where all documents are accessible. Partners noted that the original imperative for an IBMP website came out of a 2008 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report².

The point was raised that hunters might be accessing old maps of the Tolerance Zone, and the new maps that will be placed on the website can be linked from Tribes’ websites. Ashton/NPT requested that the website include a disclaimer for content related to hunting zones.

CGNF has provided the funds needed to fully develop and execute the new website. Partners will continue to have access to the mock-up website to review the format, navigational abilities, and content, track progress and provide input

¹ <https://avmajournals.avma.org/view/journals/javma/261/4/javma.22.09.0424.xml>

² 2008 GAO Report to Congressional Requesters: *Yellowstone Bison: Interagency Plan and Agencies’ Management Need Improvement to Better Address Bison-Cattle Brucellosis Controversy*. See p. 34.

at any time. The goal is to complete the website in advance of the Spring IBMP Partners Meeting and enable Partners to vote to make it live and replace the outmoded website by May 2024.

V. IBMP PARTNER PROTOCOLS

A. Protocols Subcommittee Report

Protocols Subcommittee (PSC) Chair Majel Russell/ITBC reported that the PSC met twice since the Spring Meeting, to tackle the assignment given at the April 2023 IBMP Partners Meeting, with the exception of developing a Protocol for how a group joins the IBMP/who can join and a Protocol determining what is an “IBMP Decision.”

Julie/Facilitator drafted revised Protocols for PSC review. The PSC decided to pull the Treaty Hunt Tribes meeting from the Calendar and adopted the first revision on 10/5/2023. The PSC then commissioned Julie/Facilitator to compile existing decision-making Protocols (an assembly presented to the Partners at the Spring 2023 Meeting). Reordering/condensing of the decision-making Protocols would enable the Partners to clearly see when, where, and how IBMP decisions are made, and how to proceed if consensus is not reached, a Partner abstains or does not respond or come prepared to vote on an IBMP decision. Two attorneys (John Harrison/CSKT and Mike Lopez/NPT) were asked to review the second Protocols revision that included the decision-making process, and the full PSC reviewed it on 10/12/2023, and approved it by 10/28/2023 with no further edits. These Revised Protocols were provided in advance of the Fall 2023 IBMP Partners with an indication that they were ready for vote with the exception of the process to accept new Partners. Julie noted that topic will be discussed after the vote on the Revised Protocols.

B. Adopting the Revised IBMP Partner Protocols

IBMP Lead Partner Mike Honeycutt asked for any discussion of amendments, and there being none, called for a vote on *Ref #8: Revised IBMP Partner Protocols (Approved by Subcommittee)*.

IBMP Partners Decision—The Revised IBMP Partner Protocols are adopted.

C. IBMP Partner Authorities & Jurisdictions Reference Tool

Tahnee/MDOL led the discussion of *Ref#9: IBMP Partner Statutory Authorities & Jurisdictions Relevant to IBMP*. Each Partner had been asked to update/approve their own entries. The intent was for the Partners to adopt this document as an IBMP Reference Tool vital to a workable Operations Plan. It recognizes the distinct obligation of each Partner to take responsibility for its actions according to relevant law and policy and as such sets the stage for differentiating “what is an IBMP Decision” (made jointly by the Partners) from the independent authorities and an acknowledgement that one Partner cannot infringe on the authorities of another.

The reference tool has two parts: “*Statutory Authorities*” and “*Bison Management Decisions Made Under Exclusive Authority and Jurisdiction*”. Tahnee/MDOL asked that Partners consider these options:

1. Partner authorities be limited to citations only such as a citation of Tribal, state, or federal rule or the treaty that gives the Partner their authority with no associated narrative.
2. A statement at the beginning of the document that adoption of the document by the IBMP Partners is not an endorsement of the validity of other Partners’ authorities.
3. Removal of all citations from *Bison Management Decisions Made Under Exclusive Authority and Jurisdiction* so that this section truly is only examples.”

Mike/MDOL asked for a vote, and the Partners agreed to adopt the reference tool with the provisions above included. [The Facilitator will make these amendments and re-circulate to the Partners.]

IBMP Partners Decision—The “*IBMP Partner Statutory Authorities & Jurisdictions Relevant to IBMP*” reference tool is adopted, with changes made to limit authorities’ descriptions to citations, include an introduction that states that “adoption by the IBMP Partners is not an endorsement of the validity of other Partners’ authorities,” and remove the citations from the section entitled, “*Bison Management Decisions Made Under Exclusive Authority and Jurisdiction*” so that the section contains only examples.

Unresolved issues (raised at the Spring Meeting) remain. What is the process for agreeing on what authorized actions need to be coordinated? Improving upon notice of independent Partner decisions that will be made creates better coordination between the agency and Tribal Partners and supports a streamlined approach to generating the IBMP Operations Plan. This document was tabled for more work by the Partners in advance of their Spring Meeting.

D. “New Partner Protocol” Proposal

Majel asked John Harrison/CSKT to provide a review of the document he developed on the history of adding New IBMP Partners and the accommodation of Treaty Hunt Tribes (THTs) who are not IBMP members to address the Partners.

John’s document addressed the unwritten policy of the IBMP to allow THTs the opportunity to participate in IBMP discussions for about 10 years, and the 5 active THTs that are not Partners have been regular attendees and offered input. ITBC noted it provides additional Tribes’ representation by virtue of its membership.

John proposed to incorporate this language into the Protocols: “*Participation of Treaty Hunt Tribes in IBMP Meetings. Limitations on public participation in IBMP meetings shall not apply any federally-recognized Indian Tribe that manages a treaty hunt for wild Yellowstone bison migrating out of Yellowstone National Park.*”

Mike/MDOL asked the Partners if there was disagreement about the proposed language, and the Partners registered none. However, Ashton/NPT requested that the vote occur at the Spring 2024 Meeting, so that NPTEC could formally approve NPT concurrence prior. This item will be placed on the Spring agenda for vote.

The Partners next addressed how a new entity could become an IBMP Partner. As John explained in his memo to the PSC and at the meeting, “[t]his issue has been addressed by the Partners before, notably in 2009-2010, when the CSKT, Nez Perce, ITBC and Park County requested to join the IBMP. The Tribes and ITBC were accepted, but the Partners declined the addition of Park County. The prevailing logic at the time was that a prospective IBMP Partner needed to have an ongoing and direct role in managing Yellowstone bison. As sovereigns that had treaty rights directly impacted by the management decisions of the IBMP, the Partners felt justified in adding the CSKT and NPT to the table. As an intertribal entity that represented many Tribes connected to the Yellowstone bison and that worked directly with the NPS and APHIS on what was then the quarantine feasibility study (now the fully operational bison conservation transfer program) the ITBC was also accepted into the IBMP partnership. The logic behind rejecting Park County was that unlike the tribal entities, county governments were part of the larger Montana state government and already represented at the table. Moreover, like the other IBMP Partner entities, the tribal entities were either sovereigns managing a hunt and/or serving a function directly related to the management of Yellowstone bison. Park County was concerned with

specific local government issues and individual property owner concerns. At the time the Partners felt that adding Park County would open the door to special interest groups, NGOs, community organizations and other entities focused on impacts of bison management rather than sovereigns or entities tasked with directly managing Yellowstone bison. The CSKT, NPT and ITBC were recognized as full voting members of the IBMP at the April 2010 meeting and no other Partner has been added since.”

The Partners recognized that at the April 2022 IBMP Partners Meeting, the Blackfeet Nation (represented by Buzz Cobell) made a verbal request to become an IBMP Partner. The PSC was assigned the specific task of creating a framework for entities requesting to become IBMP Partners. Majel and Troy, ITBC Executive Director proposed the following four options that were presented to the PSC:

- **Option 1:** *Any recognized Treaty Hunt Tribe that formally requests to be a voting member of the IBMP shall be granted a seat. Rationale: The two seats currently held by treaty hunting Tribes were attained in this manner and should not be exclusive.*
- **Option 2:** *Treaty Hunt Tribes would have a dedicated time on the agenda to address the IBMP Partners but will not be a voting member of the IBMP. Rationale: Provides an equal opportunity for Tribes to present their ideas and concerns regarding the IBMP.*
- **Option 3:** *Two voting member seats will be available on the IBMP for Treaty Hunt Tribes that would be filled by representatives selected by a Treaty Hunt Tribes group. Rationale: Allows for broader representation from all treaty hunt Tribes and retains the two voting seats.*
- **Option 4:** *The two current Treaty Hunt Tribes’ member seats are filled by Treaty Hunt Tribes on a rotating basis. Rationale: All Treaty Hunt Tribes would have an opportunity to be a voting member of the IBMP with the rotation.*

Erik Holt/NPT pointed out that despite there being an MOA among some THTs regarding hunter safety in Beattie Gulch, there are THTs that decline to sign it. Moreover, treaty-related language differs among the Tribes, and the “Tribes need a summit” to refine their options for cooperation in the Tolerance Zone. The Tribes currently participating at the IBMP Deliberative Table lend stability and institutional knowledge; it would be valuable to keep them involved.

Majel stated that Tribes are sovereign entities with governing bodies. The Partners agreed that an entity seeking to become an IBMP Partner must make the request in writing, and that a New Partner process proposal is needed by the time of the Spring 2024 Meeting. The PSC was assigned the task of creating and adopting a proposed “New Partner Request and Acceptance Protocol” that the Partners can vote upon at the Spring 2024 Meeting. Majel indicated the Subcommittee was to sunset upon completion of the Protocols and, as the tasks are not concluded, she would remain as Chair until a meeting was convened to select a new Chair.

A coffee break was called by Mike/MDOL to enable Randy Scarlett/CGNF to load the new Tolerance Zone maps.

VI. PRESENTATION OF NEW MAPS

Originally at the request of Julie/Facilitator then commissioned by the Partners, Randy Scarlett/CGNF has produced two maps of the Tolerance Zone: the Northern and Western Bison Management Zones. Including all landmarks thus far requested by the Partners and known to be connected to the AMP, the maps are fairly well complete. Randy has added

Madison Arm Road, for example. Mary/CGNF asked whether the grazing allotments and other data could be referenced using the maps, so it is a “one stop shop” tool. Moreover, story maps and IBMP strategies for bison distribution across the Tolerance Zone could be envisioned using the maps.

By demarking hunting areas and shooting closures, the maps could also provide a consistent tool for THT use, as some currently appear to be using outmoded and outdated maps. Ashton/NPT requested that a disclaimer be included for when Tribal hunters link to the map. USFS has always had a disclaimer on its maps. What do Tribes use for maps currently? What does law enforcement use for state-licensed and Tribal hunters? The maps referenced should be the same. Snowmobile trails should be delineated consistently.

Whisper Camel-Means/CSKT pointed out that onX Maps (GPS mapping tech) provides digital access. IBMP could produce a PDF map that is put into Avenza Maps so the public can search for it as a free map. The product, however, needs to be correct. Thus far the Beattie Gulch/CGNF-YNP boundaries have been confusing. It is important to get the map into a national database.

Mike/MDOL asked the Partners to vote on the CGNF-generated *Ref#6: New NMA + WMA Maps* for use on the new IBMP website, and they voted unanimously to approve them.

IBMP Partners Decision—The Northern Management Area and Western Management Area maps produced by CGNF will be made accessible via the new IBMP website.

It is possible to make the maps interactive, but USFS needs approval for that. Julie/Facilitator is keeping a spreadsheet of all operational locations included on the maps; Partners may contact her to add locations.

VII. REVISITING THE ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Leading the next discussion, Tim Reid/NPS referred the Partners to *Ref#17: Adaptive Management Plan (2016)* and *Ref#11: AMP Updates Requested by PJ White (9/14/2023)*, which was circulated for Partner comments by 10/16/2023. The process of review concluded with CSKT, NPS, and NPT having no objections. APHIS asked to remove MFWP from Monitoring Metric 2.2c, since MFWP does not currently play a role in BCTP procedures or where bison are moved to. No responses were received from CGNF, ITBC or MFWP by 10/27/2023. MDOL generally objected to the updates.

Bison vaccination arose as sticking-point topic, with NPS and MDOL on either side of the issue. The 2017³ and 2020⁴ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine reports indicated there should be no aggressive action until the efficacy of bison vaccination could be demonstrated. The EIS⁵ completed in 2014 was informed by a science panel. Discussion of vaccination in the current NPS [Draft EIS](#) is debated by the Governor of Montana, MDOL and MFWP, per their [letter](#) to Cam/YNP in September 2023. The Partners decided to review each AMP update and vote on individual clauses.

³ <https://www.nationalacademies.org/news/2017/05/new-report-calls-on-federal-and-state-collaboration-to-address-brucellosis-transmission-from-elk>

⁴ <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/24750/revisiting-brucellosis-in-the-greater-yellowstone-area>

⁵ Final Environmental Impact State and Record of Decision for the *Remote Vaccination Program to Reduce the Prevalence of Brucellosis in Yellowstone Bison*. *Remote Vaccination Program to Reduce the Prevalence of Brucellosis in Yellowstone Bison*, 2014.

The first AMP update discussed concerns Management Action (MA) 1.3.c. Mary/CGNF indicated that the Forest Plan changed in 2022 and supports exploring adaptive management to enable bison to use the existing Tolerance Zone. In response to Mike/MDOL's concern about possible commingling within grazing allotments, Mary noted the changes: with most vacant allotments have been closed or else any potential conflict between bison and cattle accessing the allotments addressed with the turn on/off dates. What are some possible projects to mitigate allotments adjacent or in proximity to the Tolerance Zone? Can the maps be used to pinpoint these?

At this point, because conflicts on grazing allotments within the Tolerance Zone have been minimized or eliminated, CGNF seeks to “get rid of old, irrelevant language” in the AMP. Mike/MDOL recognized there is a need for change, but consensus language on this MA 1.3.c update should be developed then put to a vote at the Spring Meeting; Ashton/NPT concurred since he needs time to have AMP language changes approved by NPTEC before he can vote.

The second AMP update discussed was AMP Management Action 2.2.c. Dustin/MFWP agreed with APHIS' recommendation to remove MFWP from being a lead on collecting monitoring data on bison in the BCTP. The MA clauses are quite out-of-date, with the ITBC role in transferring bison to suitable sites not included. There is a need to describe the whole process—how bison move through BCTP and out to ITBC member Tribes. The phase at Fort Peck should be termed “quality assurance” and the NPS-Fort Peck and Fort Peck-ITBC agreements referenced.

The AMP Management Action 3.1.a, 3.1.b, and 3.1.c updates discussed relate to vaccination. The Partners were unable to resolve their differences on the language, with Mike/MDOL seeing the deletions as eliminating the possibility of future vaccination and detracting from the IBMP emphasis on brucellosis prevention, and YNP not agreeing with that assertion. One solution proposed was to add “and disease suppression” after “vaccination” and “and conditions” after “prevailing authority” in MA 3.1.a. The Partners agreed that MDOL should work with NPS on alternative language these AMP Management Actions.

Mary/CGNF expressed concerns about changing the “architecture of the AMP” to satisfy “philosophical arguments.” John/CSKT emphasized the need to clean up/update the AMP. Mike/MDOL described ways the State of Montana is working on brucellosis management (preventing commingling during risk periods, testing cattle, capturing/collaring elk and knowing where they are during risk periods). Dustin/MFWP asserted that the Partners are not where they need to be to adopt the strike-throughs in the proposed AMP updates.

The Partners were asked by Mike/MDOL to approve the decision to work on the AMP updates for language to vote upon at the Spring Meeting; the Partners voted unanimously to approve this measure.

IBMP Partners Decision—The Partners, and MDOL and NPS in particular, will work on agreeable AMP update language for preview in time to vote upon it at the Spring 2024 IBMP Partners Meeting.

VIII. FINALIZING THE IBMP ANNUAL REPORT

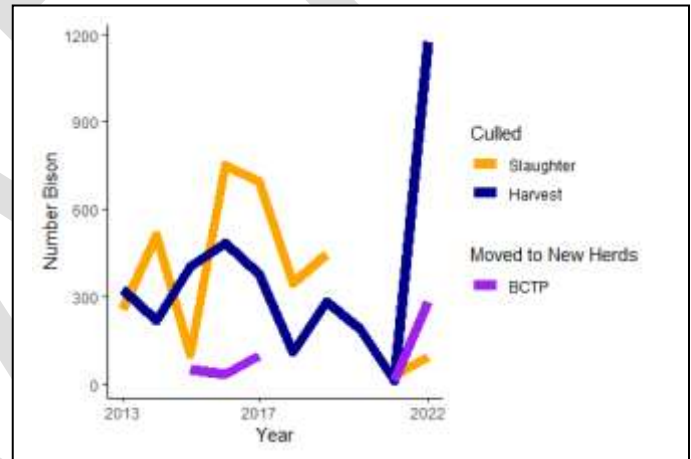
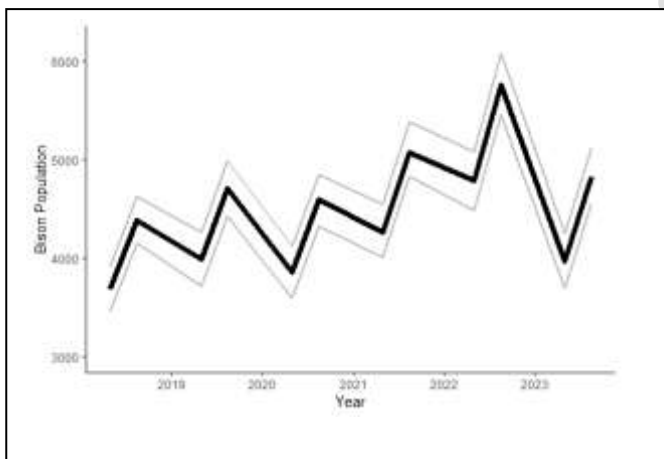
Most Partner report-outs on sections of the November 2022–October 2023 IBMP Annual Report (due October 16, 2023) were received and compiled into *Ref#12: 2022-2023 IBMP Annual Report (draft assembled by Facilitator)*. As Lead Partner, MDOL will finalize the Annual Report and requested all contributions by November 13, 2023.

IX. ENVISIONING THE OPERATIONS SEASON AHEAD

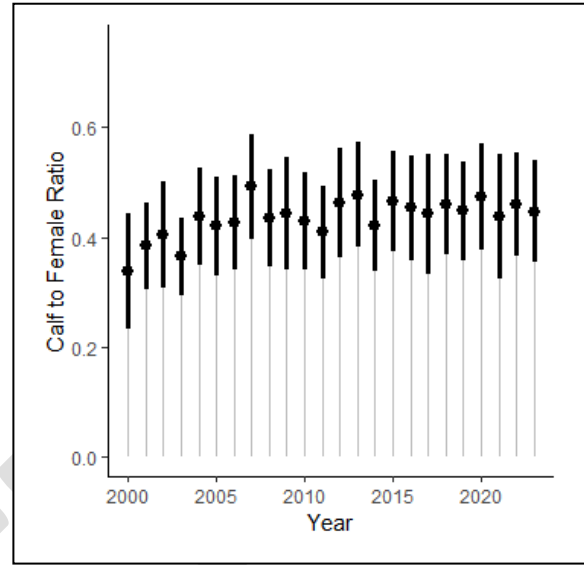
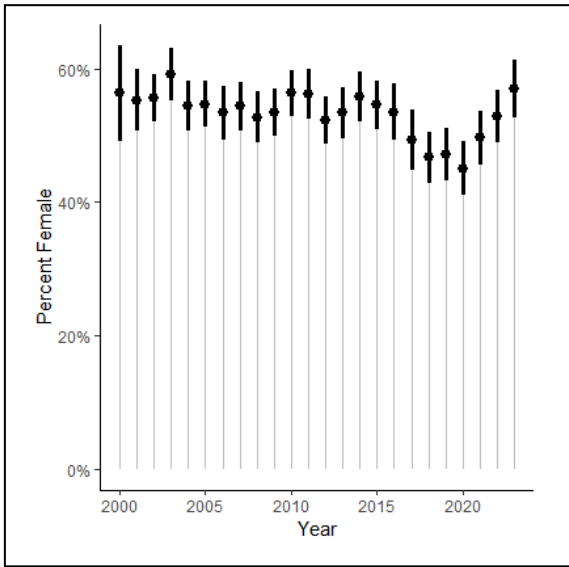
Yellowstone Bison Population Estimates—Partners had received summary points prepared by NPS by September 30. Chris Geremia/NPS reviewed the *Ref#13: 2023 NPS Population Status Report to YNP Superintendent* (available on www.ibmp.info). Key points were:

- Last winter saw a record migration with 60-70% of the bison population (constituting pretty much the whole of the Northern herd) moving into Gardiner Basin.
- The **1,551** bison removed during the winter equated to about 27±1% of the 2022 summer population. NPS continued to reduce shipments to slaughter. Removal was primarily by:
 - At least 1,010 bison harvested by Tribes in the Tolerance Zone.
 - 282 bison placed in the BCTP.

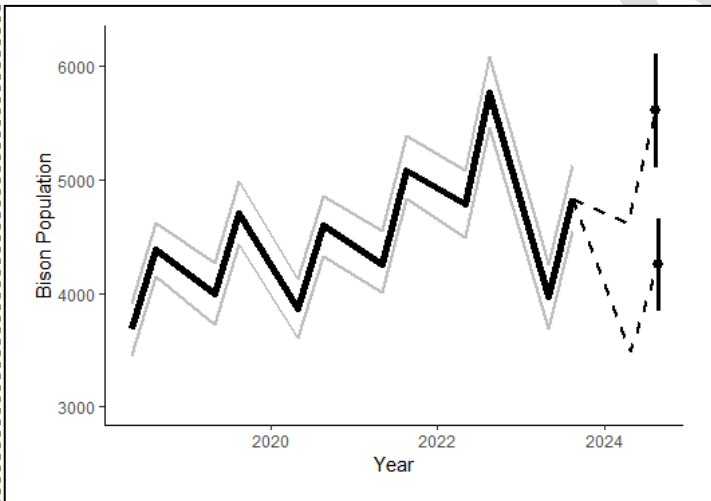
The current population is estimated to be close to the 10-year average of 4,890 bison—an estimated total of **4,830** bison counted in August 2023 recovered from an estimated low of 3,960 in May 2023.



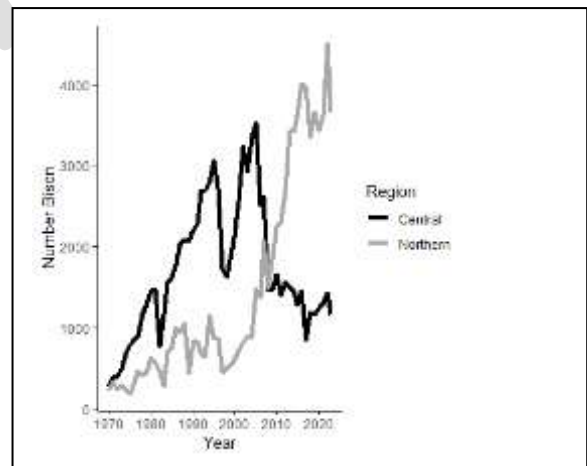
The population rebounded because of increasing numbers of adult female bison in the population. NPS is seeing more females in the population, yet a high calving rate. The calving rate was unaffected by the severe winter.



Removal of “anywhere between 0 to 1,100 animals would result in a 2024 bison population within a range that IBMP Partners have and will continue to manage successfully.” Keeping the removal limited to less than 1,100 would help ensure a sustainable end-of-winter population (i.e., exceeding 3,500 bison).



The figure to the left shows predicted numbers of bison. Dark lines show the average and gray lines show the range. Dotted lines and point estimates show the expected population through summer 2024 given removing 0 or 1,100 bison during the upcoming winter.



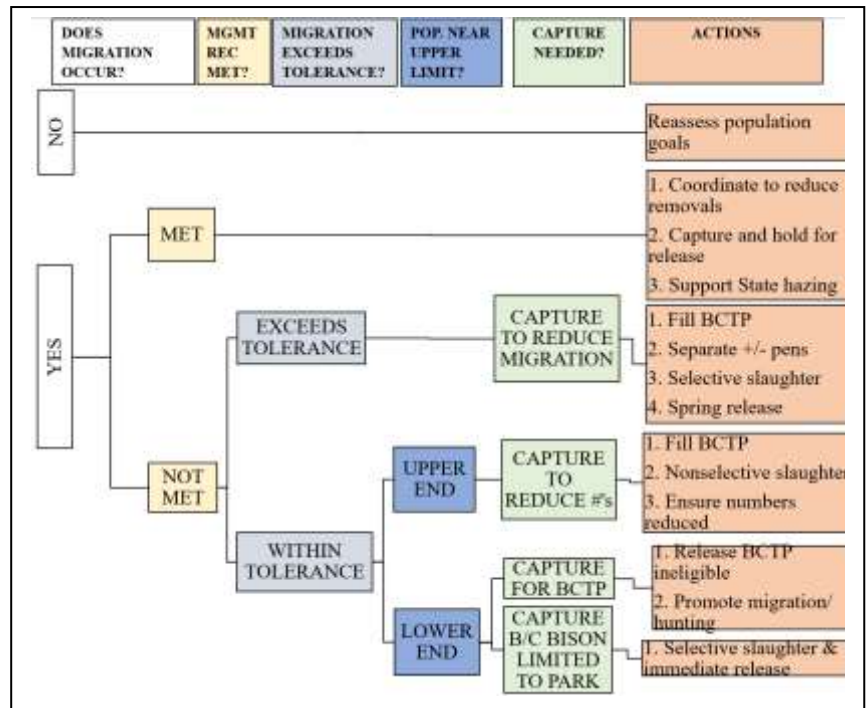
Both Central and Northern herds appear to be affected by actions near Gardiner. The Central herd is still trending down in population. See figure to the right.

What should IBMP do about “managing a migration” as more bison move outside YNP and into the Tolerance Zone, particularly if there is another severe winter? Partners were asked to consider:

- Restricting removals to the NMA, given the decline in the Central herd.
- Because there was a shift in herd structure and composition with last season’s hunting pressure, amend the imbalance in natural herd structure and composition by seeking these removal ratios:

- 80% adults to 20% calves (8-10 months old)
- 57-70% females to 30-43% bulls.

NPS aims to balance a cultural resource for both YNP visitor enjoyment/national pride and Tribal access to hunting outside YNP, while minimizing brucellosis risk. Chris shared a decision-making framework (see infographic to the right) for NPS capture operations.



X. 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 October 31, this was 11). The following members of the public spoke during this session.

- *Ellie Brighton, Montana Stockgrowers Association*
- *Wendy Whitehorn, a Montana citizen*
- *Stephanie Seay, Roam Free Nation*
- *Jaedin Medicine Elk, Roam Free Nation*
- *Nancy Schultz*
- *Glenn Monahan, Gallatin Wildlife Association*
- *Peter Brown, AMB West Ranches and Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation*
- *Shana Drimal, Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GYC)*
- *Karrie Kahle, Park County Environmental Council*
- *Chamois Anderson, Defenders of Wildlife*
- *Steve Kelly, Alliance for the Wild Rockies*

IBMP Lead Partner Mike/MDOL dismissed the group for a lunch break.

XI. REVIEWING BISON MANAGEMENT ROLES IN THE TOLERANCE ZONE

A. Bison Population Reduction by Number, Class and Method

Chris/NPS referred to the newly formatted and finalized *Ref#14: Yellowstone Bison Summary of Capture, Harvests, and Hazing Removal Table 2022-2023* that includes numbers from Morgan Jacobson/MFWP. Julie/Facilitator had generated

a new format in Excel to support comprehension and ease in calculations and requested Partner adoption. Mike/MDOL led the unanimous vote to approve the format.

IBMP Partners Decision—The new *Yellowstone Bison Summary of Capture, Harvests, and Hazing* table format used for reporting results in the Annual Report was adopted for ongoing use by IBMP.

B. Bison Conservation & Transfer Program Results & Proposed Changes to Quarantine Protocol

The quarantine facilities were filled to capacity. Partners noted that the coordination calls were helpful.

Burke/APHIS described the evolving new quarantine protocol for bison bulls, which should help get more bison into the BCTP. With zero seroconversion after 300 days among male and female bison in a quarantine group, the bulls can move out of quarantine to assurance testing at Fort Peck. This means that bulls in quarantine during spring migration (February/March) could move out the following winter (January/February), which frees up pen space for the upcoming operation season. Partners can refer to *Ref#15: JAVMA Article on Duration of Quarantine for Bison (link)* for more information. There is no change to the female bison quarantine protocol; any future changes would be made based on the data.

C. Hunting as a Management Tool

1. State Administered Hunt Role in Bison Management

Marina Yoshioka, MFWP indicated Partners may refer to *Ref#14: Yellowstone Bison Summary of Capture, Harvests, and Hazing*. MFWP has issued 85 licenses, five in the backcountry.

2. Treaty Hunt Tribes Role in Bison Management

This session was intended to produce perspectives on recent THT activities (seasons, restrictions, and enforcement). Partner may refer to *Ref#16: Treaty Hunt Tribes Directory* for current lead contacts (as reported by the THTs to Julie/Facilitator). Mike/MDOL asked each THT at the meeting report upcoming seasons and planned restrictions and enforcement for purposes of the Annual Report.

IBMP Partner Tribes

- **Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes**—Tom reported that the CSKT season is September 1, 2023 to January 31, 2023 unless the Council approves an amendment. Once in the past, CSKT extended the bison hunt season a few weeks but for hunting of bulls only. This extension matches the CSKT species wide hunt rule of no taking of female big game species between February and August of each year. The Council can shut down hunting with 48-hours' notice on the west side.
- **Nez Perce Tribe**—Erik Holt reported that the season runs now through March 31, 2024. Tribal hunters attend mandatory orientation plus onsite training. Law enforcement officers will be on the landscape, which is important particularly for disoriented first-time hunters who are increasing in number.

Other MOA Tribes

- **Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation**—Tribal hunters attend mandatory orientation. The season runs December 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024 (after which only bulls may be hunted). There can be 2 hunters per party. Hunters can be aged 12 or older, depending on if they met the mandatory hunter safety requirement.
- **Yakama Nation**—The Tribe has not yet updated regulations, but likely the season will run December 2023 to early February 2024.

Other Treaty Hunt Tribes

- Blackfoot Nation—The season runs October 17, 2023 to March 31, 2024. From April 1 to May 31, only bulls may be hunted. Blackfoot hunters adhere to the flag system.
- Crow Tribe—[Representative Leroy Stewart arrived late; did not report.]
- Northern Arapaho Tribe—Devin Oldman reported that there are no hunter safety requirements, but hunters must be 16+ years old. The season runs November 1, 2023 to April 30, 2024. Last season about 85 permits were issued; expect to issue 150 this year.
- Shoshone-Bannock Tribes—Bison hunting rules follow big game regulations, which the staff have been working on. The SBT have not yet seen a need to declare a bison hunting season per se.

3. Other Partner Perspectives on Hunt

- Ervin Carlson and Troy Heinert, ITBC—Expressed no comments.
- Mike Thom, CGNF Gardiner District—Reported on the effectiveness of the flagging system and that the springtime Treaty Hunt Tribes meeting could be an important place for Tribes to develop a collaborative plan for the upcoming season.
- Other IBMP Partners—Expressed no comments.

D. Other Bison Management Tools Deployed by Necessity

Mike/MDOL clarified that no bison removals were required in Zone 3 (outside the Tolerance Zone). Occasional hazing was needed at defined pressure points where bison use the landscape. Tim/NPS noted assistance with hazing, depending on the circumstance and intensity of migration.

Mary/CGNF reported that conversations are ongoing for long-term carcass management opportunities/partnerships, but they have not materialized yet. A multi-year partnership is needed to gain consistency and support from partners. It should be a community-based plan that includes partnering with the Treaty Hunt Tribes, along with other interested entities. John/CSKT added his view that Treaty rights take precedence.

XI. NOVEMBER 2023-OCTOBER 2024 IBMP OPERATIONS PLAN

A. Using the New Operations Plan Template

At the Spring 2023 IBMP Partner Meeting, the Partners decide to improve the Ops Plan development process whereby:

- Each Partner articulates its own operations from the standpoint of the roles they are “statutorily obligated to fulfill.”
- It is not appropriate for the Partners to provide approval for these independent actions of other Partners, but the Partners’ roles and operational intent could be acknowledged in this way.
- A true collaborative effort could be undertaken on AMP matters requiring Partner cooperation to produce an Operations Plan upon which the Partners could get to consensus quickly.

At the Spring 2023 IBMP Partners Meeting, the Lead Partner (MDOL) was commissioned to develop a new Operations Plan template, with assistance from the Facilitator, and send it to Partners for review and use in developing this year’s Ops Plan. A format aligned with the [Adaptive Management Plan \(2016\)](#) objectives was delivered to the Partners on 9/29/2023, with most all Partners returning their sections prior to October 27. On October 30, MDOL and NPS presented an alternative format that segments the Operations Plan by Partner planned operations per its authorities and

jurisdictions and lists each Partner’s specific needs from other Partners, plus metrics that the Partner will collect and report on.

B. IBMP Decisions in the 2023-24 Operations Plan

Julie/Facilitator reported that most Partners submitted Ops Plan contributions using the AMP-aligned template sent 9/29/2023, resulting in a draft Ops Plan with prompts for IBMP decision-making. MDOL’s viewpoint was to make the Ops Plan “tactical.” The alternate format simply lists the Partners’ “agency needs” (activities to coordinate with other Partners on) and these could be combined into a single table. Julie/Facilitator suggested that the entries already submitted by Partners in the first format could be simply carried over into this alternate format.

Because the Partners seek to (1) get to signature on this year’s Ops Plan and (2) have not yet explored or yet agreed upon what an “IBMP decision” is, the alternate format should get the Partners “on the same page” enough to have an approved Ops Plan for November 2023-October 2024.

Mike/MDOL emphasized that the Ops Plan should not constrain the individual decisions of a Partner that are required or authorized by statute or regulation. Partners could meet their individual operations goals by cooperating with a Partner: for example, MDOL called upon Treaty Hunt Tribes to haze bison away from the Zone 2-Zone 3 boundary last winter.

John/CSKT expressed a preference to return to what the Ops Plan was envisioned to be originally. “IBMP decisions” need to still be delineated and acted upon.

C. Process for Finalizing the 2023-24 Operations Plan

Finding the Partners in agreement adopting the alternate Ops Plan format, MDOL/Lead Partner set the following measures to conclude the Ops Plan development process this year: collection of Ops Plan input for the alternate format; circulation of the Ops Plan draft with all Partner input; final comments from Partners due November 29, 2023. There was discussion about whether the Ops Plan would have to be signed, since the new format lays out the unilateral decisions of each Partner. The Partners agreed it should be circulated for signature (as prescribed in the Protocols), but Partners should consider their signatures as endorsing only their entries in the Plan. Mike/MDOL called for a vote, with no objections arising.

IBMP Partners Decision—The Partners will utilize the alternate Operations Plan format and submit their entries by November 10, 2023; a compilation will be circulated to the Partners with comments due November 29, 2023, and signature by all Partners expected by mid-December.

XII. TOPICS TABLED TILL MEETING END

A. A Look at the Tolerance Zones

Mary/CGNF indicated Partners could use the new maps to consider IBMP cooperative decision-making about actions within the Tolerance Zone toward meeting AMP goals. With the new Forest Plan in place—and post-EIS view—this topic will be revisited during the coming year, while CGNF is IBMP Lead Partner. Also, ideally the Partners will work collectively on these ideas and generate Action Items for the Spring Meeting agenda. Sample topics: bison distribution in the Tolerance Zone, and work with the community on safety.

Other ideas shared included:

- The Citizen’s Working Group, an external dialogue process active in 2010/2011, generated ideas for IBMP Partners to think about. Perhaps an IBMP subgroup could be tasked with considering ideas from the perspective of a diversity of stakeholders, including local community landholders. What is the “new normal” and how can IBMP be resilient within its framework? (Mary/CGNF)
- NPT could provide in “Treaty 101” training to improve public understanding. (Erik Holt/NPT)
- Reemphasize the value of the IBMP convening, as there seems to be a “retreat from the [Deliberative] Table in recent years, with limited decision-making. (Majel/ITBC)
- Hunt-free areas for bison use could be defined within the Tolerance Zone to strengthen opportunities for bison to follow natural/hereditary patterns of distribution onto the landscape and enable IBMP to track where within the Tolerance bison seem determined to access and learn why—rather than eliminating their ancient memories and will to migrate by taking them out at the boundary of YNP-Zone 2. Ranchers play a strong role in landscape stewardship (Tom is from a ranching family). However, rather than setting “arbitrary and capricious targets” for bison removal, IBMP should be managing to carrying capacity of the landscape’s habitat. Prove what works. This involves getting to know the landscape better. (Tom/CSKT)
- For example, bison bulls have year-round access to Eagle Creek; there is pressure on the east side because of overhunting. Herd memory is being lost. It is important for Tribes to think about this collectively and avoid “missing the boat” on “where bison should be able to use what habitat” available in the Tolerance Zone. The collective effort of the THTs could demonstrate how it can be done elsewhere. (Tom/CSKT)
- The AMP is getting “very old.” AMP updates should be a focus of the next IBMP Meeting. (John/CSKT)

For the Spring Meeting agenda, there will be more time made available for open-ended dialogue.

Tahnee Szymanski, MDOL (Lead Partner) revisited the IBMP relevance and purpose of past presentations, which were: *Highway 191 Bridge over Cougar Creek in West Yellowstone Area* and *Ref#19: NPT Statement on Use of Non-Lead Ammunition Use*. Mike/MDOL noted that Montana Department of Transportation requested a supporting letter for funding to initiate the Cougar Creek project. Eric Kash Kash/NPT shared that NPT incorporates the preference for use of non-lead ammo in hunter orientation and has a proposal into a donor to try to reach out to all Treaty Hunt Tribes in the Tolerance Zone about this.

XIII. IBMP CALENDAR FOR 2023 AND 2024

Regarding the IBMP meeting calendar, the Partners decided that the weekly hunt calls during the winter season suffice as a substitute for a mid-year meeting. As for full Partner meetings, CGNF will host one meeting on the west side of YNP and the other on the east side.

IBMP Partners Decision—The Spring 2024 IBMP Partners Meeting will be held on May 15. The Fall 2024 IBMP Partners Meeting will be held on October 29, 2024. CGNF will serve as Lead Partner.

XIV. CLOSING

Mike/MDOL recognized the productivity of the day's meeting, and Tahne/MDOL reiterated the upcoming plans to wrap up the Operations Plan and Annual Report. In sharing the news of Mary/CGNF's retirement, Tom/CSKT commended Mary for her leadership in helping IBMP make huge progress over the 16 years of her tenure. Mary's thoughtfulness and ability to put together a cumulative, step-wise plan has greatly benefited IBMP in the midst of tough discussions. After thanking the Partners and audience, Mike/MDOL asked Ashton/NPT to share a Tribal prayer that closed the day.

DRAFT

APPENDIX A

Attendance Record

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

IBMP Partner Staff

CSKT—Whisper Camel Means, Shannon Clairmont, John Harrison, Dan McClure
InterTribal Buffalo Council—Mikiah Rutherford (Biologist),
Nez Perce Tribe—Amanda Rogerson (Legal Counsel)
NPS/Yellowstone National Park—Chris Geremia, Morgan Warthin
U.S. Forest Service/CGNF—Randy Scarlett

Others⁶

AMB West Ranches—Peter Brown*
Alliance for the Wild Rockies—Steve Kelly*
Appearing Flying Woman Consulting/Park County Environmental Council—Francine Spang-Willis
Defenders of Wildlife—Chamois Anderson*
Greater Yellowstone Coalition—Shana Drimal*
Montana Stockgrowers Association—Ellie Brighton*
Montana Wild Bison— Glenn Monahan*
Office of Montana Governor Greg Gianforte—Rachel Meredith
Park County Environmental Council—Karrie Kahle*
Roam Free Nation—Jaedin Medicine Elk (Northern Cheyenne Tribe); Stephany Seay
Yellowstone Voices—James Everett; Leslie Everett; Gerald Snyder
Concerned Citizens—Nancy Schultz*; Wendy Whitehorn*; Gail Richardson

⁶ An (*) next to a name means that person provided public comment.