

# Summary Report from the Interagency Bison Management Plan Meeting April 6, 2016



**First draft presented 20 April 2016 by meeting facilitator Scott Bischke**

The following summary report reflects activities at the April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016 meeting of the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) Partners, held at the Holiday Inn in West Yellowstone, MT. This report comes from the flip chart notes of facilitator Scott Bischke<sup>1</sup>. The report will be marked “Draft” until formal Partner agreement before the start of their next meeting. The nine Partner attendees were Don Herriott (APHIS), Leonard Gray (CSKT), Ervin Carlson (ITBC), Mike Honeycutt (MBOL), Martin Zaluski (MDOL), Sam Sheppard (MFWP), Quincy Ellenwood (NPT), Daniel Wenk (NPS-YNP), and Mary Erickson (USFS-CGNF). In addition to those at the deliberative table, ~25 staff members from across IBMP organizations and ~50 members of the public were present at various times during the day.

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## Action items identified

**Table 1.—Action items identified during this meeting**

#	Who	What	By when
1	SB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Post the Apr 2016 meeting report to the website as final</li> </ul>	ASAP
2	SS, SB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SS and the facilitator rewrite the 2014 AM Plan to incorporate the Governor's decision into a new document, now called the "2016 IBMP AM Plan"</li> </ul>	ASAP
3	SB, all Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See section "Applying Gov. Bullock's EA decision on year-round habitat for Yell bison" for timeline associated with multiple required facilitator and Partner</li> </ul>	Per deadlines in text
4	All Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sign 2016 AM Plan by May 6</li> </ul>	Per deadlines in text

## Agreeing to previous meeting minutes

The meeting started with introductions of Partners, staff, and all members of the general public in attendance, followed by a short review of IBMP history. Then the facilitator asked if there were any objections or changes to the draft meeting report from the November 2015 IBMP meeting, and noted the report has been available in draft for review since shortly after the November meeting. No objections were brought forth. Thus the facilitator, per Partner Protocols, is to post the November 2015 meeting notes to IBMP.info as "final" (\*\* action item 1).

## Applying Gov. Bullock's EA decision on year-round habitat for Yellowstone bison

*Process for integrating EA decision into the IBMP.*

- Potential proposal and acceptance as an IBMP adaptive management change (note: the IBMP AM process is shown in the Partner Protocols at <http://www.ibmp.info/library.php> )
- Potential method of incorporation into the 2015-16 Winter Ops Plan and beyond

On December 22, 2015 the Governor issued his decision on the Environmental Assessment for year-round habitat for Yellowstone bison. That decision, along with a subsequent letter to the IBMP Partners, can be found on the IBMP website at (a) the page dedicated to this meeting, and (b) the library page (for the latter, see <http://www.ibmp.info/library.php> and click on the pull down titled "IBMP EIS and Adaptive Management Documents"). The Governor's letter to the IBMP Partners is two pages long. A key aspect of that letter is provided in Figure 1.

This is the first meeting of the IBMP Partners since the Governor's EA decision. The Partners held a short discussion on adapting the EA decision by implementing it in their Adaptive Management Plan, and then in the Winter Ops Plan that derives annually from the Adaptive Management (AM) Plan.

Several Partners expressed their support of adding the outcome of the EA decision to the AM Plan. A statement was made that the Governor's decision had the force of law within Montana and thus state agencies were not at liberty to make any changes to it as the Partners considered how to adapt the EA decision into the AM Plan. No Partner dissented to the statement made by the facilitator that (effectively) "All Partners agree to the incorporation of Governor Bullock's EA decision into the IBMP Adaptive Management Plan."

This decision allows very modest year-round tolerance for bison in part of the Hebgen basin on the west side of Yellowstone National Park (both sexes), and year-round tolerance for bull bison in part of the Gardiner basin on the north side of the Park. Both are subject to geographic limitations, and bison numbers on the west side are limited to an upper range by season.

There are six fundamental changes in circumstances that support the expansion of year-round bison habitat outside the perimeter of Yellowstone in Montana:

- Cattle are no longer found on Horse Butte because of change in ownership and subsequent changes in land use.
- On the west side of the Park, there are no active cattle allotments on the public lands which constitute over 96% of the area to be accessed by bison.
- Modifications in the federal rules that govern the response to brucellosis infection in cattle have significantly reduced the economic consequences to Montana producers of a brucellosis infection in cattle.
- New research indicates negligible risk of transmission of brucellosis from bull bison to cattle.
- Research on brucellosis persistence indicates decreased risk related to cattle turnout dates in the Hebgen Basin.
- Elk are now recognized as the primary transmission route of brucellosis infection to livestock.

*Figure 1—An excerpt from Montana Governor Bullock's two-page letter to the Administrative Record of the IBMP. The full letter, as well as the actual EA decision, is available at the library page of the IBMP website (see <http://www.ibmp.info/library.php> and click on the pull down titled "IBMP EIS and Adaptive Management Documents").*

Partners agreed with a proposal made by SS that the easiest, cleanest way to incorporate the Governor's decision into the current 2016 Winter Operations Plan was not to try and rewrite the Winter Operations Plan. Instead—and recognizing that the new AM Plan would be labeled as the "2016 AM Plan"—he suggested simply adding a single line to the 2016 Winter Operations Plan saying, "As of the [date TBD] signing of the 2016 IBMP AM Plan, the 2016 IBMP Winter Operations Plan is amended to meet the dictates of that 2016 IBMP AM Plan." The amended Winter Operations Plan would then be published to the website.

Partners, led by SS and MZ, also went through the current AM Plan and determined which Management Actions would require changes to reflect the Governor's decision (those included, at least on first look, Management Actions 1.1a, 1.2a, 2.2b, 3.2c, 3.2d, as well as the maps provided at the end of the AM Plan). Partners set a process and time line for amending and signing of the new AM Plan by April 22. That timeline was changed a day or two after the meeting due to key personnel travel away from the office, plus the desire to allow for the next MBOL meeting. The new timeline is reported here (\*\* **action items 2-4**):

- \_\_ By April 8—SS and the facilitator rewrite the 2014 AM Plan to incorporate the Governor's decision into a new document, now called the "2016 IBMP AM Plan"
- \_\_ By April 12—The facilitator sends the 2016 AM Plan out to Partners in two forms: as a clean document and one showing changes from the previous plan
- \_\_ On April 20—The MT Board of Livestock meets to discuss the IBMP AM changes. They have asked the Attorney General to clarify jurisdictional issues relating to bison management, specifically, the authority of Governor, FWP, and DOL.
- \_\_ By April 26—Partners return by email their approval, or comments, on the attached 2016 IBMP AM Plan to MFWP, MDOL, and the facilitator (note again, we are not expecting any large-scale editing)
- \_\_ By April 27—The facilitator sets up electronic signing of the document and sends out request for signing to Partners

- \_\_\_ By May 6—all Partners have electronically signed the 2016 IBMP AM Plan
- \_\_\_ By May 11—The facilitator has
  - published the 2016 IBMP AM Plan to the IBMP website;
  - per description at the Apr 6 IBMP meeting, added a single line to the 2016 IBMP Winter Ops Plan that says, "As of the May 6, 2016 signing of the 2016 IBMP AM Plan, the 2016 IBMP Winter Operations Plan is amended to meet the dictates of that 2016 IBMP AM Plan" and republishes to the IBMP website; and
  - sent out a notice to the IBMP Partner mailing list that (a) and (b) have occurred.

## **2015-2016 Winter Operations to date**

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### ***Current situation overview, including evaluation of bison distribution (MDOL)***

RT reported that on the North Side there have been ~35 bison out and that for the most part to date it has been a quiet year with respect to management activity. He said ~125 bison have been out on the West Side, mostly in the Horse Butte area. Highway 191 has had multiple accidents with multiple bison having been killed. RT said that to date there has been no hazing except off private lands.

In response to a question bull bison being allowed year-round tolerance, both MDOL and MFWP said that if haze backs are required they do not discriminate—if there is a mixed group of bison they will haze bulls back the Park, as well. Trying to cull bull bison from a mixed group is considered too dangerous.

### ***Overall removals versus Plan (MDOL)***

SS said that combined state and tribal removal to date via hunting is ~400 bison. (facilitator's note: hunt summaries are regularly updated on the IBMP website; see <http://www.ibmp.info/library.php> and click on the pull down titled "Risk Management Action Reports.")

RW noted that with respect to bison mortalities, one unknown is the number of bison that are shot but escape back into the Park, only to die later.

Partners had a short discussion on their yearly hunt coordination meeting, scheduled this year for May 25<sup>th</sup> in Missoula. The state and tribes described that they will be looking for ways, as they have done in the past, to improve both the quality and the perception of the bison hunt.

### ***Culls/transfer of bison to processing facilities***

RW said that 150 animals to date have been captured and culled. Of the 150, 93 were consigned to Partners (60 to ITBC, 33 to CSKT). The other 57 are pending being transferred to a potential quarantine, currently in the EIS process. All these animals tested sero-negative following capture; all are either non-pregnant yearlings or calves.

### ***Transfer of bison to research facilities, potential for operational quarantine***

To date, per RW, there have been no transfer of bison to research facilities. Only one researcher, Jennifer Barfield of Colorado State University completed an application for bison (50; a summary of her presentation to the Partners can be found in the November 2015 meeting summary).

Dr. Barfield is currently waiting on the NPS decision on her application. RC noted that Dr. Barfield may change her request to accommodate availability of bison. She had wanted pregnant, sero-positive animals and those are not available. PJ said that by holding off until February 15<sup>th</sup> to capture bison, the likelihood of capturing pregnant females went way down.

Given that part of Dr. Barfield's work includes the harvest of embryos, ME asked if next year bison consigned to ship and slaughter might first go to Dr. Barfield for embryo harvest (presumably could be done at CSU or at the capture facility). PJ responded, yes, but first quarantine must be agreed to.

A question was posed in multiple ways, effectively: How is it possible we can move sero-positive animals to Colorado, across state boundaries, and we cannot move them within the state of Montana? Two answers were put forward: (1) The Colorado State Veterinarian has approved the transfer, and (2) the animals are being moved to tightly controlled research programs.

DW said that NPS had, as yet, made no finding on its Operational Quarantine EIS, one alternative of which includes moving bison to a quarantine facility at the Fort Peck Reservation. The decision is currently in the hands of the NPS Regional Director. YNP has the power to recommend which alternative they would select under the EIS, but is not the final EIS decision maker. To date, according to DW, YNP has not provided a recommendation.

EC put forth an endorsement for the quarantine facilities available at Ft. Peck, including that those facilities were secure and that he thought the program was being discriminated against. He also stated, as he has in the past, that ITBC supports bringing live animals out from the Park, not just those consigned to ship-and-slaughter.

### ***Planning for the remainder of the 2015/16 season (all)***

With respect to the question just above, ME asked how can we as Partners move forward next year, balancing bison removal by trapping, hunting, and operational quarantine, plus considering the new tolerances under the Governor's EA decision? And particularly, while the Partners have long said the hunting is their preferred method of population management, still how can we improve the difficult situation on the North Side?

SS responded that as ever, all things with bison are linked. He also noted that he believed the Partners had learned much about the use of the hunt versus use of the trap, and that those lessons would serve as the basis for the May 25<sup>th</sup> annual hunt meeting. Regarding specifically understanding the ramifications of increased tolerance on the West Side, SS said he expected it would be a "learn as we go" situation.

A Partner noted that this year did include a record hunt. SS said, yes, we all want to be hunting focused but success there would be controlled, as least in part, by getting bison to better utilize available habitat.

Jeremy W, of the CTUIR, described the meeting of the tribal entities the previous day, and said he felt it was a positive step toward improved, shared communication and education.

Vernon Finley of the CSKT said he felt the conversation begins with the tribes first identifying which issues they own and that those issues, then, even with all due respect to the Partners, the tribes own. TM followed on saying that the CSKT have strong expectations of their hunters. He said we can go back to the 1996/97 threshold, and that we are getting there. There may be a limit to harvest capacity, but we are not there yet. Also, every year now the hunt includes many of the same people, not like the 1990s when it was someone new each year with little knowledge of the setup.

JS put forth to have an outside group—perhaps the National Academy of Sciences—come to assess the hunt and provide recommendations on how to best optimize it. A counter thought was put forward that tribes have hunted this area for thousands of years and don't need outsiders telling them what to do.

Separate from this discussion, MZ noted that MDOL will convene Winter Operations weekly calls on an as-needed basis for the remainder of the season. SS reported that he'd just received a text that a grizzly bear had just been sighted in Beatty Gulch.

### ***Possible adjustments for next winter (all Partners; see also afternoon Adaptive Management item)***

No items were forthcoming in this section, as provided for under the Partner Protocols. However, a large modification of the 2014 IBMP AM Plan is in the works, as described previously in this report under the section titled, "Applying Gov. Bullock's EA decision on year-round habitat for Yell bison."

## **Jackson bison herd: history, ecology, and management**

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*Aly Courtemanch, Ben Wise, both of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department—Aly is a wildlife biologist who manages the Jackson bison herd; Ben is a brucellosis biologist in Jackson.*

Aly and Ben shared their knowledge regarding the Jackson Hole area bison herd. The invite for their presentation was initiated by citizen testimony from several years back, in part to learn why—whether true or not true—it seems like there is far less controversy surrounding management of the Jackson herd.

Aly began with a short history of the Jackson bison herd, including these points:

- In 1948, 20 bison were brought to Jackson Hole Wildlife Park near Moran from YNP

- Jackson Hole Wildlife Park was a 1500-acre fenced in area of private, non-profit enterprise sponsored by the NY Zoological Society, the Jackson Hole Preserve, Inc., and the Wyoming Game and Fish (WGF) Commission.
- It served as an exhibit of important large mammals and also a biological field station.
- Bison were owned by the State of Wyoming
- Grand Teton Nation Park was expanded in 1950
- In 1963, brucellosis was discovered in herd and all bison were slaughtered except 4 calves
- In 1964, 12 bison were brought from Theodore Roosevelt NP
- In 1968, 11 bison escaped and were allowed to roam freely (brucellosis-negative)

In 1980, bison discovered the elk winter feed lines which led to some disruption and conflict. Since 1984, bison have been fed separately from the elk. Bison have not used any WGF feed grounds. Current feed costs are approximately \$97,000 per year just for pellets, split between WGF and USFWS.

The bison population grew dramatically between 1980 (<100) and 2005 (>1000). Hunting was started in 1989 as a method to control the growing bison population, although WGF recognized several issues:

- Very limited hunting opportunity
- Potential for conflict in residential areas
- Proximity to winter livestock operations
- Summer public lands grazing allotments
- Competition with wintering elk

Several key items related to bison management occurred in the late 1990s:

- In 1996, the Jackson Bison Long-Term Management Plan and Environmental Analysis (EA) was completed by NPS and the USFWS, with WGF and USFS acting as cooperating agencies.
  - Developed 6 alternatives that analyzed various numbers of elk, bison, numbers wintering on the Elk Refuge, and changes to feeding program.
  - Tribal participation (11 tribes contacted, Shoshone-Bannock had the most participation)
  - Preferred Alternative: “The park and refuge would work with WGF to maintain and ensure a genetically viable population of approximately 500 bison.”
- In 1998, the Fund for Animals successfully sued to prevent any “destructive management” of bison for population control until the National Elk Refuge’s winter feeding program was fully analyzed.
- In 2000, the Jackson Bison and Elk Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was initiated. ~12,000 public comments were received.
- 2007—Final Jackson Bison and Elk Management Plan released, providing 15-year direction. Hunting season on Elk Refuge begins.

Interagency agreements now support a state population objective of 500 bison (seeking a 1:1 male:female ratio; maintaining a genetically viable population; developing a framework to reduce winter feeding; initiating a WGF-administered hunt on the National Elk Refuge. Agencies have agreed to work cooperatively to achieve these goals. And since the first hunt started on the Elk Refuge in 2007, the bison population has been decreased from ~1000 to ~600. They expect to reach the 500 bison goal in the next couple of years.

Aly shared the results of the 2015 hunting season as follows:

- Dates: August 15 – January 15
- 40 licenses for any wild bison (draw success = 1.4%)
- 265 licenses for female or calf wild bison (draw success = 25%)
- Total = 305 licenses + 7 special licenses + 5 Tribal (generally Shoshone Bannock) take = 317
- Average harvest success = 75%

Aly noted that the majority of bison are harvested on the National Elk Refuge and that with over 300 hunters it can get crowded. Thus the Wyoming hunt is highly regulated, and includes the following rules:

- Harvesting a bull is once-in-a-lifetime
- After harvesting a cow, the hunter must wait 5 years before applying for either license type
- Required reporting within 72 hours and turn in biological samples
- Can only access Elk Refuge with valid weekly or daily permit
- They have an outfitter “tag & drag” retrieval process, where the hunter is paired with an outfitter that uses a horse to drag the bison out of the field back to a road

The Wyoming hunt is highly seasonally dependent. Few animals are killed early in the season (i.e., August and September). Hunter success goes up dramatically as winter weather begins to predominate, bringing bison down into the lower elevations of the Jackson Hole area.

Ben described that in 2008 WGF created a Brucellosis Management Action Plan for the Jackson Bison Herd. The plan stipulates five key points:

- (1) Reducing the population of the bison herd, and subsequently maintaining the herd at population objective.
- (2) Maintain and improve habitat.
- (3) Minimize risk of transmission from bison to cattle by maintaining spatial and temporal separation of bison and domestic cattle.
- (4) When necessary, agency personnel will either haze or lethally remove bison from commingling situations.
- (5) Continue to research vaccination options for bison.

Ben provided a summary of bison sero-prevalence in the Jackson herd since 1999, based on hunter harvest, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.—Sero-prevalence in elk and bison in the Jackson Hole area since 1999.

YEAR	Total Female Bison				Total Male Bison			
	#POS	# NEG	TOTAL	%	#POS	# NEG	TOTAL	%
1999	1	2	3	0.33	3	4	7	0.43
2000	4	1	5	0.80	2	3	5	0.40
2001	8	12	20	0.40	15	9	24	0.63
2002	10	11	21	0.48	15	6	21	0.71
2003	5	4	9	0.56	15	8	23	0.65
2004	7	2	9	0.78	13	5	18	0.72
2005	7	5	12	0.58	16	7	23	0.70
2006	19	4	23	0.83	13	9	22	0.59
2007	73	53	126	0.58	73	47	120	0.61
2008	63	33	96	0.66	68	58	126	0.54
2009	17	16	33	0.52	55	35	90	0.61
2010	62	35	97	0.64	52	27	79	0.66
2011	55	31	86	0.64	54	44	98	0.55
2013	45	21	66	0.68	52	26	78	0.66
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>606</b>	<b>0.62</b>	<b>446</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>734</b>	<b>0.61</b>

Elk in the area are ~25% sero-positive for brucellosis. Bison are ~60% sero-positive for brucellosis. Ben said that successful hunters must submit blood samples. In the past that rule was each year; due to lab costs collection of blood samples now occurs only every third year.

Ben and Aly concluded with some thoughts on why the Jackson bison herd is not as controversial as the herds on the west and north sides of YNP, citing:

- High degree of interagency coordination
- Bison and Elk Management Plan (2007)—15 year plan
- Few conflicts with humans, livestock, and property—Winter feeding prevents livestock co-mingling
- Popular hunting season
- Jackson Elk Herd draws most attention and controversy

Only two places have potentially bison/cattle co-mingling in the area. The danger of brucellosis transfer there has been mitigated by change of the type (sex, age) of cattle being raised, and vaccination.



*Figure 2—Aly Courtemanch and Ben Wise, both of the Wyoming Game and Fish, spoke to the IBMP Partners, staff, and public regarding the history, ecology, and management of the bison herd near Jackson WY.*

In the Q&A section of the talk, RW said that bison initially did not have brucellosis in the Jackson Hole area, so he believed that bison infection must have come from elk. He also said he thought the bison management plan there was largely set up to stop bison migration, meaning less chance for comingling with cattle, meaning that the plan was really more of a brucellosis management plan.

## **Update on USFS and MSU habitat assessment work regarding status of the Northern Range**

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*Dr. Clayton Marlow, Professor in the department of Animal and Range Sciences at Montana State University.*

Jodie Canfield of the CGNF introduced Dr. Marlow, reminding people that he and his team have been working on a habitat assessment of the Northern Range outside of YNP, specifically as associated with USFS lands. The project has two key goals:

- To develop an ecological baseline for Forest Service lands north of YNP
- To serve as a basis for monitoring grassland communities as dominant grazer shifts from elk to bison. The purpose of the monitoring is two-fold:
  - Accomplishment of management goals or revise existing strategies
  - Historically most monitoring addressed response of vegetation to grazing pressure
  - (Note: during later Q&A, it came out that the entirety of Dr. Marlow’s research and report here deals with native plants only)

Dr. Marlow started by saying that there is only so much resource available. One of the decisions of this group, he said addressing the Partners, is how will those resources be allocated over time?

Dr. Marlow described the field survey that his team carried out, with sampling sites as shown in the map of Figure 3.

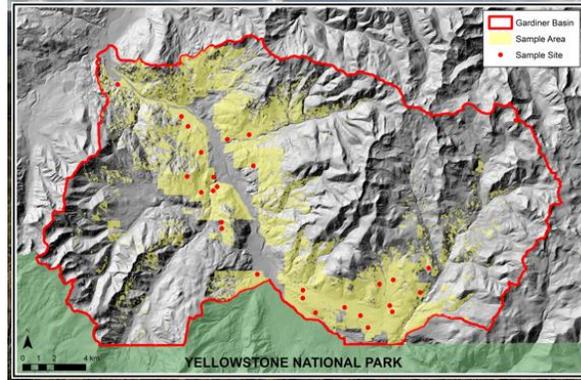


Figure 3—Sampling sites of Dr. Marlow’s team in the Gardner Basin.

That sampling included both soils and vegetation.

Dr. Marlow described ecosystem resilience as the capacity to recover following disturbance. Two factors serve as the basis for system resiliency: soil health and watershed condition. The two are related and critical, for example soil infiltration, runoff, water storage, and carbon storage all influence watershed discharge, flow duration, and sediment load.

Dr. Marlow further described resilience as being an important component of an ecosystem being important, and now increasingly important given climate change. Considering the ramifications of climate change, he then posed a question: Can current systems recover in face of projected increase in occurrence and severity of wildfire? His own answer was “Likely, if critical processes remain intact.”

Vegetation cover provides a link between soil health and watershed condition community. Vegetation composition contributes to ecosystem resiliency through:

- Building and maintaining soils
  - Addition of organic matter (roots and litter) makes soils more stable
  - Stable soil aggregates increase water infiltration
- Control of infiltration rates and therefore runoff
  - Vegetation cover limits soil crusting (maintains infiltration)
  - High infiltration rates = less runoff
  - Lower runoff = less sediment delivery to streams and rivers

Dr. Marlow described how erosion rate is greatly impacted the type of underlying geology and hill slope. In turn, he showed how the vegetation type, and hence preferred location for grazers, is also greatly impacted the type of underlying geology and hill slope. He then posed a second question—What does grassland composition say about Gardner Basin resiliency?—and provided these answers:

- Slope, aspect and geology strongly affect plant community dominants
- Sagebrush more common on 15%+ slopes
- Idaho Fescue most abundant on NE aspects
- Bluebunch wheatgrass most abundant on 15 – 35% slopes
- Needle and thread grass most abundant on 4 – 15% slopes
- Grasses are critical to soil health and minimizing erosion

A key change in the ecosystem has been the change over the last few decades from over 19,000 elk to many fewer, while the bison population has increased. This represents a major change in impact to the vegetation community, due to different target vegetation and different utilization of habitat. For example, in winter elk are more likely browsing while bison will be working the snow to still find grasses.

Dr. Marlow noted that species richness provides another measure of resiliency. Higher number suggests greater likelihood of recovery following disturbance, or stated differently, more resilience to change. In 1980 a

survey found 65 species. Today, there are far fewer. That means that today there is less flexibility and it is likely recovery from a major perturbation such as large fire would take longer than in the past.



*Figure 4.—Dr. Clayton Marlow of Montana State University spoke to the IBMP Partners, staff, and public regarding his team’s progress on their habitat assessment of the Northern Range, focused outside of YNP.*

Dr. Marlow said he feels the Gardner Basin is at a tipping point. It has enough vegetation today but species diversity is far lower (62 versus 12) so the overall ecosystem resilience is very low. Habitat/vegetation change, he said, can or will come from three key drivers: climate change, fire, or large grazers. His team recently surveyed a grazing enclosure placed in 1958 due to elk over grazing. They found that these areas were only barely recovered 60 years later.

Dr. Marlow said that a comparison of vegetation biomass in 2014 with one from 1991 shows that it is far less today, meaning there is less surface protection. He provided the following summary of the 2015 Soil and Vegetation Baseline work to date

- Vegetation cover limits erosion and runoff
  - cover currently 35 – 70% (approaching threshold)
  - Long term monitoring indicates substantial decline in cover
- Soil health tied to perennial grass cover
  - As cover declines soil health declines
- Species richness (forb component) very low (low resiliency)
- Sample adequacy—28 sites

## **Partner briefings/updates—status of ongoing activities related to Yellowstone bison & brucellosis**

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### ***Status of new Bison Management Plan/EIS—Jennifer Carpenter***

- NPS-State of Montana are co-leads on plan with five cooperating agencies: CSKT, CTUIR, ITBC, NPT, USFS).
- There were over ~8,800 scoping comments, currently under review. It is a slow process and they are seeking to be thoughtful and considered.
- A workshop is planned for this summer
- The goal is to have a draft EIS out this year.
- Web information on the EIS can be found at [www.parkplanning.NPS.gov/yellbisonplan](http://www.parkplanning.NPS.gov/yellbisonplan).

**NPS Quarantine EA—Jennifer Carpenter**

- What—The use of quarantine to identify brucellosis-free Yellowstone bison for relocation elsewhere
- Environmental Assessment evaluates establishing quarantine program for bison at one or more facilities within YNP, on tribal lands, or elsewhere
- They hope to have a decision “very soon”

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

The lawsuit includes two plaintiffs. Their motion for injunction was denied. The case remains on-going.

**Jennifer—Status of FWS petition to list bison under ESA**

Finding by USFWS that the listing was not warranted. Case closed.

**Status of State-wide Bison Management Plan—Sam Sheppard**

Still in progress.

**Iinnii Initiative—Ervin Carlson**

The project seeks to return bison to Indian Country. Just the previous day the project returned bison from Elk Island National Park in Canada to the Blackfeet Tribe of Montana. This was a very important action, both in reality to the Blackfeet, as well as symbolically.

**Update on NAS review of brucellosis in wildlife in the GYA—Don Herriott**

The National Academy of Sciences panel has now held three public meetings. They meet again in a week. The panel expects to release a draft of their report this summer. (Meeting notes and project announcements are available on the NAS website at <http://dels.nas.edu/Study-In-Progress/Revisiting-Brucellosis-Greater-Yellowstone/DELS-BANR-14-03?bname=banr>).

**Status of bison-coexistence/fencing project—Shana Dunkley**

Shana Dunkley of GYC, now the project lead organization, reported that the project was started in 2011 by MFWP, Defenders of Wildlife, NRDC, Sierra Club, and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition. It’s goal is to increase or maintain public tolerance to bison outside YNP through the funding (cost share) and technical assistance to build bison exclusion fencing. Thirty-two projects have been completed, including 9 in 2015, since the program started. Participants report being very happy with the outcomes of the projects.

**Development of an educational handout: Landowners: Living with Bison — Sam Sheppard**

This work, which will complement the three other educational handouts already available (see <http://www.ibmp.info/bisoneducation.php>), has just started.

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## **The human dimensions of migratory wildlife: documenting the attitudes and values of gateway community residents in Greater Yellowstone**

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*Peter Metcalf*

Peter is a PhD student working under Dr. Elizabeth Covelli Metcalf (no relation) in the College of Forestry and Conservation Human Dimensions Lab at the University of Montana. Dr. Metcalf had spoken to the Partners at their July 30, 2014 meeting in advance of setting up the research that Peter had undertaken and was now reporting on.

Peter described the problem he was trying to understand, as well as the goals his research sought to achieve, as:

- The Problem
  - Wildlife migrations from Yellowstone National Park bring animals into adjoining human communities, which leads to both joy and conflict
  - In Yellowstone, as in many protected areas, conserving viable migratory wildlife populations depends, in large part, on people’s tolerance
  - No previous social science work on the human dimensions of these populations has been conducted in the GYE

- Project Goals and Objectives
  - An enhanced understanding of gateway community residents' attitudes toward migratory wildlife
  - Inform IBMP's adaptive management of bison in the State of Montana
  - Assist with outreach strategies in upcoming planning efforts
  - Provide an opportunity for local residents to express their wildlife experiences and management perspectives
  - Initiate relationship building with YNP and communities

The wildlife focus of Peter's work was bison migrations in and out of the Park. In particular, he sought to learn local people in Gardiner and West Yellowstone MT feel about bison migrations, as well as how those bison migrations are managed by the IBMP Partners.

Peter's work included qualitative interviews that he described as "not quantifiable nor generalizable." He stated that he was looking for emergent themes, depth of understanding, and connections across content. He sought broad representation in his interviews, with four general subpopulations: landowners, business owners, community leaders, and residents. In all he conducted 42 interview with 50 people.

Peter provided any number of quotes from his interviews. An example follows,

*"I don't mind seein' bison outside the Park. There's probably a lot of people out on Horse Butte who'd be pissed at me for hearin' that. But I don't really mind it. I think it's kinda cool when I head into Bozeman, to see a few bison on the side of the road... It reminds you we live in a pretty damn cool place here. Look at what we got... It makes you a little bit appreciative."*

*-- Father and Hunter, West Yellowstone*

With respect to local's social tolerance for bison, Peter found locals think of it as a fascinating animal that is economically beneficial to the community and symbolic of a healthy ecosystem. Yet having bison in your neighborhood also causes issues for a community, including property damage and challenges to personal safety. The number one concern associated with living in close proximity to bison, as Peter learned from his interviews, was highway safety.



*Figure 5.—Peter Metcalf, a PhD student at the University of Montana, spoke to the IBMP Partners, staff, and public about his work documenting the attitudes and values of gateway community residents in Greater Yellowstone regarding bison and bison management.*

Local residents described their strategies for coexisting with bison, for example altering travel plans, and adding movement deterring fencing to their property. They also described any number of challenges to living with bison. Peter discovered that people have varying levels of tolerance often impacted by the varying

levels of vulnerability they feel (e.g., economic, number of animals they encounter). And the interviews revealed that people have different values, beliefs about bison, and senses of risk perception.

In his interviews Peter also explored local residents' feelings about bison management actions. Fencing mitigation projects have been received positively. However, he discovered a belief among many that bison management agencies lack in responsiveness, lack transparency, and lack a detailed management plan. Hazing and ship-to-slaughter programs received much criticism. Hunting also received criticism due to that belief that there is insufficient space for hunting, that it is not carried out in a fair chase manner, and that it is unsafe.

Some people expressed support for current management as "a necessary thing to do" to protect public safety, individual livelihoods, and private property. Others expressed concerns about range conditions and bison competition with other ungulates. Disease risk was widely challenged as being sufficient justification for bison management.

Interviewees spoke of the desire to find solutions that respect private property and livelihoods while still allowing for natural migration. Locals spoke of wanting bison management agencies to work together. Many don't believe that the current IBMP process is working, instead saying

- Current process ineffective
- Insufficient time to speak
- Lack of dialogue with officials
- Sense of not being heard
- "Boring" or "Unproductive"
- Locals are not represented

People told Peter that they think some things do work in bison management, for example holding meetings at night in local communities; having informal engagement practices such as meeting for coffee and citizen science projects

Peter concluded his presentation with five bison management recommendations:

- Assist the communities in living with bison
- Meaningful public engagement
- "Range Rider"
- Tribal outreach
- Emphasize standard wildlife management practices

## **Introducing the Udall Foundation, Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution**

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*Stephanie Kavanaugh, Mitch Chrismer*

Jennifer Carpenter introduced Stephanie and Mitch of the Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution (IECR or Institute). The Institute will be assisting the NPS and the State of Montana with the new bison management plan environmental impact statement (EIS) process.

Stephanie described the Udall Foundation as an independent, executive branch agency headquartered in AZ. The Udall Foundation was established by Congress in 1992 to honor Morris K. Udall's\* lasting impact on

- Our nation's environment, public lands and natural resources
- Support of the rights and self-governance of American Indians and Alaska Natives

Programs at the Udall Foundation promote leadership, education, collaboration, and conflict resolution. Stephanie provided language from Congressional legislation authorizing the Udall Foundation, which in part says:

*With the magnitude of environmental challenges facing the nation, coupled with the need for careful stewardship of tax dollars and budgets, all Federal departments and agencies should leverage environmental collaboration and conflict management approaches to minimize and resolve environmental conflicts.*

The Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution is the largest of many Udall Foundation programs. It was created by the 1998 by the Environmental Policy and Conflict Resolution Act to assist parties in resolving environmental, public lands and natural resource conflicts nationwide that involve public interests. Among the Institute's duties are:

- Under federal law, help federal agencies and other affected stakeholders address environmental disputes, conflicts, and challenges through programs and services that provide —
  - Situation and conflict assessments
  - Mediation and conflict resolution
  - Facilitated collaboration
  - Process design
  - Capacity building, including training and program assessment



*Figure 6.—Stephanie Kavanaugh and Mitch Chrismer of the Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution described how the Institute will be assisting the NPS and the State of Montana with the new bison management plan EIS process.*

Stephanie reminded the Partners that following the 2008 GAO report, the Partners asked IECR for assistance. Dr. Larry Fisher performed a conflict assessment to identify “options to consider for resource problem solving, adaptive management, and public discourse.” The role for the Institute in the new EIS is different:

- Facilitate and support productive dialog and coordination amongst and between the lead and cooperating agencies on the development of draft alternatives and exploration of the management issues and other concerns associated with them.
- Starting with: neutral situation assessment involving all cooperating agencies.
- We are a federal agency – our enabling legislation requires us to act as a neutral, supporting all parties involved regardless of who initiates or pays for assistance.

Finally, Stephanie described the activities associated with collaborating in developing and EIS under the National Environmental Policy Act as including:

- Cooperating with other agencies
- Developing the Proposed Action
- Establishing purpose and need
- Issuing Notice of Intent
- Conducting scoping
- Developing alternatives
- Assessing affected environment and analyzing impacts and addressing mitigation
- Managing Draft and Final Reviews
- Implementing and monitoring decision

## Public comment

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The following notes on public comment to the IBMP Partners are not intended to be complete, but rather reflect the facilitator's best effort to capture key statements. The facilitator has especially attempted to capture those comments from the public that appeared to be solution oriented and have the potential for inclusion in adaptive management planning and/or process improvement. These items, as well as other potentially actionable public input, are called out with a "\*\*\*" in the listings that follow.

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

- Thanks to Walt and the tribes for their efforts.
- The biggest issue around Beatty Gulch is safety.
- One day we had 35 shooters out there. One person had to jump behind their car to avoid being shot.
- \*\* Having different wardens for different hunting groups is confusing. All wardens should be the same when you need them.
- I worry about someone being killed. I worry about safety at my house. This situation is a powder keg waiting to blow.
- Having wounded animals is bad.
- \*\* We need more parking in the area.
  
- I can't believe we are given 2 min to talk when those of us who live near Beatty Gulch area have to live it for 6 months straight.
- They document abortions in Wyoming. If I were [a local rancher] I would help out her cattle business if it was threatened. I wish the cattle people would help out mine.
- I support the hunt—it just needs to happen on a bigger landscape.
- The whole thing going on here is about grass control; it has nothing to do with disease.
- \*\* We aren't allowed to speak, and yet we are living it.
  
- In 1989 we killed 300 bison. It was filmed and went our around the nation, right into people's living rooms. There were no tribes hunting then. We formed our group in reaction to that first slaughter.
- Be clear, those who kill bison are shooters; they are not hunters.
- \*\* The real remedy for this situation is Montana's Big Open, a place for wild bison in NE Montana.
- I never have forgotten that Mary Maher used to say, "There's no such thing as a surplus bison."
  
- Members of the Board of Livestock have a number of concerns for the IBMP Partners regarding implementing the Governor's decision.
- An expanding bison population will simply continue to expand, and thus need more and more space.
- There are no population targets.
- If the allowable perimeter to manage bison within is expanded, we will need more staff and more money for bison management.
- The Environmental Quality Council is of a similar mind to MBOL—they sent a letter to the Partners in opposition to expanded bison tolerance.
  
- I request that the Partners consider the proposed removal of *Brucella abortus* from the CDC select agents list, and the opportunity that presents for research and development of an effective vaccine which would protect livestock from the possible transmission of this infectious disease.
- The March 9, 2012 Summary Report of the IBMP Partner's Response to the Citizens Working Group Recommendations addressed this issue. I served on the CWG and assisted in preparing these recommendations. CWG Recommendation 14 asked that the IBMP lobby for removing those barriers.

- The Partners said they would write a letter to representatives stating their support for removing the significant barriers that exist for *Brucella abortus* research because of the select agent listing, but could do little more while the select agent listing remained in place.
- \*\* With that challenge removed, it seems appropriate to revisit the discussion and the CWG recommendations. Additionally the proven transmission by elk to livestock in the DSA in subsequent years increases the reasonableness of the CWG recommendation.
- Thanks for implementing the Governor's EA decision today. This is a positive step for bison.
- My group is 100% committed to help make the EA a success. And likewise, we want to continue to promote the co-existence program.
- We support quarantine regardless of location.
- We want to thank the Partners for taking a science-based step today on implementing the Governor's decision.
- Now it's time to take the next step and move forward on quarantine.
- Thank you for the efforts on implementing the Governor's decision today.
- I agree with Rob Tierney that highway safety is a major problem. My group asks the Partners to help pressure MDOT to help improve safety associated with bison on the roads.
- Part of the solution to the hunting issue in the Gardner Basin is expanded habitat.
- An incorrect statement was made earlier today by NPS that no bison had been injured at the Stephen's Creek capture facility this year. Here is a picture of an injured bison whose horn was broken off in the squeeze shoot. So please don't lie.
- Yes to managing for year-round occupation of available habitat for bison west of YNP.
- I think the Governor's letter [copies provided at the meeting] should not say "bison are wildlife" but instead that "bison are valued wildlife."
- The EA is a reactive rather than proactive approach. I make a plea to FWP to lead a plan for managing bison west of the Park starting with clearly developed goals—what good things do we want and what bad things do we want to avoid?
- I have been here since December. I have been with the buffalo and I have witnessed hunting, hazing, and capture. I want to bring that experience to the table.
- The thing I see missing in the IBMP is that respect for bison is not reflected in these activities, in the Plan. Instead the Plan is all about management and population, and so on. We need to think about what the bison are going through, how hard their life is, how their lives and all lives are sacred.
- What happened in the trap ... They are just not treated with respect.
- I have been volunteering with one group and seen much.
- I appreciate and agree with the Governor's decision.
- I have been with the bison almost every day since November. Seeing what they mean to everyone is important.
- Tonight I will likely stay up until 2 AM to protect the bison out on the roads.
- I appreciate the chance to talk.
- I live in Alaska and am a subsistence fisherman.
- Some friends created BFC.
- I want the well-being of bison. The answer is to let the bison roam. Increased tolerance is important.
- I am so impressed with the talent here, especially in the tribal realm.

*\* Final \**

- [speaker read a long proclamation from his Mother, an elderly tribal member]
- I have marched with BFC. 6000 bison had been killed at that time. I was a proud to share with all who wanted to listen. I told my people what I knew and they were proud.
- In my opinion the truth is far from being told. All are going for genocide.
- Thanks for taking action to endorse year-round habitat. That action shows that this body can go forward.
- We ask that this body please move forward with operational quarantine.
- \*\* Also, please address those 57 bison in limbo. Defenders of Wildlife works closely with Dr. Bartram of CSU and she would give up bison if those bison would go to Fort Peck. Please solve another problem. And if you think the only option for the 57 bison is to send them to ship and slaughter, we recommend that you send them back into the Park.

*\*\* Meeting adjourned \*\**

## Abbreviations

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- AJ—Andrea Jones
- AM—Adaptive management
- APHIS—Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
- BB—Brooklyn Baptiste
- BFC—Buffalo Field Campaign
- CGNF—Custer Gallatin National Forest
- CS—Carl Scheeler
- CSKT—Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribes
- CTUIR—Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- CWG—Citizens’ Working Group
- DH—Don Herriot
- DSA—Designated Surveillance Zone
- DW—Dan Wenk
- EA—Environmental Assessment
- EC—Ervin Carlson
- GAO—Government Accountability Office
- GNF—Gallatin National Forest
- GW—Germaine White
- GWA—Gallatin Wildlife Association
- GYA—Greater Yellowstone Area
- ITBC—Inter Tribal Buffalo Council
- JH—John Harrison
- JS—Jim Stone
- LG—Leonard Gray
- MBOL—Montana Board of Livestock
- MD—Marna Daley
- MDOL—Montana Department of Livestock
- MDOT—Montana Department of Transportation
- ME—Mary Erickson
- MEPA—Montana Environmental Policy Act
- MFWP—Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks
- MH—Mike Honeycutt
- MO—McCoy Oatman
- MOU—Memorandum of Understanding
- MR—Majel Russell
- MSGA—Montana Stockgrowers’ Association
- MSU—Montana State University
- MZ—Marty Zaluski
- NAS—National Academy of Sciences
- NEPA—National Environmental Policy Act
- NGO—Non-governmental organizations
- NP—Nez Perce
- NPS—National Park Service
- NPT—Nez Perce Tribe
- NPTEC—Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee
- NRC—National Research Council
- NRDC—Natural Resources Defense Council
- NT—Neil Thagard
- Park—Yellowstone National Park
- PIOs—Public Information Officers
- PJ—PJ White
- QE—Quincy Ellenwood
- RC—Ryan Clarke
- ROD—Record of Decision
- RF—Rebecca Frye
- RFP—Request for proposals
- RT—Rob Tierney
- RTR—Royal Teton Ranch
- RW—Rick Wallen
- SB—Scott Bischke
- SEIS—Supplemental EIS
- SG—Stephanie Gillin
- SK—Salish Kootenai
- SS—Sam Sheppard
- TM—Tom McDonald
- USFWS—US Fish and Wildlife Service
- USGS—US Geological Survey
- WMA—state of MT wildlife management areas
- YELL—Yellowstone National Park
- YNP—Yellowstone National Park