

NPS Recommendations 2017

~4,800 bison: ~3,970 north/~850 central

- Remove up to 1,250 bison breeding in north**
- Decrease numbers to 4,200-4,400 after calving**
- No removals in west due to lower numbers**
- Allow bison to distribute on landscape and hunt**
- Maintain 250-400 bison in Gardiner basin**
- Begin culling bison in north when migration deemed sufficient to support hunting and culling**
- Conduct larger culls if there is a larger migration**

17/18 Winter Operations Plan

Manage for a decreasing population

- **Optimize harvest while assuring combined hunt/cull take of 600 to 900 bison**
- **Reduce impacts of bison captures on hunt**
- **Monthly removal goals:**
 - **75-115 by the end of November**
 - **225-335 by the end of December**
 - **372-560 by the end of January**
 - **522-785 by the end of February**
 - **600-900 by March 15**

Harvests

December 2017: Hunters began harvesting bison west of the park (NPS recommended zero)

Removal goals/reported harvests (north):

- **November 30: Goal = 75-115; Harvest = 8**
 - **December 31: Goal = 225-335; Harvest = 8**
 - **January 31: Goal = 372-560; Harvest = 21**
 - **February 28: Goal = 522-785; Harvest = 146**
 - **March 15: Goal = 600-900; Harvest = 206**
- **Reported harvests lagged well behind removal goals by mid-February**

Captures/Culls

- **Winter conditions led to a large migration into Gardiner basin during late February/March**
- **NPS began capturing on February 16 and captured ~800 bison over a 3-week period**
- **Another 800+ bison in the Gardiner basin (Mammoth-Yankee Jim) during captures**
- **NOTES:**
 - **Harvest higher after captures began (77 bison harvested 30 days before; 172 after)**
 - **Many harvests and reports after March 11, when captures ended**

Harvests and Culls

	MT/ NPS	CSKT	Nez Perce	ShoBan	CTUR	Yakama	BFN
Hunt (372)							
North	37*	2	111	35	28	40	32
West	22*	45	4	2	0	8	6
Subtotal	59	47	115	37	28	48	38
* includes 6 dispatched, 3 poached, 1 abandoned							
Cull (796)							
Slaughter	694	Transferred to the CSKT for processing					
Quarantine	98	Includes 25 female and 73 male yearlings					
Pen Mort	4						
Total	1,168	2018: Harvest 32%; Culls 68% 2012-2017: Harvest 50%; Culls 50%					

WHY > 600-900

- Winter severity exceeded predictions.
- Unusually large migration in late February allowed continued capture and hunter success with > 500 bison north of park at times.
- Telemetric data indicating that bison migrating into Gardiner bison were associated with the northern breeding area.
- NPS holds that a long-term average of ~4,200 bison allows balance of myriad demands/values surrounding bison and provides opportunity for progress on issues that have been difficult to advance, including:
 - Full dispersal into the conservation area
 - Reduced hunting pressure near boundary/better hunt success and optics
 - Mitigation of capture/hunt conflict
 - Reduction of cull size and shipments to slaughter
- The removal of 1,100+ bison provided the highest chance of a summer 2018 count near 4,200 bison compared to other alternatives.
 - Summer 2018: Predict ~4,200 +/- 500 bison post-calving
 - <4,500 bison for the first time since 2012

Conclusions/Considerations

The combined use of hunting and culling over the past six years has reduced bison numbers toward the NPS objective (4,200), while supporting hunter harvest (41% of removals) and no >800 to slaughter in any one winter.

Future removals to stabilize population growth could be one-half of what was necessary to reduce the population size (i.e., 400-500 instead of 1,000 – 1,200).

Consider:

Removal of fewer bison via capture/culling can shift focus to reducing hunt pressure near boundary and advance other efforts:

- As outlined in the 2000 IBMP ROD, establish temporary capture facilities near Yankee Jim Canyon. Facilitates bison distribution over available landscape, habitat learning, and a dispersed hunt.
- Limit capture at Stephens Creek primarily to support quarantine or research.
- Utilize quarantine facilities at Stephens Creek, Corwin Springs, and Fort Peck Reservation to reduce shipments to slaughter.