

Summary Report from the Interagency Bison Management Plan Meeting December 3, 2019



First draft presented December 13, 2019 by meeting facilitator Scott Bischke

The following summary report reflects activities at the December 3, 2019 meeting of the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) Partners, held at the Holiday Inn in West Yellowstone, Montana. This report comes from the notes of facilitator Scott Bischke¹. The report will be marked *Draft* until formal Partner agreement to make it *Final* at the start of their next meeting. The nine Partner attendees were Ryan Clarke (APHIS), Dennis Clairmont (CSKT), Ervin Carlson (ITBC), Mike Honeycutt (MBOL), Martin Zaluski (MDOL), Mark Deleray (MFWP), Cam Sholly (NPS-YNP), Quincy Ellenwood (NPT), and Mary Erickson (USFS-CGNF). In addition to those at the deliberative table, ~70 other people were in the room over the course of the day, either staff members from IBMP organizations, representatives from treaty hunting tribes, or members of the public.

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Action items identified

Table 1. Action items identified during this meeting

#	Who	What	By when
1	SB	Post the July 2019 meeting report to the website as “final”	ASAP
2	SB	The facilitator was given the action item to write to provide MD the names and emails of these people (** action item 2).	ASAP
3	MD	MD took on the action to convene this group to further discuss the potential creation of a pilot program as described above (** action item 3). No commitment was made by the Partners at the meeting to create the pilot project in the winter of 2020.	by 1/15/20
4	SB	Add an item to the next IBMP meeting regarding convening a working group to discuss West Side issues (e.g., habitat, migration, safety).	ASAP
5	PJ	NPS to edit the document to assure their recommendations are correctly inserted and return to the Lead Partners team. Partners declared that those changes only need to be reviewed and approved by the Lead Partner team before beginning the signing process (** action item 5).	ASAP
6	See to the right	Winter Ops p 7: NT -- require update to NPT hunting season Brendan Keenan – add Yakama details on their hunting season SB -- add the Northern Arapahoe to the tribes hunting	ASAP
7	SB, RC	Completion of the 2019/20 Winter Ops Plan and 2019 Annual Report, per timeline shown in the applicable section of this report.	Both complete by 1/1/20

Agreeing to previous meeting minutes

The meeting started with introductions of Partners, staff, and all members of the general public in attendance. Next the facilitator provided a short review of IBMP history. The facilitator asked if there were any objections or changes to the draft meeting report from the July 2019 IBMP meeting, and noted the report has been available in draft for review since shortly after that meeting. No objections were made. Thus the facilitator, per Partner Protocols, is to post the July 31, 2019 meeting notes to IBMP.info as *Final* (**action item 1).

The facilitator reminded Partners of their plan to include focus on three items that they agreed to as having a good chance for short-term success. That agreement, first discussed at their May 2017 meeting and finalized at their August 2017 meeting, can be found at <http://ibmp.info/Library/20170803/20170803.php> (see link titled “Report on increasing IBMP Partner effectiveness”). The three items of focus—1) Improving utilization of expanded bison habitat, especially in new West Side tolerance area, 2) Creating a bison quarantine facility, 3) Improving safety, quality of the north side hunt/improving boundary issues—form three sections of this meeting, as reported below.

Bear safety and bison carcasses resulting from hunting

RF provided a report back on an item discussed by the Partners at their July 31 meeting. At that meeting the question was asked, “How many carcasses are too many when considering both human and bear safety?”

At the previous meeting points were made that a goal of 100% carcass removal is probably unreasonable and that perhaps it would be a better management strategy to start carcass removal at some threshold level of carcasses on the ground. But what is the threshold that could bring a grizzly bear to the carcass? someone asked. Realistically it is *one* carcass, responded another. Further comments had included:

- The issues may be difficult to tease apart—e.g., likely no biological trigger on how many carcasses are too many—but the key issue for the review will be considerations of safety (humans and bears).
- Part of the work, since it seems we don't agree on the problem (do we have too many carcasses or not?) will be for the group to define the problem. In other words, if the Partners undertake a management activity, we need to know what problem we're fixing? In this case, what negative outcome are we avoiding by acting?

RF met with Kevin Frye (MFWP), Stacy Courville (CSKT), and NT met to further discuss this topic. From that meeting, RF provided the following four points for discussion and/or future thought:

1. Dates when area might be closed to hunting to allow bison movement north, thereby dispersing hunting and carcass remains. As proven with domestic livestock carcasses, dispersal of carcasses, disperses bear activity, lowering potential bear/human conflicts, especially near trails or developed sites (homes). There was a trial of closed hunt periods, summary of how that went? Could periods of closure be longer? *MFWP and USFS can admin close the area if any bear incident should occur.*
2. Increased public awareness or closure of Beattie Gulch during the spring season (late March to mid-May) for public safety when hiking Beattie Gulch road, which is extensively used as a trail due to non-motorized access on the road.
3. As per the USFS-CGNF food storage regulation, not allow remains to be left within 200 yards of the Beattie Gulch Trail after March 1st and consider the same standards for the Old Yellowstone Trail road and Beattie Gulch road. Recommend Best Practices: Open rumen for better dispersal, take all of carcass, no rib cages/spines left behind, take heart and liver.
4. Do not transfer bison carcass remains from other areas in the Gardiner Basin to the lower Beattie Gulch area, thereby concentrating carcass attractants and luring bears near residences and recreational area.

While there Partners and staff did not discuss each item point by point, the four thoughts put forth here were referred to on several occasions during the day.

Improving safety, quality of the North Side hunt/improving boundary issues

Presentations by Sabina Strauss (Bear Creek Council), Mike Thom (CGNF), and Steve Primm (independent contractor)

Sabina, Mike, and Steve included PowerPoint slides with their presentations. Those slides, reviewed in brief here, can be found in full at the meeting website: www.ibmp.info/Library/20191203/20191203.php.

Sabina described that Bear Creek Council (BCC) provided six recommendations (also described as "solutions") in their presentation to the Partners at the July 31 IBMP meeting <facilitator's note: that presentation can be found at the meeting web page www.ibmp.info/Library/20190731/20190731.php>. Two of those recommendations had to do with education:

- *Solution 4:* Increase residents' awareness of the danger of certain areas during bison hunting season.
- *Solution 5:* Increase hunter awareness about residents' use of Jardine Road, Eagle Creek Road, and Old Yellowstone Trail and educate hunters in safe practices.

Sabina reported that BCC has taken action on both of these recommendations by creating a Public Service Announcement (PSA) that ran in the Gardiner Chamber of Commerce newsletter on November 13 (Figure 1). They plan that the PSA will run monthly until the end of the bison hunt. The cost of \$43 per ad is paid by BCC.

Public Service Announcement **Bison Hunting in Gardiner Basin**

Hikers, Skiers & Snowshoers: welcome to Gardiner! Keep in mind:

- MT FWP Bison hunting season dates are: November 15 to February 15.
- Tribes with treaty hunting rights set their own hunting dates.
- MT FWP polices the state hunters and the participating tribes are policing their own tribal hunters. State and tribal game wardens are coordinating enforcements.
- The busiest hunting areas are in Beattie Gulch area and Jardine Road from Travertine to Penn Stock area.
- When recreating in these areas wear reflective vests and put reflective collars on your dog/s.
- If you have your dog with you be aware of carcasses.

Hunters: welcome to Gardiner! Keep in mind:

- The busiest hunting areas are in Beattie Gulch area and Jardine Road from Travertine to Penn Stock area.
- Gardiner residents commute along Old Yellowstone Trail and Jardine Road: please keep these roads clear of carcasses and vehicles.
- Gardiner residents live and recreate in the same areas you are hunting.
- Forest Service lands are Pack In/Pack Out. Littering is a ticketing offense being enforced.

CALL: 800-TIPMONT

View a map of the hunting areas here:

https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd563838.pdf



Figure 1.—Public Service Announcement created by the Bear Creek Council. The group is paying to have the PSA run in the Gardiner Chamber of Commerce newsletter throughout the 2019/20 hunting season.

The PSA discussion led to an invite to Mike Thom to present his findings per an action item from the previous IBMP meeting. Mike led lead a group to compile the myriad regulations dealing with hunting on the North Side of Yellowstone. The group compiled a list of regulations, as well as a mapping look at the regulations. Both can be found in Mike’s talk at the meeting web page (www.ibmp.info/Library/20191203/20191203.php). Mike presented several maps depicting the regulations in effect, for example Figure 2 shows areas of shoeing closures in and around Beattie Gulch.

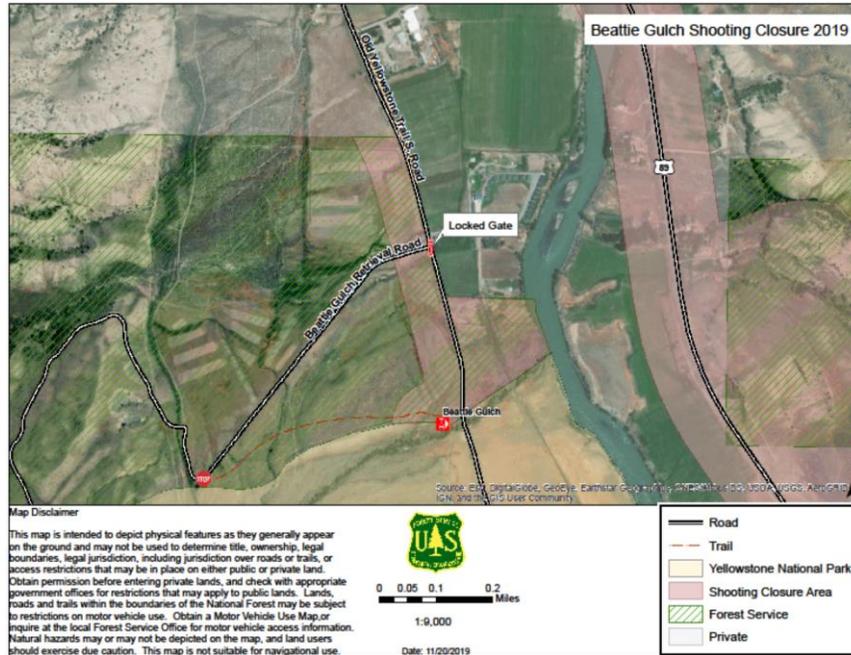


Figure 2.—Beattie Gulch shooting closures for 2019, as compiled and presented by Mike Thom of the CGNF.

Sabina later asked Partners to recall that first recommendation BCC provided to the Partners was as follows: *Make carcass removal required in Beattie Gulch*. Pursuant that goal, and with Lead Partner agreement, BCC invited Steve Primm to address the group on the topics of carcass removal and composting. Steve’s presentation was sponsored by the Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GYC). As such, Shana Drimal of GYC introduced Steve and described his unique expertise and experience in the arena of carcass handling in wild country, specifically in locations across Montana and Alberta.

Steve presented himself humbly after Shana’s accolades, and described himself as an “independent conservationist” (Figure 3). Steve’s talk covered why carcasses cause conflict, what composting options are available, the field logistics associated with removing bison remains, and finally some cost estimates for collection, transport, disposal, and composting of bison carcasses. A sampling of the points Steve brought forth are provide below. His full talk, as detailed above, can be found at the meeting website.

Steve provided four basic aspects for the Partners to consider regarding carcass management:

- Methods for carcass pick-up
- Methods of carcass transport to permanent compost facility
- Need for a 4-6 month composting process
- Need for funding and potential in-kind contributions from multiple partners



Figure 3.—Steve Primm, an independent contractor, spoke to Partners, staff, treaty hunting tribes, and public regarding the potential to employ carcass removal and/or carcass composting as tools for carcass management.

Steve provided review of several current carcass handling facilities (for example in Granite County). In some cases the focus is on livestock carcasses, in some cases on wildlife carcasses, in some cases both. He noted that a bison carcass collection and/or composting facility—properly designed to avoid scavenger (from grizzlies to corvids)—might serve double duty for ranchers who currently don't have many options for handling their livestock carcasses.

Regarding composting piles, Steve provided a graphic to illustrate the makeup of the pile (Figure 4). While the main focus of the talk was to remove carcasses from the ground to minimize human/grizzly (and other) dangerous interactions, he also noted that compost piles can be hot enough to kill *Brucella abortus*.

Steve described a method, using “deadstock” bins for collecting carcasses in the field and then moving them either to a transport, disposal, or composting facility. The deadstock bins remove the carcasses from the reach of scavengers while those carcasses are in the field. Given that isolation, the bins can be emptied per user convenience or when full, whichever comes first.

Steve further described equipment, cost, funding, and partnering in development of carcass handling facilities. He noted that Montana Department of Environmental Quality are not onerous with respect to creating a permanent composting facility, and include:

- 300 feet from property lines
- 500 feet from homes or businesses
- 150 feet from drainage
- Site operating plan

Discussion

Key discussion points following Sabina, Mike, and Steve's presentations follow. First, regarding shooting closures, Partners discussion included:

- The 150 yard buffer zones: a) that they are tough to obey without more signage; 2) that signage everywhere is not possible; 3) perhaps signage, could, however, be placed in key locations of known conflict and/or confusion; 4) we must recognize that public agencies have constraints (e.g., regulations or laws regarding what they can do and how they can/must do it); 5) BCC stated willingness to help with signage and/or other items that their membership might help with
- Scope of the regulations described: Adam Pankratz noted that Mike's presentation focused on just shooting closures, not all regulations impacting hunters (e.g., did not include mandate to wear orange).

- Concern of one tribal group of having their hunt marginalized with a mention that the group follows their own regulations and seeks to hunt safely plus tries to cooperate with other IBMP agencies
- A statement that public safety is difficult as policy in that it is considered an obligation yet there is no absolute metric for measuring public safety. Managing the hunt adaptively is a key tool for maintaining public safety.

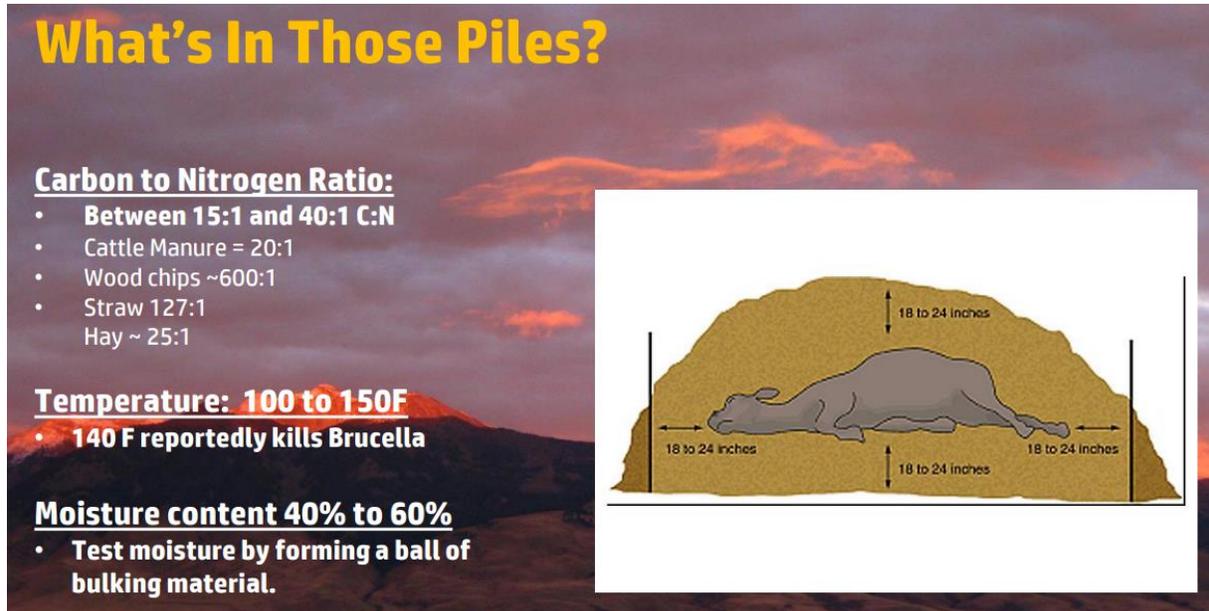


Figure 4.—Makeup and key factors of pile used to compost livestock.

- Regarding carcass handling, discussion included:
- Per Shana Drimal, principals at the Blackfoot Challenge said they'd be happy to host the IBMP Partners on a field trip to show how that group handles carcasses <facilitator's note: many from the IBMP community live in Bozeman or Gardiner; those individuals could drive through lands covered under the Blackfeet Challenge on their way to Pablo for a planned IBMP meeting in the summer of 2020>
 - Composting can be hot enough to remove pathogens, including *brucellus abortus*, and is a recognized method (under proper conditions, monitoring) for handling diseased wildlife carcasses.
 - Q.—Would it be economically feasible to collect bison carcasses or offal for transport to a composting facility outside the Gardner Basin. A.—Likely yes, to somewhere in the Paradise Valley as they already have green box transfer stations (a mention was made there is also one by the Gardner airport). Those existing areas could be expanded and carcass collection could be a great benefit to local ranchers as they might not have safe disposal places to take their carcasses as of today. Also, using an existing location is smart as people are already used to it being there.
 - Composting facilities don't smell. People who go by them often report they didn't even know that a facility was being used for composting.
 - Q.—Is transport of carcasses on the roads of Montana an issue. A.—Unlikely to be an issue if done within the DSA. Also, if taken to a compost facility that heats sufficiently to kill any pathogen.
 - Animals with Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) cannot be removed from the known CWD areas (of which Paradise Valley is no currently such an area).
 - Any work with transfer stations in Park County would require partnering with Park County to assure all of county's regulations and needs are met.
 - We c/should consider using equipment at Stephens Creek to help the collection and transport of bison carcasses to collection and/or composting facilities.

- While there is a collection facility in West Yellowstone, carcass transport through YNP may be problematic but even if not, the roads aren't open in winter.
- Q.—How many animals could each dumpster hold? A.—20 to 30 would likely fit in a 10 yard container.
- The Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GYC) has set aside \$5000 to help offset startup costs for such a project. That money could be used to hire Steve Primm as a consultant. Also GYC would be willing to work for funding such a program on an on-going basis.
- Q.—How about if we start a pilot project for this year? It could be small and possibly just focus on the use of a deadstock bin to collect carcasses in the field and transport them to disposal locations. The program need not have 100% compliance and could, in fact, be considered voluntary. The important thing is we would move forward on learning—be it positive or negative—on a possible new IBMP adaptive management tool. The things we would need to do would include deciding on locations for the deadstock bins and collection bins; setting up the facilities; assuring funding; partner with Park County; create a working group to answer such questions in perhaps the next month. A.—Responses to this question/proposal were varied. Many stated support; many did not. A sampling of comments follow:
 - Hunters are often cold, bloody, and worn out after killing, clean, and moving a bison. It's not reasonable to then ask them to move remnant carcass or offal anywhere given all that they already have to do.
 - Agreed with the previous point – dealing with the gut pile the day of the hunt may be too much. But perhaps we could develop a group of volunteers that would help in the removal process.
 - Some groups said they already have to take out everything except the gut pile.
 - Why are we always asked to do something new, or to change, or to give up something when we have already given up so much? There is a trust responsibility owed to the treaty hunting tribes.
 - I want to see the numbers. What problem are we solving?
 - We already have a regulation asking our hunters to move gut piles out of the safe zone. That movement is generally uphill. If the collection area is downhill, that would be easier and might help with compliance.
 - I like the idea but note that all of this is a matter of scale. Some years we have lots of animals out; some years far fewer. Also, one big issue not to lose track of is that we need animal distributed farther across the landscape.
 - In the Beaverhead they started their program with just small steps, working on carcass removal only in year one, and moving to a composting facility further down the line.
 - It might be useful to get information from Kevin Frye (MFWP) on how a previous carcass collection effort went.
 - I worry that the timeframe suggested is too short, even for a pilot program. I think the chance for success would go up with more extended planning.
 - I am not for this idea. Many of our hunters leave materials on the land as a gift to other creatures. It is part of our tradition and culture. We try to do things as we have always done them, yet we are always being asked to change. I don't want our hunters to be given a ticket for leaving a gut pile on the land. We are doing the best we can for our people, for the bison, for safety.
 - What are the safety issues we would be solving with this idea? Is this mostly an aesthetics issue? The grizzly issue remains regardless if we do such a program even if we ever had 100% compliance. We need to better educate our hunters. It seems likely that we will have more hunter/griz conflicts that public/griz conflicts.
 - Likewise

The discussion wound down to accepting a proposal put forward by the Lead Partner that the group create a working group to further study and consider the idea. MD agreed to organize the working group. A number of names were put forward to be on the working group, including Partners (and several from outside the Partner community (CSKT—Stacey Coureville; MFWP—Mark Deleray, Kevin Frye; NPT—Neil Thagard; USFS-CGNF—Michael Thom; Brian Helms) and also from outside the IBMP Partner community (BCC—Sabina Strauss; GYC—Shana Drimal; Independent contractor—Steve Primm). The facilitator was given the action item to write to provide MD the names and emails of these people (** action item 2). MD took on the action to convene this

group to further discuss the potential creation of a pilot program as described above (** action item 3). No explicit decision was made by the Partners regarding going forward (or not) with a pilot project in the winter of 2020.

Improve utilization of expanded bison habitat, especially in new West Side tolerance area

ME noted that the state won't be pursuing assisted migration for bison to the Taylor Fork or at least has no plans to do so for now. She stated belief that while there is not a sense of urgency, she does believe there is value in convening a working group to discuss West Side issues. The facilitator was asked to add that item to the agenda for the next meeting (** action item 4). Items of interest included 1) habitat (status and manipulation), 2) bison migration with some emphasis on concerns about migration along the highway, 3) safety issues with traffic, fencing, dude ranch guests, etc., 4) closing hunting temporarily to allow the migration to get a successful start. On the latter point TM said that the CSKT had passed rules regarding no hunting to allow natural migration, while MD said that the state had not passed (nor take to) explicit new rules through the Fish and Wildlife Commission .

MD provided two further updates: 1) the new West Side area is not open to hunting as of today; 2) Julie Cunningham has worked with MDOT to discuss improving wildlife passage, specifically near Cougar Creek.



Figure 5.—Over the course of the day, roughly 80 people attended this meeting of the Interagency Bison Management Plan, held at the Holiday Inn in West Yellowstone. Here Michael Thom of the Custer-Gallatin National Forest provides Partners, staff, treaty hunting tribes, and the public a description of the rules governing the North Side hunting district as compiled from all Partners groups.

Bison quarantine and translocation

QE provide thanks to all who helped in the past summer's transport of 55 bison to Fort Peck Reservation to undergo final assurance testing before being recognized as brucellosis free. Noting the group effort, QE said, "We can only go as far as we can all go together." These thanks were repeated by many during a short discussion and were extended to Ervin Carlson, Ryan Clarke, Rebecca Frye, Chris Geremia, Robbie Magnan, Tim Reid, Majel Russel, Cam Sholly, Dan Wenner, PJ White, Marty Zaluski. <facilitator's note: there are likely others deserving recognition, this is simply the list I was able to capture>

EC expressed gratitude on behalf of the ITBC. He said ITBC has an MOU with the Fort Peck Tribe where the Tribe will distribute live animals out to requesting tribes. EC said, "We are grateful."

CS noted that it is and was a big partnership to get the program set up between all the Partners. It's big progress that could not have happened without open minds and lots of cooperation. He said that YNP will bison will continue to be captured for quarantine at the NPS Stephens Creek facility and the APHIS Corwin Springs facility. He noted that there will be a limit to the number of animals two facilities can handle and the Partners seek to increase the size of the program they will need to develop new ideas ahead.

RC reported that APHIS currently has 14 cow/calf pairs and 3 bulls that will undergo their last test this month before (assuming successful testing) being sent to Fort Peck for final assurance testing establishing successful quarantine.

QE closed the discussion with some reflection, saying that he feels for his brothers the bison. Why, he wondered aloud, do they still have to prove themselves over and over? When will the time arrive when they can roam free? When will the barriers go away?

2019/20 Winter Ops planning

CG presented a set of NPS recommendations for bison removals during 2019/20 winter operations. As shown below, in a slide from the presentation, NPS recommends removing 600-900 bison from the population during 2019/20 winter operations. CG's presentation includes a summary of 2018/19 recommendations and actual outcomes, as well as historical and current bison population status, trends, and demography. The presentation can be found at the meeting web page (www.ibmp.info/Library/20191203/20191203.php).²

Recommendation Winter 2019-20

RECOMMENDATION

- **Remove 600-900 bison (i.e., slightly decreasing population)**
 - **Focus on Northern Herd**
 - **Removal age/sex composition resembling current demographics and if possible slightly bias towards males**
 - **Could include immediately releasing some captured bison back into the Park**
- **Approach 3,800 - 4,100 bison at end-of-winter**
- **Quarantine intake**
 - **Up to 110, which could include 50 9-10 mo females, 25 21-22 mo females, and 35 21-22 mo males**
- **Balance hunting and culling**

There were no dissenters to adopting the removal numbers, nor to the desired quarantine intake. Regarding quarantine: Dan Wenner provided updated language for this section of the Winter Ops Plan. The updated language was projected and accepted with a single edit by Partners (in the last line of the section, deleting the word “quarantine” and replacing it with “assurance test”).

Given limited changes to their 2018/19 Winter Ops Plan, Partners and staff required limited time for discussion of the 2019/2020 IBMP Winter Ops Plan. They enumerated the following steps for final edits to the complete of the 2019/20 Winter Ops Plan (note timeline for completion is provided in a later section):

² *Facilitator's note: From the report titled: Status Report on the Yellowstone Bison Population, October 2019, this statement: "The maximum aerial count of bison during summer 2019 was 4,829, including 3,667 in northern Yellowstone (northern herd) and 1,162 in central Yellowstone (central herd)."*

- Insert new quarantine section as provided by Dan Wenner (as just noted)
- NPS to edit the document to assure their recommendations are correctly inserted and return to the Lead Partners team. Partners declared that those changes only need to be reviewed and approved by the Lead Partner team before beginning the signing process (PJ, (** action item 5).
- p 7 (all under ** action item 6):
 - SB—add the Northern Arapahoe to the tribes hunting
 - Brendan Keenan—add Yakama details on their hunting season
 - NT—update to NPT details on their hunting season

Partner briefings/updates—status of ongoing activities related to Yellowstone bison and brucellosis

Mark—update on addition of new treaty hunting tribes

There are seven tribe and the state of Montana hunting. Four additional tribes have expressed interest in hunting at some time in the future. Those are the Crow, Northern Cheyenne, Oglala Sioux, and Coeur d’alene tribes.

Mary, Cam—status of new lawsuit regarding Gardner Basin hunting

The lawsuit addresses NPS and CGNF only. It is titled, “Neighbors Against Bison Slaughter and Bonnie Lynn v. the National Park Service et al., United States District Court for the District of Montana, Case No. 1:19-cv-00128-SPW (2019).” Two recent updates: a) A venue change has been granted to bring the lawsuit to Montana, b) a preliminary injunction was denied.

Shana Drimal—Update on bison coexistence/fencing project

Shana reported that since its inception in 2011, 48 total fencing projects have been completed in the Gardiner and Hebgen basins and more than \$47,000 contributed collectively towards reimbursements and materials. Three fencing projects (two in West Yellowstone/Horse Butte, one in the Gardiner Basin) were completed in 2019 and three projects are already lined up for spring of 2020. Ample funds are available for additional projects in 2020.

Mary—Update on Custer-Gallatin National Forest Plan revision effort

The report remains as described at the last meeting. CGNF released its draft plan and draft EIS and took public comment through June 6, 2019. Roughly 21,000 comments were received, many focused on bison. The final preferred alternative is expected to be released in the spring of 2020, followed by an objections period. The Forest hopes to have its new forest plan finalized by late 2020.

Next meetings, final comments

TIMING FOR COMPLETION OF THE 2019 ANNUAL REPORT AND 2019/20 WINTER OPS PLAN

The facilitator, in conjunction with the Lead Partner, provided the following timelines during the course of the afternoon for these two year-end reports (**action item 7):

- ***2019 Annual Report***
 - By Dec 5 facilitator sends out final requests for input
 - By Dec 15 Partners and staff return final items to facilitator
 - By Dec 16 facilitator incorporates final items, sends completed report to Lead Partner team
 - By Dec 20 Lead Partner provides OK to publish
 - By Jan 1, 2020—2019 IBMP Annual Report completed and posted to the IBMP website (per Partner Protocols, no signature from Partners is required)
- ***2019/20 Winter Ops Plan***
 - By Dec 5 facilitator sends out final requests for input
 - By Dec 11 Partners and staff return final items to facilitator

- By Dec 15 facilitator incorporates final items, sends completed report to Lead Partner team
- By Dec 16 Lead Partner provides OK to publish and facilitator institutes electronic signing process
- By Dec 30 all Partners have electronically signed
- By Jan 1, 2020—2019 IBMP Annual Report completed and posted to the IBMP website (per Partner Protocols, no signature from Partners is required)
- By Jan 1, 2020.—The 2019/20 Winter Ops Plan is fully signed and posted to the IBMP website

PLANNING FOR 2020 MEETINGS AND LEAD PARTNER CHANGE

The three tribal agencies—CSKT, ITBC, NPT—will share Lead Partner duties in 2020. Each of the three will be responsible for organizing and leading one of the three IBMP meetings in 2020, as well as handling Lead Partner responsibilities during that third of the year. Meeting leadership, date, and location for 2020 are as follow:

- Spring meeting led by ITBC; April 8th in Bozeman
- Summer meeting led by CSKT; July 29th in Polson
- Fall meeting led by NPT; December 2nd in Lapwai

As of this report, locations for the summer and fall meetings are considered tentative, pending agreement of NPT and CSKT tribal councils. Any changes or additional details, as available, will be provided on the IBMP website meetings page (<http://ibmp.info/meetings.php>).

MEETING CLOSE

Lead Partner for 2019, Ryan Clarke of APHIS, received a round of applause from all assembled for his efforts over the past year. He thanked everyone for their efforts, wished everyone safe winter travels, and then closed the meeting.

Public comment

The following summaries of public comment are not intended to be complete, but rather to capture key points of each public comment as presented. Upon review, Partners sometimes point out that statements made during the public comment are either incomplete or incorrect.

The facilitator has especially attempted to capture those comments from the public that appeared to be solution-oriented and/or have the potential for inclusion in adaptive management planning, and/or process improvement, and/or use as agenda items for future meetings. These items, as well as other potentially actionable public input, are called out with a “***” in the listings that follow. The “***” callouts are especially added to items that the facilitator does not believe are already under consideration by the Partners (or have been in the past).

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 end of the day.

- I'm a retired rangeland specialist the Natural Resources Conservation Service for about 36 years. Much of the last decade my colleagues and I have been researching the northern range of Yellowstone, including reassessing the plant and soil condition of the resource. Our team included a forester, biologist, myself, and others. We spent summers the last 7 years doing this work culminating in the report I have provided the Partners and have some copies for others interested. We looked at just the soil and didn't care what was eating it. Our baseline was the similar 1963 survey and set of photos. The take-home is that today the condition of the northern range is greatly diminished compared to past surveys. I think that's something that we need to take a long, hard look at. < *facilitator's note*: the speaker provided Partners hard copies of the report in the journal Rangelands (volume 40, issue 6); as of this writing, the report can be found online at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/rangelands/vol/40/issue/6> >

- I'm a private veterinary practitioner in Laurel. I've been interested in bison my whole career which is about 55 years. The last couple years I've had the opportunity to observe quarantine animals coming to and living on the Fort Peck Reservation. I'm really excited about what I've seen. I like to see the animals have a chance to get away from brucellosis concerns and get out on the Open Range in eastern Montana. I work with both commercial and conservation herds and I'm excited about the quarantine program; let's give these animals a chance.
- A year ago I was up here testifying the idea of moving animals to Fort Peck was still quite contentious. We've had lots of obstacles but we've come a long way since then. It's so great to be here in such a positive way. Just seeing all the Partners come together for the cause. Starting with those five bulls from Corwin Springs and more recently the 55 bison from Stevens Creek. I can tell you it was just so awesome to be there and see those trailers pull up onto the prairie at Fort Peck. And then when they opened the doors and the animals slipped out and pounded across the Prairie; it was really fantastic. A video of the event was released and had like 1.1 million hits. That gives you an idea not just of hope but of the international interest and exposure that comes with Yellowstone bison being restored to tribal lands outside the Park. There were stories in newspapers in Germany and France. We want to continue creating a pipeline to make animals available. We don't work alone; we work with other environmental groups and we're trying to invest. We want to increase capacity with the ultimate goal of minimizing the number of animals that go to slaughter. ** So we're interested in that effort and providing assistance and want to be there to help you.
- I'd like to thank everyone who traveled here. I wholeheartedly support FWP's position that we should have bison on the larger landscape. I support the idea of the Salish Kootenai to suspend the hunt on the west side—this will allow bison the chance to access habitat currently available besides just that on Horse Butte. ** We could further enhance habitat on Horse Butte with selective logging. I think the partners are making a big mistake by not organizing a Westside subcommittee right now. While Hebgen area residents are quiet right now don't be mistaken, but silence does not always mean there is no issue or no interest.
- The Environmental Impact Statement that this group is based on is outdated. We should be able to look forward to the emergence of a new EIS. There have been changes since the emergence of this plan. The tribes talk about the central herd's depressed numbers and its genetic importance -- when are we going to honor that genetic distinction. This is an ecosystem yet buffalo cannot find their homeland. We constantly refer to them as Yellowstone National Park bison but they belong to the landscape. We should not be speaking to bison within the Park boundaries. They should go far beyond and be accessible to the visitor. If this is going to be a buffalo management plan it should be for the buffalo and not for the cattle as we move forward.
- Why don't we take the \$5,000 mentioned and put a dumpster out there? It doesn't have to be only for body parts but for garbage as well. ** That money could pay to have it dumped once a week and then myself, Bear Creek Council, and others from Gardner could organize a cleanup day for the Gardiner Basin. We could actually do something now rather than wait as you guys do with everything. This plan was written out way before you brought in treaty tribes. Those tribes should not be part of the IBMP management plan; they are not Pawns, they have sovereign rights and should be more involved in how we manage the buffalo. And lastly, and I say this at every meeting: you have allowed elk in the designated surveillance area. The elk spread brucellosis and they contact the cattle in the Madison and Paradise Valley with no consequence. Those are unclaimed lands those are treating hunting lands that you are not allowing that bison to occupy but elk can. Why can't bison be there? At any rate we can open that land up for all wildlife and if we have a problem we can have twenty thousand hunters go out and do damage control on any problematic bison. Let's open Montana up, it's Big Sky country. Let's open our land up and be the one state and has bison and let's be proud of this species.

- I want to make a request of the partners. I appreciate that we're moving forward to do something about the carcasses in the Gardiner basin I was just am disappointed that Bear Creek Council did not have a place on the carcass removal subcommittee I want you to urge you to reach out to folks and Gardner and Park County to help them be involved. Also I'm talking about carcasses and some of the hunters thinking we're taking away some of their land you know what's the weather should be free and wild-roaming bison. We need to have the bison moving out across the landscape – better for the bison and better for the hunters as we wouldn't have the problems we have at Beattie Gulch. I want to thank you all for the conversation this morning. We appreciate getting to bring Steve here to talk about carcass management. Thank you for starting the subcommittee so we can move further forward on this topic.
- An important part of this whole puzzle here: tremendous effort has been made to expand outside of the Park yet these areas remain mostly empty of bison. Thus the IBMP is not meeting one of its primary objectives of a wild and free roaming bison population. I'd really like to come back around having some more discussions and a plan as far as steps that can be implemented to help change that lack of distribution. We want to see bison restored to these public lands outside of the Park. Greater distribution would solve some of these problems and also provide for more hunting opportunities. I do like the idea of forming a habitat committee for the west side that would be reasonable and we would be happy to help with that. I also hope don't forget about idea the idea of having a hunt closure temporarily on the Westside, as well. I don't want these things to go away I hope they will continue to stay on the agenda and continue to be addressed. ** With that I just want to say that we are here to help me, that might take the form of helping find funds for a new quarantine facility in the Gardiner Basin to serving on a habitat committee. Thank you.
- Thank you. There was not a whole lot of discussion today about the Westside tolerance area, though I heard a bit about a subcommittee. ** As I have said in the past I would like to be involved in that and would happily volunteer to be on that committee. We need to have some sort of land owner present so we can have our needs met as well. I am still opposed to the assisted migration concept to get bison to the Taylor Fork. And I would prefer to be proactive not reactive so we can anticipate what the bison might do and where they might go so things don't get out of hand. We don't have another Beattie Gulch situation. So I appreciate everything you guys have done; thank you.
- Much to address today but I want to focus on the central heard. As many of you know they are endangered. For 3 years in a row Yellowstone has recommended a cease fire over here on the West side and that has yet to be adhered to. Just two weeks ago in family group came out and within a half an hour of stepping across the boundary two adult females were shot. The rest of the family disappeared back into the park. So when we talk about buffalo not utilizing the tolerance zone, it's because we are not allowing them to. People are getting in the way and we need to do this moratorium in the Hebgen Basin on hunting. Otherwise we are not going to know how they are going to use the landscape. And truly they haven't really seem to have any desire to go to the Taylor Fork on their own. I think it's long past time that we learn to listen to the buffalo and what they want to do and what they choose to do instead of all of this habitat migration or habitat manipulation talk. Let's listen to them and what they choose and what they tell us. And I want to share with you a book called *Sweetgrass* by Native American woman that lived in the Pacific Northwest. She has a chapter that talks about “honorable harvest” and the example of coastal tribes harvesting salmon. When the salmon returns they greet it with by lighting a beacon fire; they would let them pass for days, singing, before harvesting any of them. ** Imagine if we did something similar like that with bison -- allow them to come to their homelands and enter their winter habitat before they are harassed or killed. Doing that things might change for the better.
- I really appreciate the Partners being willing to have us here and the discussions on the Northside hunt particularly. We are really happy to see what has going on in this meeting regarding safety. We are a

** final **

citizens group who has worked on many topics over the years, and with much focus on bison, safety, and aesthetics on the Northside. I think the steps being formulated here are positive and we would like to stay involved. We definitely want to see the tribes come here and do not mean to be a pain in the side of hunters by raising the safety issues. We would like to see more bison in more places so we can spread out this hunt. It is hard to see let me have more tolerance areas for bison simply go there to die.

- I traveled from the UK because I believe the issue of free-roaming buffalo is of international concern. It's not just a local issue. I will be reporting on what we discussed here back home with a goal of spreading awareness and hopefully promoting more people to consider conservation of Yellowstone bison. My main concern is the validity of brucellosis danger which is also concern in the UK with our badgers. I worry we take liberties with scaring the public about the dangers of brucellosis. It has been overblown in the UK as well respect to Public Safety. I worry about disturbing bison will affect to other species. And knock on changes will not only affect the environment but also the economy because so many visitors come to Yellowstone to see bison.
- After the Brit comes the German. I am the CEO of a big pharmaceutical company. Five years ago I moved to Heart Butte. I have discussed this issue in the park and it's very hard to explain in boardrooms; these people can't understand why we can't coexist with this animal. I can't answer this question because it is so obvious. All I can say here is that the world is watching. This is a cause that addresses more than just the local people. I invite people to come to this area and they fall in love with the region and with the bison. They're asking what is happening to the central herd and I don't have a good answer for them. But I want to thank you in this room for putting so much effort into finding an answer. I know there is no Silver Bullet. I think we must all find a way to coexist. Please be gentle with the Central herd.
- I would just like to say you will never see bison use the expanded tolerance zone if you do not allow the population to expand. They don't need to go there because they have enough room for their tiny, small population where they are now. And also I would like to point out that research done by the National Park Service shows the importance bison on the landscape and the way they affect the coming of spring Green Wave. So just pay attention to the science guys.

*** Meeting adjourned ***

Abbreviations

- AM—Adaptive management
- APHIS—Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
- BCC—Bear Creek Council
- BFC—Buffalo Field Campaign
- CG—Chris Geremia
- CGNF—Custer Gallatin National Forest
- CSh—Cam Sholly
- CSc—Carl Scheeler
- CSKT—Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribes
- CTUIR—Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- CV—Clay Vines
- CWG—Citizens’ Working Group
- DSA—Designated Surveillance Zone
- DW—Dan Wenner
- EA—Environmental Assessment
- EC—Ervin Carlson
- EH—Eric Holt
- GAO—Government Accountability Office
- GW—Germaine White
- GWA—Gallatin Wildlife Association
- GYA—Greater Yellowstone Area
- ITBC— InterTribal Buffalo Council
- JH—John Harrison
- JW—Jeremy Wolf
- LG—Leonard Gray
- LW—Leander Watson
- MBOL—Montana Board of Livestock
- MD—Mark Deleray
- 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
- ML—Mike Lopez
- MOA—Memorandum of Agreement
- MOU—Memorandum of Understanding
- MR—Majel Russell
- MSGA—Montana Stockgrowers’ Association
- MSU—Montana State University
- MV—Mike Volesky
- MZ—Marty Zaluski
- NAS—National Academy of Sciences
- NEPA—National Environmental Policy Act
- NGO—Non-governmental organizations
- 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
- RTR—Royal Teton Ranch
- SB—Scott Bischke
- SEIS—Supplemental EIS
- SG—Stephanie Gillin
- SK—Salish Kootenai
- TM—Tom McDonald
- TR—Tim Reid
- 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