

Summary Report from the Interagency Bison Management Plan Meeting (via Zoom) December 2, 2020



First draft presented December 22, 2020 by meeting facilitator Scott Bischke

The following summary report reflects activities at the December 2, 2020 meeting of the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) Partners, held via Zoom teleconferencing. 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 report is shorter than usual because a full video of the ~3 hr meeting is posted on the meeting webpage at <http://www.ibmp.info/Library/20201202/20201202.php>.

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Attendees

The nine Partner attendees to the Zoom telecon were Rebecca Frye (APHIS), Bing Matt (CSKT), Arnell Abold (ITBC), Mike Honeycutt (MBOL), Martin Zaluski (MDOL), Mark Deleray (MFWP), Cam Sholly (NPS-YNP), Quincy Ellenwood (NPT), and Mary Erickson (USFS). In addition to these Partners, ~60 others attended (mostly listening) on the Zoom call. Those included staff and representatives from treaty hunting tribes, as well as Shana Drimal (Greater Yellowstone Coalition) and Nathan Varley (Bear Creek Council), both of whom had been invited to make short presentations.

General public participation

The general public was invited to join the meeting via Facebook Live. The real-time feed of the Zoom telecon was hosted on the NPT Tribal Council Facebook page. Links were provided on the IBMP website meetings pages. Several days before the meeting, a Google Form was made available for public input with a link again posted on IBMP meetings web page. A note told the public that any comments received would be sent to the IBMP Partners. Two comments were received and sent to the IBMP Partners and staff on December 3. Those public comments are also recorded at the end of this report.

Meeting agenda, report structure

Building from their July 29 Zoom telecon experience, the Partners moved well through the 3-hr Zoom meeting, with some noting positives about such meetings (no travel, concise, shorter and to the point, no possibility of disease transmission, etc). The planning team from Lead Partner NPT sought to create a short (3 hours versus all-day format), concise agenda worthy of the discussion challenges posed by the Zoom interface. That agenda as shown below:

Draft (ver 11/30/20) agenda for IBMP Partners Dec2 Zoom telecon -- all times shown are Bozeman times

1. **WELCOME! (9-9:20)**
 1. Scott -- meeting logistics
 - Zoom protocol for Partners, staff, and treaty hunting tribes
 - Introduction of Kayeloni Scott; her thoughts on slide presentations, microphone management, Facebook Live streaming, monitoring Zoom chat, recording this meeting
 - Public comments have been and still are being taken via Google Form (not on Facebook Live)
 - Acceptance of Jul 29 meeting report, including full meeting video
 2. Welcome from Lead Partner Quincy Ellenwood (and NPT team)
 3. Scott summary of update on IBMP key deliverables from Jul29 meeting
2. **All (9:20-9:50) -- 3 min per Partner to summarize their own handling the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, election results, and other changes since Jul29, and how those might impact the IBMP**
 1. APHIS, CSKT, ITBC, MDOL/MBOL, MFWP, NPS, NPT, USFS
 2. Time permitting--CTUIR, ShoBan, Yakama, Blackfeet
3. **All (9:50-10:10) -- 2019/20 Winter Ops wrap up, as needed**
 1. Mark D -- final bison removal numbers as compiled by MFWP
 2. **Brief opportunity** for any final follow-up or late breaking news on 2019/20 Winter Ops as discussed at Jul29 IBMP meeting and as might be relevant leading into 2020/21 Winter Ops Planning.
 - No roll call -- discussion open to anyone with input.
4. **All (10:10 - 11:10) -- 2020/21 Winter Ops Planning**
 - Scott -- update on document to-date, as emailed to IBMP mailing list
 - Chris G -- NPS population recommendations
 - Updates on changes needed in on the ground operations as identified at Jul29 IBMP meeting. All topics are open to all Partners and treaty hunting tribes. Names shown in parenthesis were identified at Jul29 meeting to kick off the discussion at this meeting.
 - Improving communications between on-the-ground personnel (Steph G)
 - Modifications (if any) to quarantine sections (Dan W)
 - Review of Beatty Gulch safety zone markers (Mike T)
 - Improving coordination of hunt, trap operations and population goals (Jeremy W)
 - Scott timeline for 2020/21 Winter Ops Plan completion
 - Recall Partner Protocols require: a) electronic signing by Dec 31; b) return to previously signed Winter Ops Plan if there is a disagreement that cannot be remedied
5. **As shown (11:10 - 11:30)-- SHORT status updates on new or ongoing programs or issues**
 1. MFWP -- Mark D and Shana D status of carcass removal program, being considered as a volunteer program, not as part of the Winter Ops Plan this year
 2. ITBC (also APHIS, MDOL?)
 - status of Fort Peck assurance testing facility capacity
 3. MDOL -- update on removing brucella abortus from CDC select agent list (i.e., response, if any, to Apr 2020 comments from MDOL to CDC and USDA request for input)
 4. NPS -- description, current status of new bison EIS
 5. NPS, USFS -- Updates on two lawsuits (Neighbors against bison slaughter, Cottonwood Law)
6. **Scott / NPT (11:30 - 11:40) -- Annual report writeup planning, timeline**
7. **Partners (all) (11:40 - 11:55) -- Planning for 2021 meetings**
 1. Contingency planning if COVID-19 is still eliminating the chance to meet in large-group, public forums?
 2. Discussion, if any, on locations?
 3. Discussion on Lead Partnership role(s) for 2021
 - Previous discussion was that the 3 tribal entities would be Lead Partners again for 2021
 - Is this still the plan and if so, would it remain so if COVID-19 forced remote meetings in 2021, as in 2020?
8. **Final thoughts from Lead Partner Quincy Ellenwood (11:55 - noon)**

ADJOURN

The Zoom teleconference was recorded and is posted in-full to the web page for this meeting (see <http://www.ibmp.info/Library/20201202/20201202.php>). As such, the report that follows focuses mostly on action items developed during the meeting.

Meeting opening

New Lead Partner Quincy Ellenwood from the Nez Perce Tribe welcomed everyone and said he was eager to get the meeting going. Kayeloni Scott of the NPT, who was running the Zoom call, provided some guidance on Zoom chat, speaker presentations, and so on. Partners started the meeting by declaring the *draft* meeting summary from their July 2020 as *final*, and instructed the facilitator to mark it as such and post to the IBMP website.

Short overviews from multiple agenda topics

PARTNER WELCOMES

Partners and treaty hunting tribes each took ~3 minutes to greet everyone, and spend a bit of time discussing how the COVID-19 pandemic is continuing to impact their work and work groups. As back in July, most reported lots of Zoom meetings, restrictions to travel, and some limitations on functioning—though with continuation of the essential services required from their groups, mostly just changes in how each group services its members or the public. Some reported on the number of staff or community members that had contacted COVID-19.

2019/20 WINTER OPS WRAP UP

Mark Deleray provided a summary of the IBMP harvest for the 2019/20 season (Table 1; this table came from the *draft* 2020 IBMP Annual Report). Mark noted that compiling harvest was quite difficult this year. He noted that the harvest count is important in helping set management objectives for the following year. He asked the Partners to be as diligent as possible in providing accurate, timely data and asked for any additional information to improve Table 1.

Table 1. MFWP compilation of bison hunt harvest logs for the 2019/20 season showing *combined* totals for results on the west side (West Yellowstone) and north side (Gardiner) of YNP. Unlike past years, this year’s total is a best estimate due to incomplete reporting by some hunt agencies. MFWP was not able to separate harvest data into the two areas.

Hunters	Male	Female	(M) Calf	(F) Calf	Unknown	Total
State	4	0	0	0	0	4
CSKT	2	5	0	1	0	8
NPT	10	11	9	5	86	121
SBT	4	4	1	1	4	14
CTUIR	4	3	0	0	17	24
CTBYN	2	1	1	1	0	5
BN	0	0	0	0	20	20
NAT	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	26	24	11	8	127	196
					“unreported”	88
					2020 Total	284

2020/21 WINTER OPS PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Chris Geremia provide a 3-slides summary of NPS bison removal recommendations for the winter 2020/21 bison operations (see below). These recommendations come from the following report, *Status Report on the Yellowstone Bison Population*, which was posted on the IBMP website in October 2020.

NPS Management Recommendation Winter 2020-2021

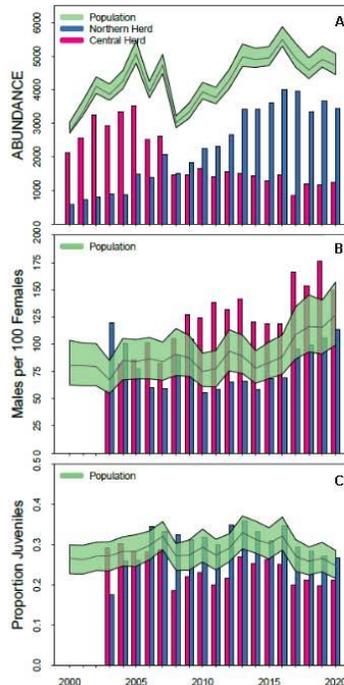
Recommendation Based on Population Modeling to Meet the Following Objectives:

1. Sustain a viable, wild population
2. Remove fewer than 25% of the population and less than 1,000 animals per winter when possible
3. Maintain more than 1,000 bison in the central and northern herds
4. Maintain a balanced sex ratio
5. Maintain an age structure of about 70% adults and 30% younger animals

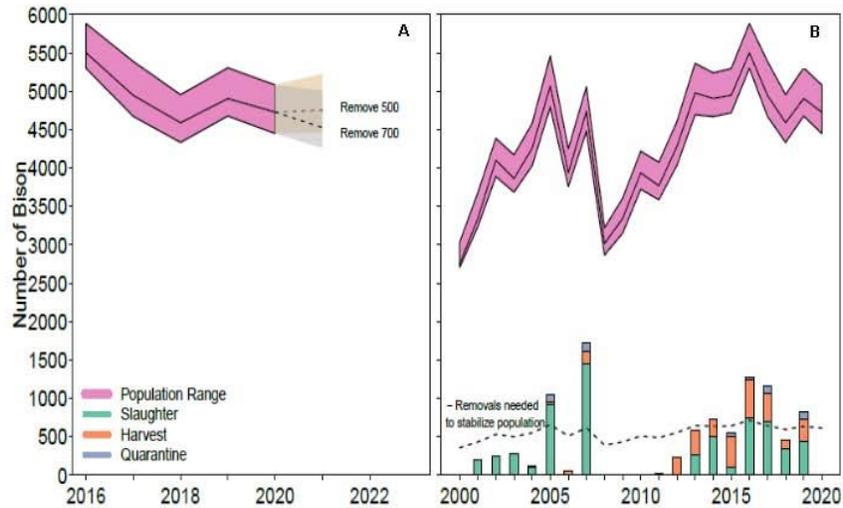
NPS Management Recommendation Winter 2020-2021

Current Status:

- About 3,992 bison at the end-of-winter and about 4,730 currently. Population declined slightly from last year and stable since 2013
- Estimate 834 removed last winter biased towards adult females and younger animals
- Summer air counts near 3,400 northern herd and 1,250 central herd
- Males outnumber females about 127 males to 100 females; larger differences in central herds
- Age structure 75% adults and 25% younger animals



NPS Management Recommendation Winter 2020-2021



RECOMMENDATION:

1. Remove 500-700 animals
2. Limit removals to bison near the northern park boundary
3. Balance hunting and rounding up animals for transfer to slaughter
4. No space to enter new animals into the quarantine program
5. If initial removals are met, up to 200 additional males could be harvested or rounded up in late winter

STATUS UPDATES

Partners provided key status updates on several items: a) status of carcass removal program; b) status of quarantine assurance testing capacity at Fort Peck Reservation; b) update on removing *Brucella abortus* from the CDC select agent list; c) description and current status of new bison EIS; d) updates on two lawsuits. Interested parties in any of these items are directed to the video recording of the meeting that can be found on the meeting website (<http://www.ibmp.info/Library/20201202/20201202.php>).

PLANNING DATES FOR THE 2020 ANNUAL REPORT AND 2021 WINTER OPS PLAN

The facilitator, in conjunction with the Lead Partner, provided the following timelines for completing the Annual Report and the Winter Ops Plan:

- by Dec 15—Final Partner input on each item
- By Dec 22—a) Scott produces final version of each item; b) Scott develops electronic signing process for the Winter Ops Plan and sends to the IBMP Partners for signing
- By Jan 1, 2021—a) 2020 IBMP Annual Report Scott completes and posts to the IBMP website (per Partner Protocols, no signature from Partners is required); b) 2020/21 IBMP Winter Ops Plan signing complete - Scott posts to the IBMP website

Action items identified during the meeting

ALL PARTNERS -- QUINCY, CAM, MARY, MARK, ERVIN, SARA, MARTY, BING, MIKE

- action -- provide, as necessary, any final updates for 1) 2020 IBMP Annual Report; 2) 2020/21 Winter Ops Plan -- see Scott's email request of 11/20 which can be resent, if needed
- others on this action -- possibly delegated to staff
- date of completion -- send any final changes or additions (either document) to Scott on/before Dec 15

MARK DELERAY

- action -- Mark send (via Scott) Partners, staff, treaty hunting tribes data on north and west side harvest numbers
- others on this action -- All Partners/staff, or treaty hunting tribes add to or update the data with respect to #s, sex, age of bison harvested; send to Mark
- date of completion -- please send any changes or additions to Mark on or before Dec 14 (and Mark then on to Scott on or before Dec 15 for inclusion in the 2020 Annual Report)

CHRIS GEREMIA

- action -- rewrite language for harvest language in Winter Ops Plan to include NPS recommendation presented today. See section called "Managing Bison Abundance" on ~line 155". This section still says (effectively) "manage to a decreasing population".
- others on this action -- NA
- date of completion -- please send to Scott on or before Dec 15

TIM REID, JEREMY WOLF

- action -- agree to final language for the hunt/trap section of the IBMP 2020/21 Winter Ops Plan
- others on this action -- Neil Thagard, Erick Holt
- date of completion -- please send completed language to Scott on or before Dec 15
- caveat -- recall that per Partner Protocols, if no agreement can be reached then Partners return to operating under the most recently signed Winter Ops Plan (i.e., last year's)

NATHAN VARLEY, BEAR CREEK COUNCIL

- action: organize and call meeting for discussion of GYC-funded, voluntary carcass collection trailer -- who will the trailer will be transferred to, who will maintain it (people power and \$), when will it be purchased and delivered, etc.
- others on this action -- meeting to include GYC (ShanaD), FWP (MarkD), and CGNF (MaryE)
- date of completion -- meeting to occur "next week" so on or before Dec 11; recall GYC would like to spend \$ soon and the trailer-building contractor is already waiting for the go ahead
- outcome -- provide any meeting report to Scott who will send to IBMP mailing list

SCOTT BISCHKE (COLLECTION OF ACTION ITEMS)

- change listing on IBMP website of Jul29 IBMP report to "final"
- create web page for this Dec2 meeting (along with slides, recall to add a) FWP letter to state of MT hunters; b) Becky website on b abortus policy statement)
- 2020 ANNUAL REPORT:
 - by Dec 16 -- complete with final input from Partners
 - by Dec 20 -- get approval from Lead Partner, post to IBMP website (by Dec 31) and inform Partners/staff, treaty hunting tribes of completion
- 2020/21 WINTER OPS PLAN:
 - by Dec 16 -- complete addition of final input from Partners and get approval from Lead Partner
 - by Dec 20 -- begin electronic signing process

- by Dec 31 -- electronic signing process complete, post document to IBMP website and inform Partners/staff, treaty hunting tribes of completion
- Send to Partners potential dates and meeting leadership/funding expectations for the 2021 IBMP meetings

Planning for 2021 (and beyond) IBMP meetings

Near meeting close, Partners decided to task the facilitator with proposing meeting dates for 2021 following the meeting. In addition, a short discussion was held regarding if the three tribal entities—ITBC, CSKT, and NPT—should retain the Lead Partner role for 2021 since they were not able to host in-person IBMP meetings, as would be normal, for 2020. At their July 2020 meeting Partners thought that the three tribal groups *would* host the IBMP meetings in 2021. At this meeting, however, Partners recognized there is a real potential that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, at least the April 2021 IBMP meeting might still have to be handled as remote, Zoom calls. Again, the facilitator was asked to propose, post-meeting, a method for determining who would act as the Lead Partner in 2021.

Meeting close

The facilitator thanked Kayeloni Scott for running the meeting. Lead Partner Quincy Ellenwood of the NPT, then thanked everyone for their time, said he appreciated the group's work and expertise, and bid all good health in the days ahead, and then closed the meeting.

Public comment

The following public comments were received through a Google Form that was available before the IBMP meeting until midnight the day of the meeting. Each bullet is from a separate commenter.

- from Humanity -- The propaganda on your website has peaked my interest. On the surface level, it appears that your organization has the honorable mission to protect the wild Bison population and to work with native people and local communities to protect our national mammal. However, upon further investigation it appears that the Montana Department of Livestock controls wild buffalo, acting in the interest of local cattle farmers, not seeking to protect the bison or the people who have inhabited these lands long before our ancestors arrived on the shores of this continent. Research indicates that there has never been a documented case of a wild, free-roaming buffalo infecting domestic cattle with brucellosis. It would appear that you are in fact working to protect your own economic and political interests with continued disregard for the animals and the land. Land that was stolen from Native People and from native animals in order to profit the factory farming industry which is indeed the largest contributor of green-house gasses, which as a collection of organizations that claim to protect our most precious natural resources, should be of your top concern. It is beyond disheartening to learn that you are in cahoots with not only cattle interests, but also in partnership with the National Parks Service and the US Forest Service. To think organizations that are created to protect and preserve our lands are instead contributing to the degradation of the Central Herd, the animals whose descendants were here long before ours, is a travesty. We must protect the bison. It must be illegal to hunt bison. It must be illegal to send bison to slaughter. Bison are our national mammal and any actions that promotes their demise should be considered treasonous. It is time to stand true to your mission, to maintain the wild free-ranging bison population and protect this majestic species threatened with near extinction. In the words of Teddy Roosevelt, the founder of the modern conservation movement, "Defenders of the short-sighted men who in their greed and selfishness will, if permitted, rob our country of half its charm by their reckless extermination of all useful and beautiful wild things sometimes seek to champion them by saying the 'the game belongs to the people.' So it does; and not merely to the people now alive, but to the unborn people."
- From Stephaney Seay, BFC -- Both FWP and YNP have stated numerous times that the Central herd is in trouble enough so that they recommend NO HUNTING on the West side. Who is listening to them? With

** final **

this being only a suggestion it has no teeth. You decision-makers and hunt managers need to take this seriously. What are any of you doing to protect the Central herd? And Yellowstone can't just place the burden on hunters while they indiscriminately capture for slaughter or quarantine buffalo at Stephens Creek. We all know the Central herd migrates into both basins so they are doubly impacted by your mismanagement actions. And you are not fooling anyone with the greenwash name change from quarantine to "bison conservation transfer program." It's still a domestication process and buffalo still die or are eliminated from the wild. Don't pat yourselves on the back. Corridors NOT quarantine. Lastly I want to applaud Erik Holt and his words about being sick of the status quo. 5 million back on the land!

*** 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