



Memorandum

Date: December 31, 2018  
To: Administrative Record  
From: Interagency Bison Management Plan Members  
Subject: Operating Procedures for the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP)

**APPROVAL (signed electronically, per IBMP Partner Protocols)**

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InterTribal Buffalo Council, President	Date
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National Park Service, Superintendent, Yellowstone National Park	Date
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**Introduction**

This document outlines the actions necessary to implement the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) as set forth in the federal and state Records of Decision signed in 2000 and modified by adaptive management adjustments since 2005. The principle purpose for action described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the IBMP was “to maintain a wild, free ranging population of bison and address the risk of brucellosis transmission to protect the economic interest and viability of the livestock industry in Montana.” The signatory agencies agreed to nine objectives that would guide them in accomplishing this purpose:

1. Address bison population size and distribution; have specific commitments relating to size of bison herd.
2. Clearly define a boundary line beyond which bison will not be tolerated.
3. Address the risk to public safety and private property damage by bison.
4. Commit to the eventual elimination of brucellosis in bison and other wildlife.
5. Protect livestock from the risk of brucellosis.
6. Protect the state of Montana from risk of reduction in its brucellosis status.
7. At a minimum, maintain a viable population of wild bison in Yellowstone National Park, as defined in biological, genetic, and ecological terms.
8. Be based on factual information, with the recognition that the scientific database is changing.
9. Recognize the need for coordination in the management of natural and cultural resource values that are the responsibility of the signatory agencies.

Voting members of the IBMP include the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC), Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL), Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP), National Park Service (NPS), Nez Perce Tribe (NPT), and U.S. Forest Service (USFS).

Operating procedures for the IBMP were originally developed in December 2002 and have been updated in 2007, 2009, and each year from 2012 to 2018. The updated operating procedures outlined in this document will remain in effect until replaced by subsequent updates. All actions described in this document are consistent with the analyses of impacts included in the federal and state Final Environmental Impact Statements for the IBMP that were completed in 2000 to comply with the National and Montana Environmental Policy Acts.

### **Jurisdiction and Legal Mandates**

The federal and state agencies agreed on a plan to manage bison in Yellowstone National Park (YNP or Park) and Montana as set forth in the IBMP and the associated Records of Decision adopted in 2000. The CSKT, ITBC, and NPT joined the IBMP at the deliberative table in November 2009. The NPS has lead responsibility for implementing bison management actions inside the Park. MDOL has lead responsibility concerning disease issues in Montana, while MFWP has lead responsibility regarding public safety and property damage. The NPS and MDOL may request assistance from the other IBMP members. Property damage issues on private lands are the responsibility of MFWP; MDOL may assist upon request. NPS personnel do not routinely respond to property damage calls received from citizens at the Yellowstone Communications Center, unless a life threat or danger is reported.

USFS personnel are responsible for enforcing the regulations that apply on National Forest System lands as promulgated in 36 CFR, Part 261. Upon request from MDOL through the Gallatin and/or Park County Sheriff's Offices, USFS law enforcement personnel will provide public safety assistance related to on-going bison operations to the extent possible given capacity and other priority needs.

MFWP has primary responsibility regarding the public bison hunt, in cooperation with MDOL, as directed by state statute. The CSKT, NPT, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes (SBT), the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation (CTUIR), Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (Yakama Nation), and the Blackfeet Nation are all treaty tribes that have reserved aboriginal hunting rights on open and unclaimed lands found within the state of Montana.

### **Media Relations/Public Information**

Each agency, tribe, or tribal organization associated with the IBMP will independently manage their media relations concerning bison management, with news releases or media contacts being handled by designated individuals. However, the IBMP members may also cooperatively represent and support management activities under this agreement with joint press releases and other associated media.

For all activities occurring within the boundaries of Yellowstone National Park, the NPS will take lead responsibility and coordinate media information. For information on bison management procedures within the state of Montana, the MDOL will take lead responsibility for coordinating media information on state actions. The CSKT and NPT will take lead responsibility for information on bison management procedures within tribal lands.

The CSKT, NPT, and MFWP will coordinate media information regarding their respective bison harvest and hunts (recognizing that the SBT, Yakama Nation, CTUIR, and Blackfeet Nation will handle media relations/public information concerning bison independently).

## **Organization**

Various IBMP members conduct bison management activities such as hazing, capture, monitoring, quarantine, and research (Table 1, end of document). However, each agency, tribe, or tribal organization does not provide support for every management operation. The level of participation and support by personnel in bison management actions as set forth in the IBMP remains subject to each IBMP member's supervision, jurisdiction, specific authority, and administrative oversight.

An Incident Command System will be used to implement actions/operations associated with the IBMP within and outside the Park. Bison management operations within the Park will be under the authority of the Bison Operations Coordinator (or designee) and positions in the command structure will be filled, as necessary, to ensure effective mission accomplishment. Bison management operations occurring outside the Park will be under the direction of an on-site Operations Chief from MDOL (or designee). The NPS will not participate in bison operations outside of the Park unless an on-site MDOL Operations Chief (or designee) is present, except for life threatening emergencies or imminent bison-livestock comingling.

Under a unified command structure, each IBMP member involved may designate an Incident Commander to represent them in command decisions. However, at no time will there be more than one Operations Chief, regardless of the number of Incident Commanders.

## **Managing Bison Abundance**

During July and August of each year, the NPS will conduct counts and age and gender classifications of bison in Yellowstone National Park. The NPS will use long-term weather forecasts, summer population counts and classifications, and modeling to predict numbers of bison migrating to Park boundaries during the upcoming winter. The CSKT, NPT, and MFWP may use this information when setting or refining their respective permit or harvest levels (recognizing that SBT, Yakama Nation, CTUIR, and Blackfeet Nation are also given this data to aid in their treaty harvest opportunities). As winter progresses, the NPS will use aerial and ground counts, snow model projections for the Park, and revised long-term weather forecasts to refine predictions of the timing and magnitude of trans-boundary movements by bison and support decision-making during winter operations.

The IBMP members have decided to manage for a decreasing population during the winter of 2018-2019; primarily reducing the numbers of bison in northern Yellowstone. The IBMP members plan to manage numbers and distribution of bison through public and treaty harvests in Montana. Also, the NPS will initiate capture operations at Stephen's Creek throughout the winter season to meet population management and conflict resolution objectives. During capture operations, sufficient numbers of bison will be allowed to pass by the facility to continue to provide treaty and state hunting opportunities.

The NPS will monitor bison abundance and movements through the winter. The CSKT, NPT, and MFWP will work with the SBT, Yakama Nation, CTUIR, and Blackfeet Nation to compile information on hunter harvest on a weekly basis. The NPS will incorporate the harvest information with data regarding management culls, predation off-take, and winter-kill.

## **Monitoring and Reporting of Bison Movements and Management Activities**

Timely monitoring and reporting of bison sightings and locations is necessary to facilitate operations managing the distribution and abundance of bison on winter ranges outside Yellowstone National Park and in year-round tolerance zones. Inside the Park, the NPS has the lead responsibility for monitoring the prevailing environmental conditions and the timing, numbers, and locations of bison movements. When appropriate and feasible during winter and spring, the NPS will conduct aerial and ground surveys of the number and distribution of bison throughout the Park. This information will be used to determine migration

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routes and timeframes, and predict future movements of bison to the Park boundary and into areas of Montana. The NPS will annually document the number of bison moving into the boundary areas and the number and type of activities needed to manage bison distribution inside the Park.

The MFWP will have the lead responsibility for monitoring environmental conditions and bison movements outside the Park, with assistance from other IBMP members. When appropriate and feasible, MFWP will conduct ground surveys of the number and distribution of bison. The MDOL and MFWP will annually document the timing and number of bison migrating from Yellowstone National Park to areas designated for their use in Montana, the number and sex of bison that attempt to leave agreed-upon tolerance areas, and the number and type of management activities needed to retain them within the agreed-upon areas.

MFWP will work with landowners who have human safety and property damage concerns, as well as those who favor increased tolerance for bison, to provide habitat in areas designated for bison use in Montana while reducing human-bison conflicts. MFWP will annually document the numbers, timing, and types of reported incidents for human safety and property damage related to bison, with support from MDOL. The USFS will annually track the status (e.g., number of acres, location, etc.) of active and inactive grazing allotments on public lands. MDOL will work with livestock producers to protect against disease transmission from bison to cattle. MDOL will work with livestock producers with regard to vaccination, testing, and livestock operation changes.

The NPS, MFWP, and MDOL will communicate information on environmental conditions and bison movements to other IBMP members in a timely manner. This information will be used to prepare for and implement management actions, as well as to gain experience on how bison use habitat in and outside of Yellowstone National Park. The IBMP members may agree to additional monitoring provisions on a case-by-case basis. During the winter season, the lead agency for the IBMP<sup>1</sup> will prepare reports as requested by other partners that summarize bison monitoring, hazing, capture, quarantine, vaccination, shooting, and other management actions within these operating procedures and the IBMP, which will then be promptly shared with all IBMP members and eventually posted on the IBMP website ([www.ibmp.info](http://www.ibmp.info)).

### **Bison Distribution**

Bison numbers and their distribution in Montana are under the authority of MDOL and will be managed consistent with the IBMP. MDOL and MFWP maintain jurisdiction for management of bison outside Yellowstone National Park in Montana. Subject to the criteria set forth in the IBMP, and as modified by adaptive management adjustments since 2005, including the Governor of Montana's Environmental Assessment (EA) Decision of December 22, 2015, the distribution of bison outside Yellowstone National Park will be limited to certain lands adjacent to the Park in the Hebgen and Gardiner basin areas, as described in the following paragraphs. The current adaptive management plan, which incorporates all changes made in 2005, 2008-2009, and 2011-2016 and upon which this winter operations plan is based, can be found at <http://ibmp.info/adaptivemgmt.php>.

In the north management area, bison will be allowed on National Forest System lands and other lands north of the Park boundary and south of Yankee Jim Canyon (see attached map, end of document) each winter and spring, subject to end-of-winter hazing back to Yellowstone National Park by May 1 for cows and calves. Bull bison will be tolerated in these areas year-round. At the discretion of the State Veterinarian, the actual date may be earlier or later based on prevailing conditions (e.g., snow depth, vegetation green-up). The extent of haze back within Yellowstone National Park remains at the discretion of the NPS. Bison will not be allowed north of the hydrological divide (i.e., mountain ridge-tops) between Dome Mountain/Paradise Valley and the Gardiner basin on the east side of the Yellowstone River and Tom Miner

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<sup>1</sup> APHIS is the IBMP Lead Partner in 2019.

basin and the Gardiner basin on the west side of the Yellowstone River. Bison attempting to move north of this hydrological divide will be hazed to other available habitat within the tolerance area, captured, hunted, or if necessary, lethally removed.

In the west management area, bison will be allowed to migrate onto and occupy the Flats (the area east of South Fork Madison River, south of the Madison Arm, and west of Highway 191) when cattle are no longer present (see attached map, end of document), subject to end-of-winter hazing from this area with a target date of May 15. At the discretion of the State Veterinarian, the actual date may be earlier or later based on prevailing conditions. The extent of haze back within Yellowstone National Park remains at the discretion of the NPS. During November 15 through April 15, up to 30 female bison (or a mixed group of 30 males and females) will be allowed on the Madison Arm. After April 15, up to 30 female/mixed group bison will be allowed east of the Madison Arm Resort. After May 15, no female/mixed group bison will be allowed on the Madison Arm. Groups of female/mixed bison will not be allowed outside of the boundaries defined in the Governor's 2015 EA decision. Bison attempting to enter these areas will be hazed to the Horse Butte peninsula, other habitat, captured, or if deemed appropriate or necessary, lethally removed.

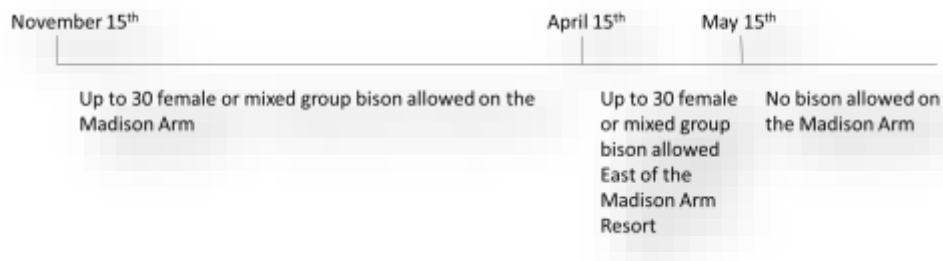


Figure 1. Timeline for tolerance of bison south of the Madison Arm in the western management area.

In addition to the year-round tolerance on the west side specified in the Governor's 2015 EA decision, unlimited numbers of bison are allowed to occupy the Eagle Creek/Bear Creek area, Cabin Creek Recreation and Wildlife Management Area, the Monument Mountain Unit of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness, and in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness year-round without interference.

### **Hunting Bison**

The IBMP members, through the adaptive management process, have agreed that the harvest of bison will be a preferred method for managing their abundance and distribution to the extent possible. Hunters from at least six different tribes and the state of Montana participate in the annual harvest of bison within the Greater Yellowstone Area. In 2017, ahead of the 2017-2018 hunting season, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Nez Perce Tribe, and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation developed and signed a Memorandum of Agreement for coordinating bison harvest in the Beattie Gulch area near Gardiner, Montana, including common hunt protocols, safety provisions, regulations, and enforcement.

Each summer, the CSKT, NPT, MFWP, NPS, and USFS coordinate with each other and the CTUIR, Yakama Nation, SBT, and Blackfeet Nation regarding bison harvest objectives by time of year, location, age, sex, and breeding group. The parties discuss issues and concerns from the previous year's hunt, as well as safety concerns such as no shooting zones, access, enforcement, and sharing harvest data. In addition,

the parties engaged in active hunting of the Beattie Gulch area may coordinate via daily briefings in Beattie Gulch and weekly phone calls arranged by MFWP during the winter operations season when most hunting occurs. The briefings and phone calls will help coordinate hunter activities and collect current harvest data.

Each year that MDOL authorizes MFWP to administer a hunt, they have set a quota for state-licensed hunters, with permits allocated between two hunting districts in the Gardiner and West Yellowstone areas. State-licensed hunting is permitted from November 15 through February 15 on public lands and private lands with permission of the landowner outside Yellowstone National Park in agreed-upon tolerance areas for bison. Also, the Fish and Wildlife Commission has approved the use of up to 200 bison roster hunters to address large out migration and mitigate public safety and property damage situations. The Commission can enact a 24-hour notice of the state's hunting closure, when deemed necessary, to implement other management actions such as hazing, capture, or lethal removal. MFWP will consult with the treaty tribes regarding the implementation of a closure of the state hunt. Hazing bison wholly within areas closed to hunting will not require a hunt cessation unless deemed necessary to ensure the safety of staff.

The CSKT bison hunt begins September 1 and extends through January 31 of each winter season. CSKT Tribal members 18 years or older are allowed two either-sex bison permits, if approved that season by Tribal Council, only after they have attended the current bison hunt orientation. The hunting of bison is restricted by CSKT member regulations, annual harvest quotas, and special annual regulations set by the Tribal Council. The bison hunt season may be closed by Tribal Council action and implemented within 48 hours of Tribal Council action. The CSKT bison permit hunt area is described as those open and unclaimed lands found within the state of Montana.

The NPT's 2018-2019 bison hunt season began in West Yellowstone on September 25, 2018 and in North Yellowstone on November 13, 2018. The season will extend through March 18, 2019. The season is open 7 days a week from one half hour before sunrise to one half hour after sunset. Tribal permits authorize the harvest of bison and/or elk. All Tribal members issued a permit, or listed as a designated shooter or assistant on a permit, and must attend a 2018-2019 NPT hunter orientation. The NPT's Department of Fisheries Resources Management, Enforcement Division monitors NPT's hunt to ensure compliance with all applicable tribal laws and regulations.

MFWP, CSKT, NPT, CTUIR, Yakama Nation, SBT, and Blackfeet Nation will document the numbers and locations of bison (by age and sex) harvested in each hunting area. This information will be reported to MFWP in a timely manner (e.g., weekly) for compilation and dissemination to the IBMP partners for consideration prior to future bison management activities (e.g., capture and culling). MFWP and the MDOL will conduct an evaluation of the state-regulated bison hunt at the conclusion of the season and propose adjustments to future bison hunts, as necessary. Recommended adjustments will be discussed with the treaty tribes. These tribal entities and MFWP will coordinate with the USFS to explore recommendations for accommodating hunting within appropriate additional areas where bison are tolerated that could accommodate additional bison hunting opportunities.

### **Hunt-Trap Coordination**

#### ***Goals***

- The IBMP partners will work together to coordinate trapping and hunting activities to achieve reasonable:
  - Migration of bison to and beyond the Park boundary to maintain a wild, free-ranging population of bison and support hunter harvest opportunity.
  - Distribution of bison into habitats available to bison, throughout the northern and western management areas in Montana to facilitate use of available habitat, habitat learning, and greater hunter distribution and harvest.

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- Distribution of bison that are not harvested or hazed back into the Park, throughout the current tolerance zones in Montana.
- Prioritization of bison removal from the northern breeding area.
- The National Park Service will:
  - Minimize capture of bison at the Stephens Creek facility when there are fewer than 200 bison north of Mammoth Hot Springs, Wyoming.
  - Coordinate trapping with hunting activities so as to facilitate the distribution of bison outside the Park, throughout the tolerance zones in Montana.
  - Reduce capture when hunter harvests are on track to approximate, or nearly achieve, annual removal objectives.
  - Reduce capture when large numbers of hunters are present, if allowed by totality of harvest success, time of season, and anticipated bison migration.
  - Not capture a group of bison imminently exiting the Park until the group of bison returns to the Park, unless necessary to meet removal objectives or reduce potential conflicts with residents, livestock, and motorists due to large numbers of bison outside the Park.

### ***Communications and Coordination***

- Interagency/Tribal LEO staff will share information on a daily basis, as well as during the weekly scheduled LEO coordination calls. Additionally, the pre-hunt coordination meetings that occur each morning at the tribal command post at Beattie Gulch may be attended by staff from the NPS, tribes, MFWP, and USFS, depending on their availability. Information to be shared on a daily and weekly basis will include:
  - *Expected hunter numbers for each day during the week* — LEO staff will share information, as available, regarding the number of hunters expected to travel to the hunt area. IBMP partners will provide one another a list of contacts for LEO staff working in the Gardiner and Hebgen basins to facilitate communication between partners.
  - *Capture activities and records (total and daily)* — NPS will share information regarding the activities at the Stephens Creek capture and handling facility. A compilation of data will be posted on the IBMP website ([www.ibmp.info](http://www.ibmp.info)) every two weeks. If known, the NPS will record the origin and pre-capture migratory movements of captured bison according to monitoring/tracking data. This information will be used to evaluate the influence of trapping on bison distribution and be included in the IBMP's annual report.
  - *Harvest records (total and weekly)* — MFWP and tribal staff will provide harvest records to MFWP each week for compilation and dissemination to the IBMP partners. These records are to include total animals harvested as well as the demographics (age, sex) and locations of the animals harvested. This information will be used to evaluate the influence of hunting on bison distribution and included in the IBMP annual report.
  - *Distribution, numbers, and movements, within and outside of the Park boundary, based on daily and weekly observations* — NPS staff monitor movements and will share information regarding the general location and number of bison within the Park. MFWP will conduct distribution counts of areas in Montana outside of the Park, as possible, and share information regarding general locations.

### ***Stephens Creek Operations***

- Trapping operations are dynamic and driven by a variety of factors (e.g., weather, snow conditions, forage availability, bison density) that do not allow for prescriptive coordination protocols. NPS will implement the following best practices:



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- *Coordination* — NPS will implement trapping operations with the intent to balance hunter opportunity with bison movements, temporal limitations, harvest success, population management recommendations, and current monitoring information. Coordination will center around communicating the current situation status through a variety of methods including scheduled status calls and daily interactions between field personnel.
- *Snow removal* — NPS will attempt to refrain from plowing/removing snow in the Stephens Creek area in a way that creates substantive depositions capable of altering bison travel will be mitigated to facilitate migratory movements to the Park boundary.
- *Bison held in Stephens Creek facility* — Bison captured and consigned to slaughter by NPS will be processed and transferred as expeditiously as possible, within the constraints of transport and slaughter facility limitations and logistics. Hay stored within the Stephens Creek area for use in bison and corral operations will be stored in a manner inaccessible to wildlife.
- *Trapping* — Bison that are to be trapped may be gathered by NPS staff to usher them in to the initial capture pastures. The coordination of hazing activities is addressed elsewhere in the Operations Plan.

### **Hazing Bison**

Hazing is used to manage the distribution of bison by preventing dispersal beyond Zone 2 area boundaries. It is also used to prevent the comingling of bison and cattle and the shedding of *Brucella abortus* bacteria by bison on ranges that will soon be occupied by cattle. In addition, hazing will be used to move bison away from private lands where they are not wanted or away from areas such as homes or highways where they are causing safety or property damage issues. Bison may be hazed as they approach a non-tolerance boundary.

Hazing may be accomplished by personnel using ATVs, snowmobiles, on foot, and/or on horseback, and may include the use of cracker shells or rubber bullets. These methods may be used singly or in combination, subject to applicable restrictions. The safety of the public and personnel will be the primary consideration in any hazing operation; at no time will the safety of the public or personnel be compromised. As a secondary consideration, where and when possible hazing operations will be done in the manner that provides the least impact to the animals being hazed and to local landowners. At the direction of Montana Governor Steve Bullock, as of May 21, 2014, MDOL may not enter private property to haze bison without landowner permission unless there is an imminent threat of disease transmission from bison to livestock or people.

The MDOL may, at times, haze bison off of National Forest System lands during spring when bison are moved into year-round tolerance areas, which could include back into Yellowstone National Park. To the extent practicable, when hazing is planned on National Forest System lands, MDOL will notify the USFS Line Officer or designee 24 hours in advance of when, where, and how hazing operations will occur.

Hazing operations will be coordinated with the administration of the hunt. The NPS and MDOL will make efforts to integrate the management of hazing actions with treaty and state-regulated hunting in Montana. Hazing of bison will be minimized in areas where bison are tolerated outside Yellowstone National Park. Hazing during hunting seasons will be designed to maintain separation with cattle, ensure human safety, prevent property damage, or prevent the movement of bison outside of agreed-upon tolerance areas or onto private property where bison are not desired by the landowner.

The NPS is the lead agency to implement hazing within Yellowstone National Park and the Bison Operations Coordinator (or designee) will determine the timing, location, and duration of hazing. The NPS may stage groups of bison within the Park to reduce the need for multiple hazing operations. MDOL is the

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lead agency to implement hazing outside of Yellowstone National Park in Montana with assistance from MFWP. The NPS and MDOL may request assistance with hazing from other IBMP members.

The IBMP members will coordinate in April to compile and update knowledge on bison movements and distribution, snow conditions, vegetation green-up, stream flow in the Madison River, logistical issues (e.g., staff and horse availability; traffic control; visitation and road closures), and cattle turn-on dates and locations. The IBMP members will assess this information and discuss a step-wise, integrated plan for hazing bison from the Gardiner and Hebgen basins back into Yellowstone National Park or year-round tolerance zones. The current target dates for female bison to be back into the Park or year-round tolerance zones are May 1 from the Gardiner basin and May 15 from the south side of the Madison Arm. While maintaining a focus on brucellosis risk management, end-of-the-winter hazing operations could occur earlier than the target dates if forage and other conditions on summer ranges are suitable or later if conditions preclude safe and effective movements of bison to habitats that will hold/sustain them (e.g., adequate snow melt or vegetation green-up). The State Veterinarian will determine the start dates of hazing operations to return bison to the Park or year-round tolerance areas. The distance bison are hazed back within Yellowstone National Park remains at the discretion of NPS.

To reduce the need for multiple hazing operations, MFWP will take the lead in exploring private land management options as they arise or are proposed by individual landowners to prevent bison-cattle mingling and property damage. These options could include conservation easements, livestock grazing plans, and strategic fencing to separate livestock and bison. The IBMP members will evaluate whether strategic fencing is appropriate and, if so, at what locations along bison migration corridors on a case by case basis.

### **Capturing Bison**

Bison may be captured 1) to augment hunting removals; 2) when safety concerns arise because bison repeatedly resist hazing to keep them within agreed-upon tolerance areas; 3) because there are already large numbers of bison in the tolerance areas after the hunting seasons are completed; or 4) for disease testing, vaccination, and quarantine. The capture of bison will occur in ways that allow bison to migrate into Montana to support tribal and state hunting as a preferred method for managing bison abundance and distribution.

The NPS is the lead agency to implement bison capture within Yellowstone National Park and currently maintains a capture and handling facility at Stephens Creek in the northern management area. The NPS will be responsible for capturing, processing, and caring for the welfare of bison in and around the Stephens Creek area, but may request assistance with capture and operating facilities from the other IBMP members. The NPS may conduct testing by collecting samples and submitting them to a) accredited laboratories for pregnancy testing, and b) National Veterinary Services Laboratories and/or the Montana Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory for brucellosis testing.

Before commencing capture operations, and while such operations are ongoing, the NPS will intentionally let bison move beyond the capture facility at Stephens Creek and leave YNP, where they can be harvested by public and tribal hunters. However, the NPS cannot guarantee a certain number of bison will be available for harvest each day or control the fact that many bison return to the refuge of the Park after being engaged by hunters congregated near the boundary. Also, the NPS cannot wait until mid-March, when most tribal hunting ends, to conduct capture operations because 1) hunting by itself has not been effective at reaching annual removal objectives for bison, 2) there is a limited time (January through March) to ship females before late pregnancy, 3) there are few facilities willing to process bison, 4) these facilities have a limited capacity to process bison (150-200 per week), and 5) quarantine is an important method to restore bison conservation numbers.

The MDOL is the lead agency to implement bison capture outside the Park and could maintain or erect one or more capture and handling facilities. The MDOL will be responsible for capturing and assisting with processing and sorting bison outside the Park, but may request assistance with capture and operating facilities from the other IBMP members. MDOL or APHIS may conduct brucellosis and pregnancy testing and vaccination, though it may be necessary to use one or more contract veterinary practitioners on some occasions.

### **Shipment to Processing Facilities**

The Secretary of the Interior has broad discretion to transfer some Yellowstone bison or otherwise dispose of them under existing authorities (54 USC 100101; 54 USC 100752; 16 USC 36). The NPS currently has agreements with the CSKT, Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho of the Wind River Reservation, and the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation to provide them with bison for direct transfer to processing (slaughter) facilities and subsequent distribution of meat, hides, and other bison parts to support tribal nutrition and culture; thereby allowing more tribal members to benefit from the healthy benefits bison provide. The NPS will initially coordinate with the CSKT to offer them available bison for direct transfer to processing facilities, provided they have the capacity to transport the available bison at the necessary times. If they are not available, then other tribes or government agencies with current transfer agreements will be provided with the available bison for transfer directly to processing facilities to achieve the annual population target goal.

MDOL, NPS, and APHIS may conduct testing or vaccination of captured bison for diseases. Bison selected for removal from the population will be separated as facilities permit, by sex, size, and age to prevent injury. These bison will be marked with at least one small, brown, metal ear tag. All bison consigned to processing facilities will be delivered as soon as practical after capture.

Tribes with transfer agreements or the NPS will contact one or more processing facilities (based upon the size, number, and sex of the bison captured) to determine the number of bison each facility may be capable of handling on a particular day. The NPS will load bison consigned to processing facilities from the Stephens Creek facility into transportation vehicles. A local representative of the state of Montana and/or APHIS will certify the numbers, sexes, and age categories (e.g., calf, adult) of bison loaded and secured in each trailer with tamper-proof seals. APHIS Veterinary Services Form 1-27 will be completed by these representatives for all shipments. Copies of the form will be provided to the NPS and the transporter to document the transfer of ownership of the bison. The state of Montana requires all shipments of bison to be accompanied by an armed, law enforcement escort from Stephen's Creek to the processing facility; NPS will notify MDOL and APHIS in advance of when shipments are to occur and MDOL will work with the transporter to ensure an escort. The NPS will provide APHIS and the State Veterinarian with the results of testing for brucellosis from each bison that is transferred. The party transporting the bison will assume ownership of the bison at the capture facility once the bison are loaded and secured into trailers or other vehicles that the NPS agrees are appropriate for transporting bison to the intended processing destination(s).

The bison will be transported directly to the processing destination agreed-upon with the NPS. As necessary, MDOL will assist the tribes with arranging the secure transport of bison. A meat inspection agency representative will certify that bison are delivered to processing facilities. APHIS or MDOL or NPS staff or contractors may coordinate with the processing facilities to collect samples for brucellosis or other research. APHIS, CSKT, NPS, and state of Montana will use their own respective funding sources to accomplish their respective tasks.

Bison at the Stephens Creek facility that are not consigned to processing facilities may be temporarily held and released when winter weather moderates in spring or earlier to provide operational space and shorten confinement. If, for whatever reason, it is necessary to hold pregnant, likely infectious bison in the capture

facility, then NPS staff will attempt to separate them from susceptible bison and hold them in isolation until they have calved and the risk of brucellosis transmission has abated.

Calf, yearling, and non-pregnant adult female bison released from the capture facility after the conclusion of the hunting seasons may be vaccinated for brucellosis via syringe with a safe vaccine (Strain RB51), regardless of their disease testing status (i.e., seropositive or seronegative). Animals vaccinated with *Brucella* vaccine should not be consumed within 21 days of vaccination. Bison may be vaccinated and held at the capture facility for the duration of the 21-day withdrawal period, or be vaccinated and released after the cessation of hunting season. The IBMP members will continue to try to derive management approaches that minimize the impact of vaccination on hunting opportunities.

### **Lethal Removal of Bison — Risk Management**

The NPS is the lead agency to implement lethal removal operations within Yellowstone National Park, while the MDOL is the lead agency outside the Park. To the extent practicable, when lethal removal of bison is planned on National Forest System lands, MDOL or MFWP will notify the USFS Line officer or designee 24 hours in advance of when and where the removal will occur. MFWP is the lead agency for lethal removal of bison for private property and public safety reasons. The NPS, MDOL, and MFWP may request assistance from employees or personnel from other IBMP members. For example, assistance from the USFS law enforcement may be requested for public safety assistance. Requests for assistance before a shooting operation occurs will be as timely as possible to plan for carcass salvage.

All reasonable attempts will be made to salvage carcasses that result from management actions in Montana according to MCA 81-2-120(2) for human consumption or research purposes. The retrieval or removal of carcasses from within Yellowstone National Park, regardless of cause of mortality, is prohibited. The MDOL will be responsible for field dressing and transport of bison carcasses that are removed outside the Park, but may request assistance from other IBMP members. After veterinary inspection, carcasses that are deemed unfit for human consumption will be condemned. Tribal governments and/or charitable organizations would receive carcasses fit for human consumption for distribution through their social service system. Tribal organizations or their designees may receive the bison heads and hides. Bison carcasses, heads, and hides may also be sold as provided for in Montana law (MCA 81-2-120(3)). In addition, some bison carcasses may be designated for research purposes and transported to appropriate facilities.

The MDOL and the landowner shall determine whether to leave bison offal on-site on private land. Only designated personnel shall remove offal, fetuses, or stillborn calves. Every attempt will be made to remove offal from sites near residences or used for livestock operations when grizzly bears may be present to avoid human-bear conflict. All gravid uteruses and stillborn calves will be disposed.

### **Quarantine**

In September 2017, APHIS, MDOL, and NPS agreed to implement a quarantine program to: support the transfer of Yellowstone bison to the Fort Peck Reservation; use quarantine procedures to reduce the number of bison sent to slaughter; and continue to work to minimize the risk of brucellosis transmission from bison to livestock.

Quarantine will be accomplished in three phases. During phase I, bison will be serially tested for brucellosis exposure at approximately 30-45-day intervals until no new test-positive animals in each test group are identified for at least two successive testing periods. During phase II, bison completing phase I will undergo additional testing based on their age and sex following protocols outlined in the 2003 Uniform Methods and Rules. Bison completing phase II will be certified as brucellosis-free. During phase III, bison are additionally tested at 6- and 12- months for one year of assurance testing.

\* *FINAL* \*

APHIS, the Fort Peck Tribes, MDOL, and NPS will actively work towards creating a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to direct the implementation of a Yellowstone bison quarantine program to include the facilities at Corwin Springs, the Fort Peck Reservation, and Stephens Creek. This work should include in-person meetings between all the parties.

NPS will continue to quarantine two test groups of 59 males and 21 females at the Stephens Creek quarantine facility. The male test group has moved to Phase 2 of the quarantine protocol since completing two consecutive negative tests in September and October. The female test group's status will be dependent on its November test results.

APHIS will continue to quarantine four test groups of various ages, sexes, numbers, and quarantine phases at the Corwin Springs quarantine facility. The status of the remaining test group of five, five+ year-old bulls will depend on the result of the above-mentioned MOU—either remaining at Corwin Springs or being transferred to Fort Peck or another approved assurance testing facility to complete Phase 3.

### **Vaccinating Cattle**

By June 15, APHIS and MDOL will determine and document the vaccination status of all at-risk cattle in or coming into the Hebgen and Gardiner basins. These agencies will use existing regulations and/or incentives to ensure 100% of adult cattle in the Hebgen and Gardiner basins are calf-hood and/or adult vaccinated. If the vaccination status of adult cattle in these areas is not 100%, then vaccination or other to-be-determined actions will be taken to achieve 100% status as determined by the State Veterinarian.

### **Safety**

The safety of all personnel and the public is paramount in all aspects of bison management operations. No actions will be taken which compromise the safety of any personnel. Personnel involved will take all precautions to protect the security of operations. Bison may be lethally removed at the discretion of the Operations Chief if the safety of personnel is in jeopardy. Conditions attached to hazing, lethal removal, and/or retrieval of dead bison on private lands will be made clear to the hazing or lethal removal teams and those individuals responsible for field dressing and transporting bison carcasses. Under the leadership of the MDOL, when feasible, reasonable attempts will be made to notify affected private landowners prior to operations.

The IBMP members will continue education and awareness of the social, public safety, and private property impacts of bison tolerance in areas with residences or used for livestock operations. They will also continue to explore ways to reduce or eliminate human safety or property damage problems related to bison on a case-by-case basis.

### **Access/Approval to Operate on National Forest System Land**

The MDOL will notify the USFS Line Officer, to the extent possible, prior to the time when bison are to be hazed, captured, shot, or otherwise removed from National Forest System lands. The MDOL will notify a representative from the USFS if MDOL proposes to use motorized vehicles on national forest system roads, trails, or areas otherwise closed to such use. The USFS may also provide direction related to the retrieval and field dressing of dead bison on national forest system lands in addition to direction related to motorized use on national forest system roads, trails, or other areas otherwise closed to such use. IBMP members involved in hazing, capture or removal operations will follow protective measures for bald eagles and grizzly bears that are in place on National Forest and Park Service lands.

**Assurance of General Security**

The MDOL will contact NPS, USFS, MFWP, and if necessary and appropriate, Gallatin and/or Park County Sheriff's offices and the Montana Highway Patrol to ensure that necessary and appropriate actions are taken to provide for the general security of all personnel involved in hazing, capturing, shooting, or processing bison outside the Park. A security agency may be contracted by the MDOL and/or other IBMP members to provide general security, if necessary.

Security for bison management operations inside the Park will be the responsibility of the NPS. The Stephens Creek administrative area, which includes the corral, operations infrastructure and pasture, bison capture facility, and quarantine pastures, is closed to the public year-round due to public safety issues and the need to protect government property, equipment, livestock, and infrastructure. Lands surrounding the Stephens Creek administrative area may be temporarily closed during periods when the capture facility is operational and captured bison are being held, handled, or processed and associated hazing operations are ongoing. When implemented, this temporary closure provides for public and employee safety and ensures that hazing actions are effective, safe, and humane. Hazing actions in the northern management area are extremely dynamic and it is impossible to sweep the area to remove members of the public before operations commence.

**Maintenance of Records and Accountability for Bison Removal**

The MDOL and NPS will be responsible for the accountability of bison management records for activities outside and inside the Park, respectively, including hazing, capturing, testing, and vaccination.

**Adaptive Management Review, Evaluation, and Modification**

Each year, the IBMP members will meet to review, evaluate, and modify, if deemed necessary, the operating procedures for accomplishing the objectives of the IBMP. These procedures may be modified at any time, with the agreement of the IBMP members, to facilitate and/or improve the operations procedures to accomplish the objectives of the IBMP.

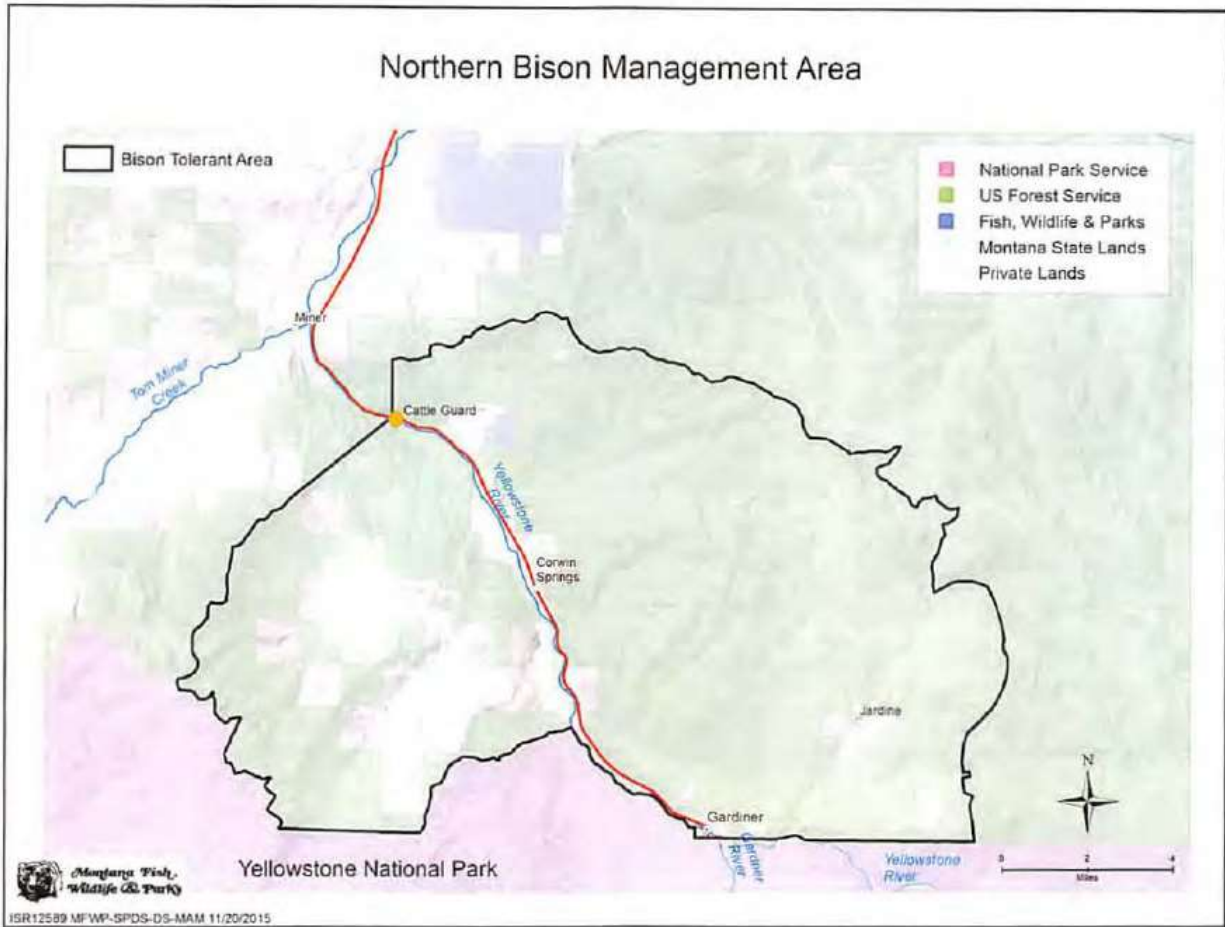
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**Table 1.—Resource levels that may be necessary to conduct an array of bison management activities described in the Interagency Bison Management Plan and subsequent adaptive management adjustment documents. This table is intended to be identical to Table 2 in the IBMP Partner Protocols.**

Operation Size / Resources	MDOL	MFWP	NPS	APHIS	USFS	NPT	CSKT	ITBC
<i>Media relations / Public information</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
<i>Monitoring bison movements / distribution</i>	√	√	√	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<i>Human safety and property damage</i>	√	√	√	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<i>Hunting</i>								
Biologists (modeling / recommendations)	NA	√	√	NA	NA	√	√	NA
Game wardens	NA	√	NA	NA	NA	√	√	NA
Law enforcement officers	√	NA	√*	NA	√	NA	NA	NA
<i>Hazing</i>								
Horses and riders	√	√	√*	√	NA	NA	NA	NA
ATVs	√	√	NA	√	NA	NA	NA	NA
Snowmobiles	√	√	NA	√	NA	NA	NA	NA
Law enforcement officers	√	√	√	NA	√	NA	NA	NA
<i>Shooting</i>								
Law enforcement officers	√	√	√*	NA	√	NA	NA	NA
Lethal control teams	√	√	√*	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
ATVs	√	√	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Snowmobiles	√	√	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Tissue sample collectors	√	√	√*	√	NA	NA	NA	NA
<i>Capture (Stephens Creek)</i>								
Horses and riders	NA	NA	√	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Law enforcement officers	NA	NA	√	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Testing personnel	NA	NA	√	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Bison handlers	NA	NA	√	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Vaccination	NA	NA	√	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
<i>Bison transfer and transport (from Stephens Creek)</i>								
Inspectors	√	NA	NA	√	NA	NA	NA	NA
Vehicles, trailers, and drivers	NA	NA	√	NA	NA	NA	√	NA
Distribution of meat, hides, etc.	NA	NA	√	NA	NA	NA	√	NA
Armed escort	√	√	√	NA	NA	NA	√	NA
<i>Research and disease surveillance</i>	√	√	√	√	NA	NA	NA	NA
<i>Quarantine operations</i>	√	NA	√	√	NA	NA	NA	√
<i>Monitoring cattle turn-on and/or vaccination</i>	√	NA	NA	√	√	NA	NA	NA

\* Inside Yellowstone National Park. Assistance with hazing or other activities outside the Park will be considered on a case-by-case basis based on the location, situation, capacity, and other priority needs.

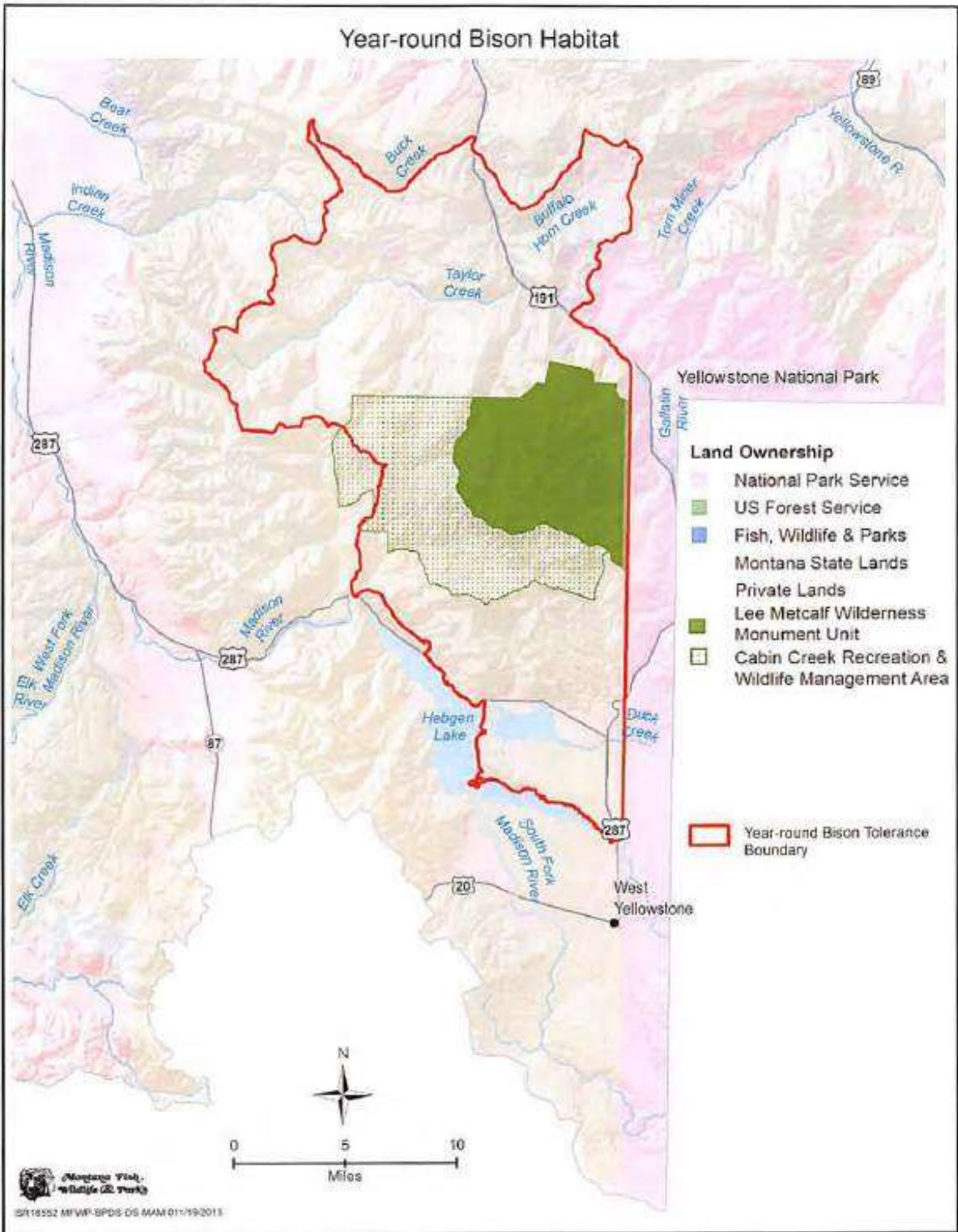
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Northern management area for the Interagency Bison Management Plan



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Western management area for the Interagency Bison Management Plan