

Summary Report from the Interagency Bison Management Plan Meeting April 13, 2022



First draft presented May 4, 2022 by meeting facilitator Scott Bischke

The following summary report reflects activities of the April 13, 2022 meeting of the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) Partners, held in person in Bozeman MT (it was also available for live viewing via an open Zoom call). This report comes from the flip chart notes of facilitator Scott Bischke¹, along with audio recordings of the meeting. The report will be marked *Draft* until formal Partner agreement to make it *Final* at the start of their next meeting.

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Attendees

Nine Partners attended the in-person meeting in Bozeman: Rebecca Frye (APHIS), Tom McDonald (CSKT), Ervin Carlson (ITBC), Mike Honeycutt (MBOL), Martin Zaluski (MDOL), Hank Worsch (MFWP), Cam Sholly (NPS-YNP), Quincy Ellenwood (NPT), and Mary Erickson (USFS-CGNF). In addition to these Partners, across the day ~60 others (staff, treaty hunting tribe representatives, and general public) attended in person. An attempt was made to provide Zoom access to allow people to view the meeting remotely, though some reported difficulty hearing all voices over the Zoom call. Given that all Partners, as well as ~60 people were at the meeting in person, the focus of the meeting was those in the room.

Action items identified during the meeting

MARTY ZALUSKI (ALSO, LIKELY INPUT FROM MAJEL RUSSELL, RYAN CLARKE, AND ROBBIE MAGNAN)

Q (from MR)—Can the APHIS and MDOL certification process be made more formalized to aid ITBC in bison transfer? The issue is that the process has been an email exchange that does not document the animals are disease-free prior to arriving at Fort Peck which would expedite transfers from Fort Peck to other Tribal lands. MZ said no problem that MDOL could review and consider formalizing the disease-free certification.

MARY ERICKSON (ALSO MARINA YOSHIOKA)

Meet to consider reconvening habitat subcommittee. Begin with a review work of the past habitat subcommittee—can some of this work can be built upon? Can we improve our ability to manage bison outside the park? ME to reach out to MY to start the conversation. Topics might include finding habitat within existing tolerance zone, removing fence, improving migration pathways, reducing conflicts, improving traffic safety, using prescribed fire, and more.

MAJEL RUSSELL (LEAD) PLUS MANY OTHERS

Create an ad hoc subcommittee to review, and edit, as needed, the Partner Protocols. The ad hoc subcommittee will consist of Majel R (will lead and convene the group) and Troy H (ITBC); Tim R and PJ W (NPS); Jon H (CSKT); Quincy E and Neil T and Mike L (NPT); Mike H (MBOL); Hank W (MFWP). The subcommittee will answer at least five questions, shown below, with a response to the Partners by July 1, 2022. Further details for the five questions can be found elsewhere in this summary report.

1. How does a group join the IBMP and who can join?
2. Should the IBMP Winter Ops Plan be renamed?
3. Verify IBMP decision spaces: what is an IBMP decision vs what is an agency or Tribal decision
4. Definition of consensus?
5. Ability of each Partner at the table to commit their agency or Tribe to an IBMP decision during a meeting.
6. Timeline review of the IBMP calendar—does it need to be modified?

FACILITATOR (SCOTT BISCHKE)

- X Change listing on IBMP website of Dec1 IBMP report to "final"
- IP Aid new IBMP facilitator, Julie Anton Randall, in transitioning to her new role
- X Add multiple items to the Partners Parked Item list for potential future discussions
- Supply ME, MY, JAR links to meetings where the habitat subcommittee provided reports/presentations
- Supply MR most up-to-date Partner Protocols to the ad hoc subcommittee chair
- Find/forward letter to Park County Commissioners regarding their petition to be part of the IBMP table

Invocation

Jon Murray, of the Blackfeet Tribe, provided thoughts and then an invocation to open the meeting.



The April 13, 2022 IBMP meeting took place at the Hilton Garden Inn in Bozeman, MT. Difficult driving conditions kept some from attending in person.

Meeting opening

CHANGES DUE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The facilitator noted that COVID, including a new BA.2 variant, remains a public health issue and thus a continuing consideration for meeting safety. As such, and under request from the Lead Partner team, the facilitator provided a description of current CDC COVID-19 Event Planning Guidelines, both verbally to open the meeting and also reviewed in print on the first page of the meeting agenda (the full set of CDC guidelines can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/event-planners-and-attendees-faq.html>). As of 4/11/22, the CDC rated the risk of transmission for Gallatin County as “Low.” CDC recommendations for local areas having the “low” risk of transmission rating were provided to meeting attendees. In addition, the facilitator took a set of photos of all attendees to, along with the meeting sign-in sheet, assure the ability to identify attendees if contact tracing proved necessary.

WELCOME

Ervin Carlson of ITBC, currently the Lead Partner, welcomed everyone to the meeting. The facilitator next reviewed a selection of IBMP history and accomplishments. Each Partner provided a short hello, along with any minor updates they wanted to make regarding their agency or Tribal entity. A couple of noteworthy items:

- Both APHIS and MDOL are spending much effort dealing with recent outbreaks of avian influenza (both in Montana and nationwide).
- Partners, staff, and public welcomed many new people in attendance, including Partner Hank Worsech, MFWP Director, and Warren Hansen, new MFWP Region 3 wildlife manager. Additionally, Tom McDonald, while long a participant of the IBMP, attended this time for the first time since being elected as Tribal Chair for the CSKT. Tom introduced Shannon Clairmont, the lead CSKT wildlife biologist for the Bison Range.

- EC introduced Troy Heinert, Executive Director of ITBC, mentioned that the Board of Directors for ITBC was in attendance for the meeting. Ervin also provided several ITBC updates, including that ITBC will have two interns working in Yellowstone National Park this summer, are working with schools, and have a new food sovereignty program that includes promotion of bison as a key Tribal food.
- Quincy noted that the NPT are currently in Stage 4 with respect to COVID status and his belief that the Tribe is doing well. He provided credit to the NPT team for communications, long hours, and care for members of the Tribe. Tribal Council elections will be held during the first full weekend in May.
- Tim Reid introduced Julie Anton Randall as the new facilitator of the IBMP, beginning at the next IBMP meeting. He thanked the Partners for their engagement in the hiring process for the new facilitator. Julie noted that she started her career as an agricultural economist at USDA and values the role of ranching in America, along with conserving wildlife and ecosystems. As a facilitator, she has worked with several of the IBMP Partner agencies and Tribes, and looks forward to now also working with the Montana state agencies. Julie stated that she is a strong admirer of the IBMP process and was honored to have been selected to serve as the new facilitator.

Everyone else in the room—staff and public—was asked to introduce themselves, along with any affiliation they wished to call out. Partners agreed to declare the *draft* meeting summary from their December 2021 meeting as *final*, and instructed the facilitator to mark it as such and post to the IBMP website.

Improving IBMP effectiveness

The Partners organized their discussions into three categories, as reported below, that they several years ago agreed upon as key areas where they had good chance of making progress. Bulleted highlights are provided for the West side and North side discussions. Given that it is a somewhat longer description, the third item, the quarantine program, is moved to its own section for this report.

IMPROVE HABITAT UTILIZATION (ESPECIALLY WEST SIDE)

- It was a mild winter with bison mostly staying inside the Park until just recently. As of April 10, FWP reports 117 bison outside of the Park on the West side, split into a couple of different groups.
- A mention was made of potentially re-convening the habitat subcommittee from several years back.
- Both CSKT and the state of Montana are continuing moratorium on hunting bison in the new West side tolerance area (i.e., up and into the Taylor Fork). The hope is that bison will begin to move into the tolerance area on their own (more likely without hunting pressure) and gain herd memory for annual migrations. ITBC stated its support of both treaty hunting rights, and natural migration.
- Some CSKT hunters stated concern that CGNF habitat modification work (including fuels reduction) might be dissuading bison from moving into the new expanded habitat in the West side tolerance area.
- In response to a question, HW said that the state of Montana has never considered anything other than natural migration for bison to get into the new West side tolerance area.
- MR noted that there is a new Secretarial order that describes expanding opportunities for co-management of federal lands with Tribes which could be beneficial in the management of Forest Service and NPS lands, for expanded bison habitat. Though not proposing anything specific today, she asked that the concept be held on the table as a new possibility for future Partner consideration. (**action item—facilitator to add this concept to the Parked Items list)
- Lance Tissidmit said that the ShoBan have not put a moratorium on hunting in the new tolerance area but have only a few hunters. Separately, he mentioned how bringing Yellowstone bison to the Shoshone meant so much to them, helping return to the old ways, and honor the elders.
- Jim Marsh of the CTUIR said that translocation worked very well on the Columbia River for salmon and he would like to see some bison translocated to the Taylor Fork, then left alone for three or four years.
- Three to five bulls have made it to Fawn Pass and live in the upper Gallatin over the last few years.
- TM mentioned that the elephant in the room for bison is the sheer number of people moving into, and recreating in, the GYE. We need to challenge how we protect treaty hunting rights, which are paramount,

in the face of increasing population and the many different types of recreation taking place on the landscape.

- QE agreed with these sentiments about protecting treaty hunting rights—including for the Nez Perce people—which must come first. And while we say “hunting rights” or “fishing rights” what we are really talking about is a way of life. That’s my job is to protect that first for our people, he said.
- JC stated that updates regarding highway safety, wildlife migration, and recreation associated with the Cougar Creek bridge project were not available for this meeting. The project working group (MFWP, CGNF, MDOT, perhaps others) had not met recently.

HUNT/BOUNDARY ISSUES (ESPECIALLY NORTH SIDE)

- Similar to the West side, the mild winter resulted in a small number of bison exiting the Park.
- QE thanks NT of the NPT for calling the near weekly phone conferences of the hunting Partners. The collaborations, particularly the MOA tribes, continued this year. The NPT Commission received some unhappy feedback regarding frustration over the early trapping of bison. He had no enforcement concerns to relate.
- FIELD OPERATIONS: ME reported that creating a project for carcass handling and dumpster(s) collection stalled out. The topic was less critical with fewer animals coming out this year and fewer animals harvested. It may still need to be addressed during larger out migrations in the future. A big concern is who will be responsible for the carcass collections and dumpster collections.
- EDUCATION: MY reported that MFWP collaborated with the CGNF to install kiosk at Beatty Gulch as an experiment. Feedback was that the information was helpful so MFWP plans to work with the CGNF to make the kiosk a better, more permanent installation. MFWP is also working on education videos as reported at the last IBMP meeting.
- ENFORCEMENT: AP of MFWP said that from the state’s perspective, there were limited enforcement issues as limited out-migration brought limited availability of bison to be hunted. Because of work over the last few years, the interagency maps are in good shape. He thanked all hunting partners, with particular thanks to the Nez Perce Tribe, for their collaboration on issues on the ground.
- HUNTING AND REMOVALS: Morgan Jacobson of MFWP reported the following harvest on the North side: Montana hunters 1 bull; NPT 1 bull; CTUIR 1 bull; Northern Arapaho 2 cows. On the West side: Montana hunters 1 bull; Blackfeet 1 bull and 5 cows. Twenty seven bison were captured by YNP and assigned to CSKT for processing (5 adult males, 2 yearling males, 20 adult females). Entry into the quarantine program included 10 bison (3 yearling males, 1 yearling female, 6 calves).

Bison quarantine and translocation (Improving IBMP effectiveness item #3)

The Lead Partner team scoped a full review of the bison quarantine process, from animals a) migrating out of the park and being captured, through b) quarantine of bison at NPS and APHIS facilities in the DSA, to c) bison transfer to Fort Peck facilities and what happens there; and finally d) bison transfer from Fort Peck to Tribal Nations and the importance of that transfer. The focus of the effort at this meeting was items c) and d), which have had less coverage than a) and b) at past IBMP meetings.

EC introduced the session stating that ITBC is focused on conservation of Yellowstone buffalo to preserve the pure genetics of these animals and quarantine is a key component. Conservation is critical because these are the animals that were hunted or killed nearly to extinction. The bison meant a lot to Indian people, they were our economy, key to our life. So that’s why, he said, ITBC works to get these animals out to the Tribes *alive* and to help them build their genetics into their own Tribe’s herds or even build new herds. “That’s our goal, at ITBC and why we started the whole organization,” Ervin said, “is to return buffalo back to Indian Country, and for our spiritual and cultural connection to them.” Ervin noted that he respected other’s perspectives and their goals. Quarantine, he said, is key to ITBC achieving its goal.

A) AND B) MOVEMENT OF BISON TO OUTSIDE YNP AND QUARANTINE PROCESSING BY NPS AND APHIS

CG and RF provided details on this portion of quarantine processing, which consists of Phase I and II of the 3-part quarantine process developed in the early 2010s and approved as a method of proving bison to be brucellosis free. Both Chris and Rebekah's slides can be found at the meeting web page (<https://www.ibmp.info/Library/20220413/20220413.php>). As these parts of the quarantine process have been largely discussed at past IBMP meetings, the bulleted items below capture just a few key concepts made during Chris and Rebecca's presentations and follow-on Q&A with Partners and staff:

- Chris provided a list of procedural steps for bison capture (at Steven's Creek) and testing, as well as the number of bison that have entered the Bison Conservation Transfer Program since 2014.
- He noted that in 2018 NPS signed an agreement to be able to quarantine 250 bison within the Park.
- The full quarantine process was developed by APHIS and NPS scientists. It has 3 phases; after Phase 2 the animals are considered brucellosis free.
- The bison must pass through a 3rd phase, assurance testing, before they can be shipped around the country. That testing can be done outside the DSA and is currently done in facilities at the Fort Peck Reservation in northern Montana.
- NPS signs a one-time agreement with APHIS, MDOL, and the Fort Peck Tribe before transferring bison from NPS facilities to Fort Peck facilities.
- The final phase of the quarantine process, called *assurance testing*, is done at Fort Peck facilities.
- To date 182 animals have gotten to brucellosis-free status using the NPS facilities in the Park and the APHIS facilities just outside the Park.
- The Park is now ready to expand their ability to take animals into the quarantine program, and is increasing its capacity to do so.
- Rebecca noted the bison quarantine feasibility study started in 2005 and led to the publication of a study that validated the 3-phase quarantine process, thus allowing NPS to move forward with the quarantine process.
- Becky described the 1st phase of quarantine testing as sero (blood) testing. Animals that test positive for brucellosis are removed from the group. The testing continues (required because an animal can sero-convert, i.e., go from negative to positive, within a known time period) until they get two consecutive whole-herd negative tests. Then animals move into the next phase of quarantine, Phase 2.
- Bulls can be tested at defined periods and if negative, move on through the process. Cows or calves, however, must first be bred (at the proper age). Animals that don't get pregnant are removed from the cohort. Six months after testing another whole-herd test is taken and if all negative they have cleared Phase 2 and APHIS recommends to the state veterinarian that they can be certified brucellosis free.
- If the state veterinarian concurs, s/he can certify the bison brucellosis free. At that point an MOU can be created to transfer the bison to the Fort Peck facility for Phase 3 assurance testing.

Shared statements from, and questions to, Chris and Rebecca:

- To date, 0 animals (of over 600) have converted from sero-negative to sero-positive after the first phase.
- Recurring questions included:
 - 1) Can Phase 1 and Phase 2 be run concurrently?
 - 2) Can the Fort Peck facility, the largest facility in the state, be utilized to the maximum capacity for Phase 1 and 2 testing?
 - 3) Can the timeframe for Phase 1 be reduced based on the data to date?
 - 4) Can bulls be moved more rapidly to assurance testing (Phase 3) as Fort Peck is ready for them and that would help distribute the genetics across the country more rapidly?
 - 5) What is the testing process for moving cattle out of the DSA as compared to buffalo?
 - (**action item — Facilitator to add Qs to parked item list to be potentially addressed at future meetings)

- BF provided overview answer for all questions: Possibly, and we always continue to test and learn, every animal we put through gives us more confidence on our process and helps us learn for possible future modifications to the quarantine process.
- MZ answered the last (#5) question by describing brucellosis testing—methods, timing, length of viability of the test results, more—of cattle in the DSA. He described how USDA testing mandates differ between cattle not known to be infected by brucellosis, versus those that are known to be thus infected. He also said that even for a herd of cattle where brucellosis is found, the infection rate often far less than 1% relative to the high (on the order of 50%) overall infection rate in Yellowstone bison. Thus, the higher scrutiny on Yellowstone bison.

C) BISON TRANSFER TO FORT PECK FACILITIES AND WHAT HAPPENS THERE

- MH said that bison must be certified brucellosis free by APHIS and the state veterinarian to be transported from the GYE into the jurisdiction of Montana. Further, all bison leaving the DSA, be it to Fort Peck or to a slaughter facility, must travel on sealed steel trailers and have an escort (may be law enforcement from NPS, MDOL, or CSKT) to the end location.
- MZ described the MDOL process for their certification of the bison as brucellosis free, including (but not limited to) a) receiving and reviewing the APHIS documentation showing completion of Phase 2 of the bison quarantine process, b) assuring that the testing supplied applies to the bison to be transferred, c) move with special USDA forms complete, and d) then the USDA form is returned to MDOL to assure that the animals that were certified are the animals that were delivered.
- Q (from MR)—Can the APHIS and MDOL certification process be made more formalized to aid ITBC in bison transfer? The issue is that sometimes the process includes a simple email exchange and it is not always clear (i.e., easy to document) that animals are disease free before they get to Fort Peck to expedite the transfer of buffalo from Fort Peck to other Tribal lands. MZ said no problem that MDOL could review and consider a formal disease free certification document. (****action item** — for MZ, RC, MR, and/or Robbie Magnan to determine process)
- Robbie Magnan thanked NPS for helping move bison to Fort Peck, thus allowing them to be moved from there on to Tribes around the country. The first bison arrived at Fort Peck in 2012 and they had to be held and tested for 5 years. Now it is down to 3 years, Robbie said, and they'd like to see that timeframe decreased. Transfer to tribes requires working with ITBC to assure that receiving Tribes have land and finances to handle the bison.
- Robbie said that the program is successful, having transported bison to 19 different Tribes in 9 states.
- Fort Peck facility is 320 acres (across 4 pens). They haven't filled up the space yet, but they'd like to. The Tribe has ~15,000 acres that they have to feed the bison. There is a huge buffer around the Fort Peck facility.
- After bringing bison to Fort Peck, they have seen great improvements and interest for Native culture and traditions. They have incorporated bison science and knowledge into their school system (e.g., hunting methods, use of full animal when harvested). The Tribe has 350 animals in a business herd (used, e.g., for hunts, live sales) and a cultural herd (used, e.g., for educational and cultural purposes, diabetic program).
- Q—Is there an option to create a DSA around the Fort Peck facility? A (from MH)—The state pays for testing in the current DSA around Yellowstone and more cattle in the NE area of the state would result in more expense for the testing—sharing the bill by other Partners would be helpful, but there is an additional testing labor that many producers would be against. Also, a key issue is that every state may have different requirements for disease-free certification.

D) BISON TRANSFER FROM FORT PECK FACILITIES TO TRIBAL NATIONS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THAT TRANSFER

Troy Heinert described the process for transferring bison from Fort Peck to Tribes, which includes ITBC issuing a request for proposal (RFP) to member Tribes. Tribes must show both their interest in and capacity for taking bison. ITBC completes the selection process looking for the best match to Tribes, with a goal of doing the

most good for the Tribes ITBC represents. (Megan Davenport showed an example of a detailed spreadsheet showing the Tribal aspects and state transfer requirements and data tracked). Troy asked the Partners to recognize that the Tribes it represents have extra capacity to take bison that wasn't there in past years.

Melisa Berns-Svoboda (member of the Alutiiq Tribe) of Old Harbor Alliance next provided a presentation regarding the transfer of bison from Fort Peck and to her Native community at Old Harbor, Alaska. The operation—where three bison were moved by truck, airline (FedEx), and boat—occurred in 2020 and was dubbed “Operation Buffalo Wings.” Melissa’s full talk can be found at the meeting web page: <https://www.ibmp.info/Library/20220413/20220413.php> so a review of that talk will not be repeated here. As part of her talk, Melisa played a video the full bison transfer process from Montana to Alaska (a link to that video can also be found at the meeting web page just noted).



Melisa Berns-Svoboda of the Old Harbor Alliance, and ITBC Region 3 Director, described the process and importance of transferring bison from the Fort Peck quarantine facility to the native community in Old Harbor, Alaska. Along with Partners, staff, and public, the ITBC Board of Directors attended the meeting (seen here from behind) and were present for Melisa’s talk.

Melissa concluded her presentation with a bulleted list of the benefits and results from a successful bison program, repeated below verbatim:

- Heard Health for long-term sustainability
- Food Security
 - Remove monetary barriers to healthy food sources
 - Harvesting Opportunities for our people
 - Provide for Elders & Youth Programs
- Self Determination and Pride
 - Respect for our land and resources
 - Healing of our people
- Economic Benefits
 - Future sales of meat products for the benefit of our cultural programs

During Q&A, in response to a question Melisa said that they’ve had no depredation on their bison herd by Kodiak grizzlies to date: “...our Kodiak brown bears, in the springtime they’re just eating spring green up right there alongside with the bison...” While she said bears killing bison would likely happen someday, “...that’s just

inevitable, but for right now our bears are looking at these animals like, ‘What the heck are you?’ You know their massive and there’s strength in numbers and it’s a bit intimidating for our bears.”

Ervin congratulated Melisa and their community for going through the challenging process of moving bison to their Tribal lands in Alaska. Ervin emphasized how it meant and means so much to the Tribe to bring those animals there (on many levels: e.g., cultural, educational, improving herd genetics). Movement of the bison to the Native community of the Old Harbor Alliance, he said, is a great example of what ITBC’s mission is, what it is seeking to do with the quarantine program.

Luncheon

ITBC graciously provided a bison luncheon to everyone present: Partner, staff, and public. The bison came from Lance Tissidimit and the herd managed by the ShoBan Tribe.

Describing the luncheon, TH said, “In our way, when anybody comes to your home you always invite them for a meal. We offer this spirit plate, which consists of vegetables and then our relative the buffalo.”

Troy concluded by returning with a few last thoughts on Melisa’s presentation about moving Yellowstone bison to a willing Native community in Alaska. “You have all had a hand in that,” Troy said, addressing everyone in the room. “Without this meeting, without what you have done in years prior, that doesn’t happen. A lot of work went into it from the folks from Old Harbor, a lot of work from ITBC and some other partners as well. But you’ve all had a piece of that as well; you should feel some ownership in that, as well.”

After lunch, the chef at the Hilton Garden Inn kindly boxed up the remaining food, which ITBC donated to the Bozeman homeless shelter that evening.



Troy Heinert, ED of the InterTribal Buffalo Council, described ITBC’s process for restoring Yellowstone bison to Tribal lands, as well as some of the successes of, and importance of, the restoration program.

Quarantine success stories (continued from before lunch)

ITBC OVERVIEW

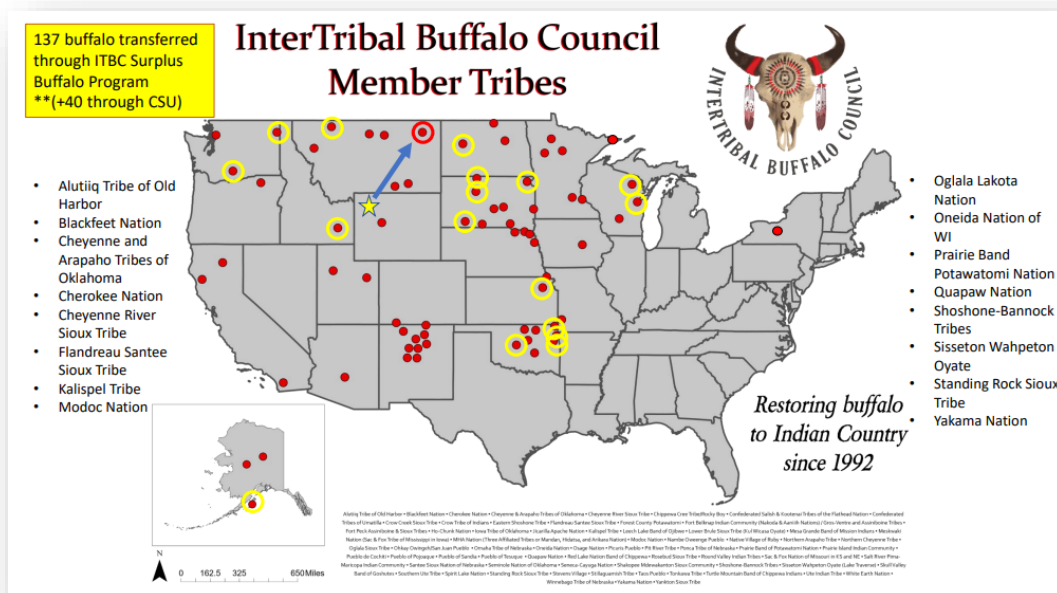
Following lunch, TH provided a short talk on ITBC. He said that along with the story Melisa shared about the bison transfer to Alaska, there have many success stories for Yellowstone bison, moving through the facilities at Fort Peck, being relocated to Tribes. For some of the Tribes it might be the first time they are receiving bison

back in their homelands for decades. There can be incredible emotion that comes with that, as well of as “...the songs and the ceremonies and that level of hope that comes to that people is something that you cannot describe.”

TH noted that (per their mission statement):

The InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC) is a collection of 76 federally recognized Tribes from 20 different states whose mission is to restore buffalo to Indian Country in order to preserve our historical, cultural, traditional, and spiritual relationship for future generations

That mission, Troy said, is ITBC’s guiding force and can be seen as a backdrop for other successes they wanted to highlight. As a lead in to the success stories highlighted below, TH provided the following slide documenting relocation of Yellowstone bison to Tribal lands. Troy’s full talk can be found at the meeting web page: <https://www.ibmp.info/Library/20220413/20220413.php>. Megan Davenport also described and showed a short film titled, “Returning the Buffalo,” a link for which can also be found the meeting web page.



Geographical representation showing successes of moving bison from Yellowstone to Fort Peck to ITBC member Tribes around the nations.

JASON BALDES, EASTERN SHOSHONE TRIBE (ALSO MEMBER OF THE ITBC BOARD OF DIRECTORS)

Jason, who manages his tribe’s buffalo herd, described many facets of his Tribe’s history (he also collaborates with the Northern Arapaho Tribe), including:

- Their reservation was created in 1863 with a grant of rights *from* Indians.
- The Tribe has a history of conservation successes, for example a) establishing a wilderness area in the 1930s; b) reintroduction of the extirpated pronghorn antelope and bighorn sheep; and c) implementation of wolf and grizzly management plans, which considers these animals to be our relatives and considers how we can learn how to be good human beings from them.

Jason said that the only animal missing on their lands is buffalo. We need traditional ecological knowledge incorporated into what we do to assure our kids have a better future. Cattle are subsidized making restoring buffalo more difficult. “You’ve seen the evidence of what getting these animals back to our community does. For the first time the Arapaho Tribe is going to be able to harvest a buffalo for their annual sun dance—130 years” since that last happened on Tribal lands.

The buffalo is very important to the Tribe’s ceremonies, our culture, young people, diet, and health, Jason said. “So this quarantine program is what makes that possible.”



Jason Baldes of the Eastern Shoshone Tribe spoke of the importance of restoring Yellowstone bison to his and other Tribal groups. He said that for the first time in 100 years, his Tribe would be holding a bison hunt on their lands.

Near the close of this session, Jason explained that bison are a keystone species that were ecologically extinct until the quarantine program made it possible to begin to recover them. QE said bison were the “first true stewards of the land,” many Tribes have creation stories centered on the bison. Referring to shelter as well as food, he said, “The buffalo gave himself to us” and “We [Tribes] all have that in common.” Nevertheless, “our relative has had to work twice as hard to show how important he is.”

Public comment period

Audio from the full public comment period was recorded and is available to listen to at the meeting web page: <https://www.ibmp.info/Library/20220413/20220413.php>.

Overview of, update on new bison Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

The facilitator noted that this topic, per meeting agenda, was slated to discuss at least three aspects of the new EIS planned for Yellowstone bison: a) Is there an IBMP role in the EIS for input or does that input just reside with the cooperating agency process? b) How does the new EIS process fit with the existing IBMP (ROD/EIS)? c) Under new EIS, is the 3-phase quarantine process open for review?

A proclamation against the EIS by Montana Governor Gianforte², and just prior to the IBMP meeting, changed the discussion, as reflected below.

CS reminded people the purposes of the new EIS. First is that the IBMP collaborative and more have made a lot of progress (e.g., management, understanding, disease dynamics) beyond where the original EIS in 2000 started. The NPS considers the new EIS as an effort to consolidate all of the efforts of this group over the last 22 years. The IBMP does allow for adaptive management. The 3000 population goal in that EIS was relatively arbitrary; it was generally developed to give the best chance—given the information known at the time—of preventing giving brucellosis to livestock, and also reduce conflicts to landowners due to large numbers of bison migrating out of the Park. Now data, especially over the last decade, have shown that IBMP objectives have been met even with substantially higher numbers of bison in the Park. The planning alternatives in the proposed EIS provide a spectrum of population that starts with where this group has gotten to today, and looking forwards not backwards. Goals for the alternatives, to varying degrees, including (in part) maintaining genetic diversity and a healthy population of bison and an appropriate level of migration to support treaty and state hunting while still maintaining IBMP goals.

MH agreed with the concept that CS put forward that the Partners had agreed for a declining population and that population is dependent on the number of animals coming out from the Park each year. But he provided disagreement to a statement made by CS that no official objection had been made to alternatives 1 and 2 proposed by NPS, nor that 5500 was accepted as the stable bison population. Similarly, the state of Montana, via the Governor's comments, claims that they have not been involved in the discussions in preparation of the new Yellowstone bison EIS.

CS said in the past week he has offered to the state of Montana the opportunity to construct a fourth opportunity for consideration. He noted that NPS is early in scoping. NPS current expectation is to draft the EIS in the fall of this year. He said that the new EIS does not override the IBMP framework, but complements it.

TM pointed out that the NEPA process allows decision makers to evaluate all the alternatives, including helping them to think outside the box. He said that as a planner and biologist that he has always loves to think of how he can test things and find out where the limits of acceptable change exist while still achieving success. The restoration of buffalo is, Tom went on, the restoration of treaty rights, the highest law in the land. He said that we want to operate cooperatively with everyone. "I think that the wider the scope of a NEPA document is, the better we are in the final decision." We need to do our full due diligence.

CS said he wanted to be clear that quarantine would not have happened without APHIS and MDOL and the full group here. And also that getting bison onto larger Tribal landscape is something everyone can be very be proud of as a group. This isn't personal, he continued. "Everybody has a role, function, responsibility. Everybody has different missions, different authorities. We try to bring those together at this table. It's not always possible. There's all kinds of different political, social, scientific, other pressures that are applied to decision making that we embark on. So we're talking about a hiccup in communications;" and later, "even if we can't work out the differences, we agree to disagree, we try to come up with the best solution." Still later, CS concluded with, "A lot of times it's hard to gauge progress at an individual meeting because sometimes it doesn't look like we're making progress. But if you look at it cumulatively over time, we've made some really good strides and we've achieved our objectives as a group, first and foremost. We're doing bigger and better things because of that. I think it is important that we do everything in our powers to continue that progress and continue to make this group relevant and that we don't go backwards in this progress that we've made."

QE stated appreciation for the discussion, for the Park's work, and noted that the NPT had submitted its comments. He noted that for the NPT, decisions must be made by the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Council.

EC said that we are here to make decisions together. We sit here together and make decisions and be forthright with one another, whether we agree or disagree. We do it here at this table, and we don't go away and do something else.

² < facilitator's note: The following article from the 4/13/22 Bozeman Daily Chronicle, though not discussed explicitly at the IBMP meeting, is provided for context: https://www.bozemandailychronicle.com/news/environment/montana-pushes-yellowstone-to-withdraw-its-update-to-its-bison-management-plan/article_f38254d8-e2c7-5911-ba61-4b9365ef4afd.html >

ME stated appreciation for the USFS being supportive of the Park Service's EIS and the process, plus appreciation for the USFS being in the cooperative role (having been on the other side of that process, and also different from the USFS in the original IBMP EIS). She said that they don't see it as putting the USFS in a veto role, as much as their opportunity to be in the know, to influence the thought process, and to bring things that might be unique to their agency and mission into the discussion and considerations.

MR said that for the original 2000 EIS decisions tribes were in the background, not having a voice. She said that now today a lot has changed, that now Tribes are allowed to be involved in wildlife decision making. ITBC believes the new EIS must include the rights of Tribes. We have treaty right to hunt bison, MR continued, meaning a treaty right to access bison which, in turn, means translocation of bison and an expanded number of bison in the Park. We think that the alternatives need to be worked out here at the table with everyone, not just with the state of Montana. (CS stated his belief that most of what's been agreed upon and decided at the IBMP table is built into the alternatives.)

TM ended the discussion mentioning that providing a numerical population goal is destined to fail (as he has noted in the past). In effect you are managing for conflict when the goal should be to manage for success. Better then, he said, was setting a direction and adaptively managing to conflicts and whatever happens on the ground.

CGNF Forest Plan revision effort

ME said that the CGNF just completed a 6-year planning process where they developed a new forest plan. The Record of Decision was signed in early 2022. The Forest includes a lot of the public lands that the Tribes and state hunters exercise hunting rights. The old plan, ME said, was essentially silent on bison management. During this 6-year process, the two most often noted issues in public comment—by orders of magnitude—were bison management and recommended wilderness.

ME noted that in the new Forest Plan for the first time the CGNF has expressed affirmatively that they view bison *on* the national forest as an important part of this national forest with important significance regional, nationally, globally, and incredibly important to Tribes. Also, it is unique to this Forest that it has free-roaming bison on the landscape. We acknowledge bison as a native species on the national forest, and put affirmative language in the Plan stating our desire over time to expand the population of bison on the Forest, and supporting expanded tolerance. ME said they do that in the framework of this IBMP group and acknowledge the role of the state.

ME provided a written summary of sections of the new CGNF Forest Plan that deal with bison. That summary can be found on the meeting web page: <https://www.ibmp.info/Library/20220413/20220413.php>. Among many bison-related topics, the Plan speaks to educational aspects (e.g., signage, community interaction) the Forest has in working with bison. It also includes a goal for the Forest to do three projects every three years within the realm of creating suitable bison habitat (the Forest is using the grizzly bear primary conservation area as the focus area for projects). Here, ME asked if it might be of interest to the Partners to re-invigorate the habitat subcommittee.

****action item** — have a small group review past work of the past habitat subcommittee and review if some of this work can be built upon. Can we improve our ability to manage bison outside the park? ME to reach out to MY to start the conversation. Topics might include finding habitat within existing tolerance zone, removing fence, improving migration pathways, reducing conflicts, prescribing fire, improving traffic safety, and more.

****action item** — Scott to find the meetings where the habitat subcommittee presentations were made and send to ME, MY, and JAR

Request from the Blackfeet Tribe to be included as an IBMP Partner (not on agenda)

Loren Monroe, the vice chair of the Blackfeet Tribe, asked if the Tribe might be included at the IBMP table as a Partner. This item was put forward without being on the agenda. TM and HW noted their thanks to the Blackfeet work at the last Missoula Hunt Managers' meeting, and said they are in favor of having Tribal partners included in the decision making.

Partners reviewed responsibilities (including financial) for being at the table (i.e., being a Partner). They recognized that treaty hunting Tribes currently participate, and have for many years, in the discussions but several had declined to be part of the deliberative table (i.e., become an IBMP Partner with numerous responsibilities, including financial ones and commitment to the IBMP goals). They also discussed the process that occurred—to the best of a few people who were there remembered—regarding how ITBC, CSKT, and NPT were added to the deliberative table as an official IBMP Partner.

An action item was added for this discussion on who can become an IBMP Partner and how the process to become a Partner works. As it was combined into the discussion on the IBMP Partner Protocols, it is included in the next section.

Review of Partner Protocols (and editing, as needed)

The facilitator reviewed the current IBMP Partner Protocols and six topics, as shown in the box below, identified as worthy of review:

*Topic 1: **Organization lead and second** (Table 1, line 33)*

*Topic 2: **Meeting hosts & dates** (Table 1, line 33); discussion, as needed, on impact of new EIS*

*Topic 3: **Meeting goals** in newly edited annual calendar showing 2 meetings/yr rather than 3 (Table 3, line 181)*

*Topic 4: **Discussion (review needed?) of which management actions are considered IBMP decisions as opposed to actions taken under the exclusive authority and sole responsibility of the agencies.** (Table 2, line 105)*

*Topic 5: **Review and revision, as appropriate, of Partner Protocols to improve annual Winter Ops Plan creation.** Consider these 4 locations in the Partner Protocols:*

- a) Partner commitment (line 18): “Each Partner commits to the overall IBMP goal...”
- b) Lead Partner Responsibilities (line 40): regarding getting consensus on Winter Ops Plan
- c) Method of decision making (line 79-104, esp. line 86): regarding definition of consensus
- d) Winter Ops creation (line 151-157): regarding all must sign

*Topic 6: **How will Partners do business in-between meetings** of, particularly given just two meetings per year? Should guidelines be incorporated into the Partner Protocols?*

The Partners went through an open discussion that included several points of agreement, including:

- Yes, the Protocols should be reviewed for potential revision
- Yes, the group that would be charged to review the Protocols should be the same one noted above that is charged with reviewing how a group could get added as an official member of the IBMP
- Issues include the definition of consensus: does it mean unanimous consent (as the document is written) or does it mean consensus (majority rules, 2/3 rules, etc—to be declared by the Partners)
- Partners need to remain clear about each agency’s sole responsibilities (review of Table 2)

Discussion followed, some of which is highlighted below.

MH noted that the IBMP is not a legislative body, saying, “...we’re not making laws, we’re not even really setting policies that we’re bound to follow because we have to follow the policies as set by the other people we report to. We’re trying to figure out where we have consensus around points of improvement, such as quarantine and others things we’ve worked on...”

ME noted that there has been some confusion over the Winter Operations Plan. To her and the Forest’s way of thinking, the Winter Operations Plan is not making new, independent decisions (that might require, for example, NEPA review). Instead, it is an implementation tool for plans and policies and framework we already have. Those may be seen or put forward in this group, for example in the Adaptive Management Plan, but then require the key agency to go through proper analysis and public review process for that decision. As the Partners

work out Protocol language, ME said, it probably would be clarifying to tease out “...what is the nature of decisions we are making here.”

QE noted that for the NPT the Tribal Council must be instrumental in making any decisions. He read the portions of the NPT constitution that defined decision making for the Tribe.

MR agreed said it would be a good exercise to go through what decisions are agency or tribal decisions vs which are decisions of the IBMP collaborative. She said she wondered if the Winter Ops Plan might actually be better published as a notice (perhaps a “Winter Operations notice”) from each of the agencies that are implementing activities for that winter).

The facilitator reviewed and received agreement to the following set up actions from the discussion:

****action item — Create an ad hoc subcommittee to review and (potentially) revise the IBMP Partner Protocols. Report back to the Partners by July 1. Majel Russell to convene and lead the subcommittee.** The ad hoc subcommittee will consist Majel R (lead) and Troy H (ITBC; Tim R and PJ W (NPS); Jon H (CSKT); Quincy E and Neil T and Mike L (NPT); Mike H (MBOL); Hank W (MFWP). < Facilitator to supply most up-to-date Partner Protocols to the ad hoc subcommittee lead >

The ad hoc group will focus on at least these five questions:

1. **How does a group join the IBMP and who can join?** How does the request get made and evaluated, what is required to be a member of the IBMP (support twin goals, provide funding, more?). How is the membership defined: Will all 27 treaty hunting tribes be included? County Commissioners < Facilitator to find the letter sent to the Park County regarding their petition to be part of the IBMP table)? Landowners? NGOs? Others?
2. **Should the IBMP Winter Ops Plan be renamed?** For example as an “implementation plan” or “ops notice” or something else? Would such a renaming be clarifying or defocus the group from the collaborative symbolism and actuality of the current Winter Ops Plan development process?
3. **Verify IBMP decision spaces: what is an IBMP decision vs what is an agency or Tribal decision?** Need clear delineation of laws governing, and authorities specifically given to each agency or Tribe — is Table 2, which was constructed in an attempt to provide this delineation, still correct? If not, can we correct it? Should we include a new column or set of duties we agree to be collaborative decisions or, at least, decisions a group is willing to take input from other Partners on? Can we define what issues are germane to the IBMP and which are not?
4. **Definition of consensus?** Does consensus mean unanimous consent (i.e., as the document is currently written) or does it mean what is more typically considered “consensus,” such as majority rules, 2/3 rules or whatever (rule to be determined by the Partners)?
5. **Timeline review of the calendar—does it need to be modified?** Timeline review recognizing at least three potential difficulties: a) Partners have shifted from 3 meeting/yr to 2 meetings/yr; 2) NPS bison population status report comes out late in the fall giving little time for Partner consideration before Winter Ops Plan needs to be implemented (historically on Jan 1); c) some Partners need to return to their Tribal Council to get the go ahead for any decisions, thereby extending the timeline and making decision by 100% consensus difficult and—even at best—delayed (two related questions were asked, effectively, i) If a Partner coming to the table cannot make a decision at the table, then what is the reason for the Partners to meet in person?); ii) Would it be possible to get materials to Partners in advance of IBMP meetings so that they can come to the meeting with their decision in hand and then the Partners can make a final decision during their meeting?)
6. **Expectation of IBMP Partners to make decisions on behalf of agencies or Tribes at meetings.** Impact to timelines and inclusion of public for notice and comment for taking matters under consideration back—i.e., post meeting—to agencies or Tribes for final decision making.

Status updates

Status of Bison co-existence Program (Shana Drimal) — The program, Shana reported, is alive and well and thriving. Last year it celebrated 10 years of work (started in 2011). The program is a collaboration of the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Defenders of Wildlife, Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, and MFWP. It helps land owners co-exist with bison on the landscape (usually dealing with constructing fences to solve lawn, garden, pet, and/or safety issues; active especially in Gardner and West Yellowstone areas). They have decided this year to increase the participation cap from \$1000 to \$1500 per project, with a willingness to consider larger amounts for landowners with livestock or agriculture operations that are experiencing issues with bison. Since inception, the program has completed 56 projects and the program has collectively contributed over \$50,000 in fencing reimbursements and materials. Last year they completed five projects and, per Shana, “We have a lot of funds available for this year.” Shana encouraged MFWP staff and anyone knowing of landowners in need of bison fencing or similar work to contact her.

< Facilitator’s note: Partners decided not to address the other status update items listed in the agenda >

Meeting close

SUMMER FIELD TRIP?

Multiple times during the day the potential for a summer IBMP field trip was mentioned. No specific plan (i.e., date, location, host, key topic[s]) was suggested. Determination of whether such a field trip will occur, and then if so subsequent organization of the field trip, will be left to the new Lead Partner team and facilitator.

UPDATE ON WINTER OPS PLAN COMPLETION TIMING

The facilitator reminded the Partners that with only two meetings scheduled for 2022, the Winter Ops Plan will need to be largely completed before the next time the Partners meet, likely adding responsibilities—both in work and communications—to the new facilitator and the new NPS Lead Partner team.

CHANGE OF LEAD PARTNER AND NEW FACILITATOR

The Partners recognized that Cam Sholly, of NPS, will be their new Lead Partner for 2022. Cam said he looked forward to continuing the great collaboration and work that the Partners have created. He said he had every confidence that the Partners would continue to make progress. Cam warmly greeted Julie as the new IBMP facilitator. Finally he stated his appreciation to ITBC (and previously NPT) for the work they did on behalf of the collaborative during their turn in the Lead Partner role.

FINAL WORDS

The assembled group—Partners, staff, and public—provided a warm round of applause in thanks to ITBC for providing an excellent bison luncheon for everyone in attendance.

Before closing the meeting, the Partners were kind to thank the current facilitator for his work for 14 years with the group. < Facilitator’s note: The words and gifts and the honor song were overwhelming and beyond kind, thank you all again from the bottom of my heart >

Lead Partner Ervin Carlson said he really appreciated being the Lead Partner and working with everyone. He asked Jon Murray, who provided the invocation, to provide a closing as well, which Jon did in the language of the Blackfeet. Following that prayer, Ervin thanked Jon, said “safe travels” to everyone, and adjourned the meeting.

**** Meeting adjourned ****

Abbreviations

- AM—Adaptive management
- AP—Adam Pankratz
- APHIS—Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
- BCC—Bear Creek Council
- BCTP—Bison Conservation Transfer Program
- BFC—Buffalo Field Campaign
- CG—Chris Geremia
- CGNF—Custer Gallatin National Forest
- CS—Cam Sholly
- CSKT—Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribes
- CTUIR—Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- CV—Clay Vines
- CWG—Citizens’ Working Group
- DSA—Designated Surveillance Zone
- EA—Environmental Assessment
- EC—Ervin Carlson
- EH—Eric Holt
- GAO—Government Accountability Office
- GW—Germaine White
- GWA—Gallatin Wildlife Association
- GYA—Greater Yellowstone Area
- HW—Hank Worsech
- ITBC— InterTribal Buffalo Council
- JAR — Julie Anton Randall
- JH—John Harrison
- LG—Leonard Gray
- LW—Leander Watson
- MBOL—Montana Board of Livestock
- 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
- MY—Marina Yoshioka
- 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
- TH—Troy Heinert
- 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