

INTERAGENCY BISON MANAGEMENT PLAN



SPRING IBMP PARTNERS MEETING REPORT

Wednesday, May 14, 2025 ~ Zoom

05/19/2025 DRAFT for Review by IBMP Partners – no comments received

Posted online 06/13/2025

PARTICIPANTS

Lead Partner & Host: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

IBMP Facilitators: Deb O'Neill and Stevie Burton

IBMP Partner Primaries

Christy Clark, Director, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) [IBMP Lead Partner]

Tom McDonald, Tribal Council Vice Chairman, Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes (CSKT)

Mike Honeycutt, Executive Officer, Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL)

Dr. Tahnee Szymanski, State Veterinarian, Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL)

Tim Reid, Chief of Yellowstone Center for Resources, Yellowstone National Park (YNP), National Park Service (NPS)

Aaron Gould, Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee, Nez Perce Tribe (NPT)

Matt Jedra, Forest Supervisor, Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF), USDA Forest Service (FS)

Dr. Burke Healey, Senior Leader for Policy & Operations, USDA Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

IBMP Partner Seconds

MFWP—Kelly Proffitt, Region 3 Supervisor; Kevin Rechhoff, Deputy Chief Legal Counsel; Marina Yoshioka, Chief of Operations

CSKT—"Bing" Matt, Tribal Council Member; John Harrison, Staff Attorney

NPS—Chris Geremia, Bison Program Manager, Yellowstone National Park

NPT—Mike Lopez, Staff Attorney; Erik Kash Kash, Wildlife Department Director

USDA FS/CGNF—Mike Thom, Gardiner District Ranger; Wendy Urie, Hebgen Lake District Ranger; Brad Bolte, Patrol Captain

APHIS—Dr. Jennifer Siembieda, Cattle Health Assistant Director; Dr. Jeff Richards, Veterinary Medical Officer

Treaty Hunt Tribes (non-IBMP Partners)

Shoshone-Bannock Tribes— Thomas Wadsworth, Interim Director for the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, Fish and Game Enforcement

Meeting Location: Zoom

Other Attendees: *Please see Attendance Record in Appendix A.*

I. MEETING OPENING

The Spring Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) Partners Meeting started with a call to order by Lead Partner Director Christy Clark, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). Christy welcomed all those in attendance and shared her appreciation to the group. The IBMP Partner Primaries and Seconds introduced themselves. Deb identified one change in the agenda (**Ref#1: Spring 2025 IBMP Partners Meeting Agenda**) under the 1015 agenda item. It indicated that Deb would be the lead, but she shared that the partners should be the lead. Christy asked for other changes to the agenda and there were none. She asked for approval of the spring IBMP meeting agenda, and there were no objections.

IBMP Partners Decision #1—The Spring 2025 IBMP Partners Meeting Agenda was approved by all Partners present.

II. IBMP PAST BUSINESS

A. IBMP Annual Report

Generally, the Annual Report (**Ref#2: IBMP Annual Report**) is approved by the end of December. With the transition of facilitators, this did not occur. In addition, all edits were not provided to the new facilitator, and Deb could not create a final draft. Deb presented the changes she received – there were no substantive changes – and asked that the Partners approve the report as final. There were no objections, and the annual report was approved as final.

IBMP Partners Decision #2—The IBMP Annual Report was approved by all Partners present.

B. Approval of Fall 2024 IBMP Partners Meeting Report & Annual Calendar

Deb shared that she received only minor edits to the Fall 2024 IBMP Partners Meeting Report (**Ref#3: Fall 2024 IBMP Partners Meeting Report**). She asked for approval of the report. There were no objections, and the Fall 2024 IBMP Partners Meeting Report was approved as final.

IBMP Partners Decision #3—The Fall 2024 IBMP Partners Meeting Report was approved by all Partners present.

The IBMP 2025 Calendar (**Ref#4: IBMP Calendar 2025**) was emailed to IBMP Partners two weeks prior to the meeting. It complies with past IBMP decisions to encourage Partner engagement by setting document review deadlines well in

advance of meetings. Deb asked for approval of the calendar. There were no objections, and the IBMP Partners 2025 Calendar was approved as final.

IBMP Partners Decision #4— The IBMP 2025 Calendar was approved by all Partners present.

III. IBMP PARTNER UPDATES

The Partner Primaries and their Seconds (**Ref#5: IBMP Partners Directory**) were invited to share any updates on their entity's activities since October 2024.

Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes (CSKT)—Tom McDonald shared CSKT just broke ground in Ronan for an animal processing facility to assist local farmers and ranchers, as well as with hunters and the bison harvest. They hope to have the facility fully operational in early 2026.

Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL)—MDOL Executive Officer Mike Honeycutt shared there were no changes in the MBOL composition. There was not a big legislative agenda for MBOL this session – mostly deregulation and getting rid of statutes that were outdated. One important change is that people do not need original paper copies when they are moving livestock; digital copies and photos are acceptable as legal documentation now. MDOL switched some federal funding to state funding because of some federal budget cuts. The biggest issue was transferring most emergency disease preparedness program funding from federal to state, so that could continue without disruption. MDOL also expanded staffing in their meat program to prepare for more meat inspection plants that may open in the next couple of years. There are bottlenecks and shortfalls currently in finding places for bison to be processed, and MDOL is trying to increase capacity.

Dr. Tahnee Szymanski shared that one of their employees graduated from the law enforcement academy, and he is fully operational on the west side. Also the USDA delisted brucellosis from the select agent list. This removed some restrictions surrounding the ability to conduct research on brucellosis. Hopefully this will allow for future research on diagnostics, vaccination delivery methods, and other opportunities. The delisting also allowed for MDOL to receive whole genome sequences. There was one new slaughter trace since the fall meeting. It was traced to a herd outside of the GYA region of Montana, in north central Montana. Testing was conducted on the herd and no evidence of the disease was found. The slaughter trace has been closed. The state is due for a three-year brucellosis review by USDA. They will look at Montana's program and provide recommendations on how to strengthen the program. With USDA, MDOL conducted an annual inspection of the quarantine facilities in Gardiner Basin, and everything was found as expected. Avian influenza seems to be quieting down on the landscape; the fall migration will indicate if it stays consistent. New World screwworm has expanded into Mexico, and MDOL is preparing for what will happen if there is a detection in the US.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP)—Director Christy Clark shared that FWP was pleased with outcomes of the legislative session. The budget came out mostly intact, and it included new FTEs for enforcement and the communication and education divisions. The fisheries division is entering a new field season in SW Montana's River Research Project, exploring mortality and recruitment in Jefferson Basin. The wildlife division concluded their statewide grizzly bear and wolf plans, and they are in the early stages of developing a mule deer plan. The parks division hired a new administrator, and she has been doing a great job.

National Park Service/Yellowstone National Park (YNP)—Tim Reid indicated that most of the updates will be covered under the winter operations agenda item. He shared that the park is gearing up for a busy summer season in terms of bison-related staffing and changes. One of the senior law enforcement staff moved to the USFS, not far away, but he is unsure what his engagement will be in terms of bison. YNP is looking to fill the vacancy. Calving is occurring in the bison quarantine facility and elk are beginning to calve in the park.

Nez Perce Tribe (NPT)—Mike Lopez, staff attorney, provided the update for NPT. Aaron Gould has been elected to leadership in NPT for a three-year term. He will be replacing Ashton Picard as the primary contact for IBMP. The hunting season for NPT began September 3 and ended April 13. The first bison was harvested on March 3. A total of 33 bison were harvested, with most on the west side and a few on the north side.

USDA Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)—Dr. Jennifer Siembieda reported that the revised program standards for brucellosis, including new quarantine procedures for male bison, have been drafted and the expected publication date is fall 2026. APHIS transferred 768 bison to the tribal food program. Ninety-seven bison were placed into quarantine in Gardiner. Seventeen new bison were placed in quarantine this spring, and that will be the fiscal year 2025 cohort. Thirty-seven cow-calf pairs are anticipated to be transferred in 2026.

USDA Forest Service Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF)—Forest Supervisor Matt Jedra began the position in August 2024, but was unable to attend the fall 2024 meeting. The CGNF is navigating challenges around restructuring.

Mike Thom shared the hunt on the north side went smoothly and was fairly quiet. CGNF is just starting to engage on the Bear-Palmer vegetation management project in the Jardine area. This is Mike's last IBMP meeting, as he is headed to the Bighorn National Forest.

Wendi Urie reported it was busier in the Hebgen Lake district of CGNF this season. The hunt went well, and she had opportunities to engage and educate the public on travel, food storage, and other issues. There are a lot of "red dogs" right now on the landscape. The highway bridge and the snowmobile bridge that cross Cougar Creek are being designed to accommodate a wildlife underpass. They are still hoping to get thermal sensing cameras to turn on highway flashers if there are wildlife on the highway. This hopefully will be implemented in summer of 2026.

IV. UPDATE ON NEW IBMP WEBSITE

Kelly Proffitt, FWP, shared her screen to show the new website, www.ibmpinfo.org. She shared FWP will maintain it as the lead agency through the end of the year. FWP has been updating it with the park's bison operation reports, as well as all the edits and feedback received from partners. She encouraged partners to provide input and feedback on the website, and send it to her at kproffitt@mt.gov or the website coordinator, Missy Erving, at merving@mt.gov. The only place in the website that is not fully updated is in the partners operations. The operational safety flag system page is still blank.

V. WINTER OPERATIONS

CSKT – Hunt manager calls were held weekly on Wednesdays and were run very well and were well-attended. While there were no bison harvested, the Tribe was there and the usual orientation was given. CSKT updated their bison hunt orientation page. They coordinated with the park on the food sovereignty transfer program. They extending the season since there was no hunter success. They will evaluate each year and reserve the opportunity to extend the season as needed. They do not like doing it because of the female hunting issue. They expressed appreciation to Mike Thom and are sad to see him go as he has been a great partner.

MDOL – There were no bison in Zone 3 at any time over the winter season. Busy year assisting the park and APHIS with the Tribal food transfer program. Provided assistance to APHIS with tuberculosis surveillance in bison. Successful year as far as removals are concerned.

FWP – Warren Hansen, Region 3 wildlife manager presented. There was a small harvest from state hunters. There were 25 licenses issued for the West Yellowstone area, with one bison harvested. On the north side, 25 licenses were issued in Gardiner Basin and five backcountry licenses issued. Four bison were harvested in Park County. The roster was not activated this year due to the limited migration of the park.

YNP/NPS – The park bundled their winter operations update with their population update (scheduled later in the agenda). The park is busy operating under the new bison management plan. Appreciation to Mike Thom was shared with best wishes. The park implemented a decision tree that was presented to the partners at the fall meeting. They were above the population assurance threshold, which meant they would increase capture operations. They wanted to bring 100 bison into the quarantine facility. The BCTP was filled on March 10. At that time, harvest was at 10 animals, and upwards of 600 needed to be removed to reduce the population. They made a decision to continue capturing bison and donate them to the Tribal food transfer program. This included all bison regardless of brucellosis presence. The operations continued until April 11 and 768 bison were donated to CSKT. One bison died while processing and 97 entered into the quarantine program. Every day bison were captured, some were left to see if they would move out of the park. They did not. The bison population estimate is 4,300 animals. Summer counts will occur to see where the population is post-calving and going into next winter. There are 165 animals in the bison facility. The park is expecting about 145 to 150 animals to complete the quarantine process this calendar year and be ready for disease certification or clearance by the State of Montana.

NPT – On the north side three bulls and two male calves were harvested. On the west side, there were three bulls, 12 cows, eight female calves, and three male calves harvested. There were no citations. Appreciation for Mike Thom was also expressed.

APHIS – It was a great opportunity to partner and conduct additional tuberculosis surveillance with the Tribes and the state during the food transfer program. They looked at 8.7% of the group that went for food transfer. This gave them a 95% probability if the disease was present in the Yellowstone herd, it would have been detected at slaughter. The animals looked really healthy this year. They appreciate the coordination with CSKT, the park, and the state and are looking forward to continue this type of work.

If there are any updates that partners would like to see in the Operations Plan, please send them to Deb O'Neill at doneill@mt.gov.

VI. PUBLIC FEEDBACK SESSION

Thirteen members of the public signed up to participate in this session by 11:59 pm on May 13. They were given the opportunity to speak for 80 seconds (30 minutes (as stated in the Protocols) divided by 13). The following members of the public spoke during this session:

- Jaedin Medicine Elk
- Clint Nagel, Gallatin Wildlife Association
- Cindy Rosin, Roam Free Nation
- Edwin Johnson
- Jeff Abrams, Idaho Conservation League (did not register, but the partners allowed him time to speak)

Thomas Wadsworth, Interim Director for the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, Fish and Game Enforcement, spoke as a member of the Treaty Hunt Tribes. He was not subject to the 80 second time limit.

VII. CLOSING

Deb reviewed the action items.

- Send Deb any updates or edits to the Operations Plan.
- If there are updates or edits to the website, please send them to Kelly and Missy Erving.
- Deb will get the draft report to the partners quickly, so it can be posted by June 13. The audio link will be included.

Director Clark concluded the meeting by thanking everyone for their work and contributions, and expressing appreciation that they could attend a Zoom meeting. She said she looked forward to meeting everyone in person at the fall meeting in Butte.

The meeting adjourned.

APPENDIX A

Attendance Record

(In addition to IBMP Partner Primaries and Seconds listed on page 1)

Partners: Can you please add who else attended online from your agency/Tribe?

IBMP Partner Staff

CSKT— Kari Kingery, Wildlife Program Manager; Joe Paul, Biologist; Dan McClure, Chief Tribal Conservation Officer; Shannon Clairmont, Lead Biologist

FWP – Warren Hansen, Region 3 Wildlife Biologist