

Interagency Bison Management Plan



Annual Report - Final

November 1, 2023 through October 31, 2024



This report summarizes progress under the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) during the annual period from November 1, 2023, to October 31, 2024. It provides the results of operations, research, monitoring, outreach and education activities conducted as part of IBMP adaptive management (see <http://ibmp.info/adaptivemgmt.php>).

In addition, this report documents the effects and effectiveness of management actions taken to progress toward objectives and adjust management actions for the following year, as appropriate, to better meet those objectives. The Annual Report is not intended to provide a comprehensive description of all actions taken by the Partners during the preceding year. More information is available at the IBMP website (see <http://ibmp.info/index.php>), including meeting reports, key science reports, and historical documents.

This report compiles submissions from all IBMP Partners: Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT); InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC); Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP); Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL); Nez Perce Tribe (NPT), U.S. Department of Interior National Park Service (NPS)/Yellowstone National Park (YNP), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and Forest Service (USFS)/Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF).

This report was approved by Partners present at the IBMP Spring 2025 Meeting.

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1. Background

The Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) provides a framework for federal and state agencies with different authorities and missions to cooperatively manage the risk of brucellosis transmission from Yellowstone bison to cattle. The Plan recognizes that bison fill important biological, ecological, and cultural roles and that seasonal migrations of the bison from Yellowstone National Park (YNP) into Montana are natural events. MDOL, MFWP, NPS/YNP, USDA APHIS and USFS/CGNF were the Partners initially responsible for implementing the IBMP. In 2009, the CSKT and NPT became involved due to their treaty hunting rights for bison on open and unclaimed Federal lands in southwestern Montana.¹ Also, ITBC became involved due to its mission of restoring bison to Tribal lands.

Management practices under the IBMP have been successful at preventing the transmission of brucellosis from bison to cattle. This result is due to efforts by state and federal agencies to maintain temporal and spatial separation between the species. The IBMP has also allowed the successful conservation of Yellowstone bison and supported the presence of a viable, wide-ranging bison population within YNP and on adjacent lands in Montana. Bison management is a complex and often controversial endeavor requiring ongoing evaluation and adjustment of management actions to measure effectiveness and progress towards further desired conditions.

2. Objectives

The purpose of the IBMP is to maintain a wild population of Yellowstone bison and address the risk of brucellosis transmission from bison to protect the economic interest and viability of the livestock industry in the State of Montana. The agencies agreed to address these objectives:

1. Address bison population size and distribution; have specific commitments relating to the 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 transmission from bison.
6. Protect the State of Montana from risk of reduction in its brucellosis status².
7. Maintain a viable population of wild bison in Yellowstone National Park, based on biology, genetics, and ecology.
8. Base decisions on factual information, with the recognition that scientific understanding is, or can, evolve.
9. Recognize the need for coordination in the management of natural and cultural resource values that are the responsibility of the signatory agencies.

¹ The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Blackfeet Tribe, the Northern Arapaho, and the Crow Tribe have recognized treaty rights to harvest bison in southwestern Montana. While they regularly participate in IBMP meetings, none is a formal member of the IBMP.

² A brucellosis-free classification allows producers outside the designated surveillance area for brucellosis to export livestock to other states or nations without testing for brucellosis exposure.

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The IBMP is not intended to eradicate brucellosis, but rather to prevent transmission from bison to cattle and reduce the prevalence of brucellosis in bison.

The *IBMP Adaptive Management Plan* (AMP) signed by the Partners in 2016 contains three goals:

1. Increase tolerance for bison in Zone 2 outside the north and west boundaries of Yellowstone National Park with no unacceptable consequences (e.g., transmission of brucellosis from bison to cattle, unacceptable impacts on public safety and private property).
2. Conserve a wild, free-ranging bison population.
3. Prevent the transmission of brucellosis from bison to cattle.

Each goal has related objectives. Corresponding to each objective are management actions and lists of monitoring metrics and management responses that Partners can utilize to guide their reporting.

Maps of the Tolerance Zone are provided in the Appendix. Zone 1 is the area inside of YNP on the boundary of Zone 2; this area is reported so bison personnel are aware of bison movement on the park boundary. Zone 2 consists of the area outside of YNP in Montana with varying degrees of bison tolerance as put forth in the State's 2015 Environmental Assessment. Zone 2 is made up of the Northern Management Area (NMA) in Gardiner Basin and the Western Management Area (WMA) in Hebgen Basin. Zone 3 is the area outside of YNP with zero tolerance for bison.

3. Pre-Winter Status and Trends

Bison Count and Age-Sex Classification by Central and Northern Regions

In 2024, the bison population was estimated at $4,469 \pm 330$ pre-calving and $5,449 \pm 335$ post-calving. The post-calving sex ratio was $54.7\% \pm 4.8\%$ female. Animals less than two years of age represented 32.8% of the population. Calving rate was 47 ± 11 calves per 100 $2 \pm$ year-old females in 2024.

The population is best described as a metapopulation—a single population with sufficient gene flow across two relatively distinct breeding geographies. In 2024, the northern herd bred in the Lamar, Upper Lamar, Mirror Plateau, and Pelican Valleys, while the central herd bred in the Hayden Valley. The number of bison counted in traditional central herd units averaged 2,012, while northern herd units averaged 3,499. However, including animals in the Pelican Valley (as radio-collared individuals there also spent summer in the Lamar) resulted in an adjusted average of 1,108 bison for the central herd and 4,403 for the northern herd. During the breeding season, the northern herd had a sex ratio of 55.2% female, while the central herd had a sex ratio of 51.5% female.

Bison Counts and Observations by Location in Gardiner and Hebgen Basins

MDOL's observed bison counts for the Gardiner and Hebgen Basins are provided in Figures 1 and 2, respectively. Observations are conducted by MDOL personnel responsible for monitoring bison abundance outside YNP.

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Figure 1. Number of Bison Observed per Month in Zones 1-3 of Gardiner Basin

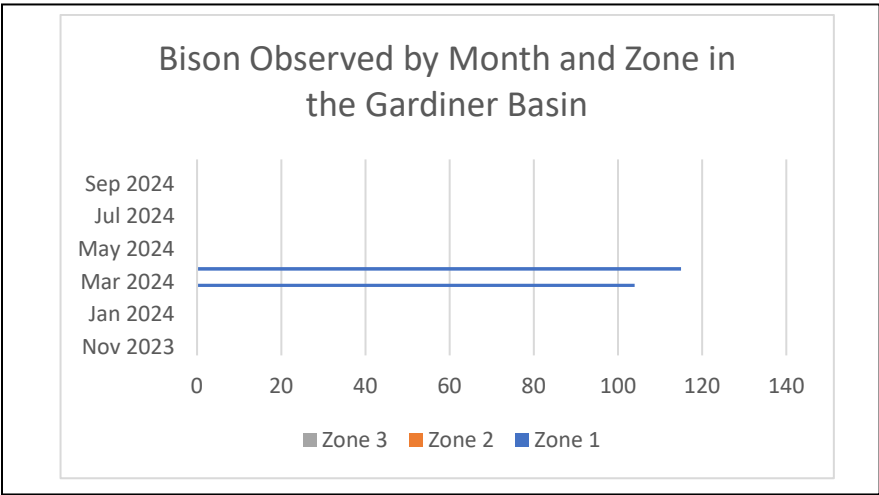
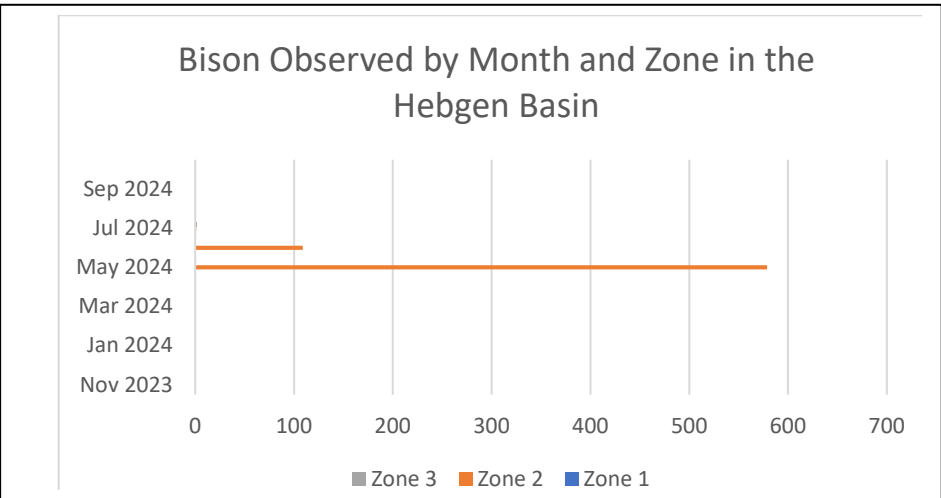


Figure 2: Number of Bison Observed per Month in Zones 1-3 of Hebgen Basin



Cattle Counts and Observations by Location in Gardiner and Hebgen Basins

As reported by MDOL, Tables 1 and 2 summarize cattle locations in Gardiner and Hebgen Basins, respectively. Included, as available, are livestock owner, number and class of cattle, and date the cattle were put on and taken off grazing pastures. The on-dates and off-dates are consistent from year-to-year.

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Table 1. Ownership and Turn-Out Dates for Gardiner Basin

PROPERTY OWNER	LIVESTOCK OWNER	ZONE	EST. # OF CATTLE	CLASS	ON-DATE	OFF-DATE
USFS Allotment	BC	2	60/6	Pairs/Bulls	June 24	Oct 1
Cinnabar Basin	Unknown at this time.	2	20	Pairs	June 20	Oct 15

Table 2. Ownership and Turn-Out Dates for Hebgen Basin

PROPERTY OWNER	LIVESTOCK OWNER	ZONE	EST. # OF CATTLE	CLASS	ON-DATE	OFF-DATE
PR	PR	2	22/4	Pairs/Bulls	Year Round	NA

4. IBMP Operations Plan

At their October 29, 2024 Fall IBMP Partners Meeting, all of the IBMP Partners agreed to sign the IBMP Operations Plan. This Plan describes measures that the nine IBMP Partners will undertake under their authorities and jurisdictions during the period of November 1, 2024, to October 31, 2025. Adoption by the IBMP Partners is not an endorsement of the validity of other Partners' authorities or actions. At the Fall 2023 IBMP Partners Meeting, the Partners voted to adopt a new format for the IBMP Operations Plan to improve understanding and cooperation. It consists of each Partner citing its individual authorities, planned operations, needs for coordination with other IBMP Partners, and metrics it plans to collect for the IBMP Annual Report. The headings within each Partner section are defined as:

- **Partner Authorities**—A bulleted list of each entity's authorities as a reference point to support self-reported actions. Reported as citations where possible.
- **Planned Operations**—Each Partner is obligated to operate under its respective authorities as to what actions it will perform during the upcoming season. Planned Operations therefore largely reflect the individual authorities of the Partners in concise statements about what each intends to do during the IBMP Operations year.
- **Needs or Opportunities for Cooperation**—This is where the Partners list potential areas for cooperation among IBMP Partners as they perform certain Planned Operations.
- **Optional: Partner Reporting Metrics**—Numbers and narrative collected by Partners for reporting in the IBMP Annual Report.

5. Bison Migration and Distribution

Bison Movement and Trends

The maximum count of bison north of Mammoth Hot Springs was 195 on April 16, 2024. The number of bison observed daily in this area averaged 0 in January and February, 69 in March, and 150 in April. Bison were observed outside of the park in the Beattie Gulch area on only 4 days during March 24th to May 1st, with the largest group consisting of 55 animals. Bison were not observed in other regions of the northern tolerance area. The snowpack was the least severe during the IBMP era for northern YNP and fifth least severe for central YNP.

Incidents of Commingling with Cattle

No incidents of bison commingling with cattle were reported by IBMP Partners during the year.

6. Hunting on National Forest System Lands in Tolerance Zone 2

Bison Hunt Results

MFWP provided the following summaries of total bison harvested by hunters in the Tolerance Zone:

- **NMA**—An estimated total of 16 bison were harvested by hunters, including 2 by state-licensed hunters, 14 by Treaty Tribes.
- **WMA**—An estimated total of 32 bison were harvested by hunters, including 13 by state-licensed hunters and 19 by Treaty Tribes.
- The combined estimated total for the 2023-24 season is **48** bison harvested by hunters.

Reported bison harvest from hunting – 2023-24 season							
Managing agency	Northern Management Area			Western Management Area			Total harvest by agency
	Male	Female	North total	Male	Female	West total	
State-licensed hunters	2	0	2	10	3	13	15
CSKT	0	0	0	1	3	4	4
NP	3	2	5	0	0	0	5
CTUIR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SB	0	0	0	13	0	13	13
YN	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BN	0	0	0	1	1	2	2
NA	9	0	9	0	0	0	9
CT	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Overall total	14	2	16	25	7	32	48

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Acronym Key:

CSKT = Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes
NP = Nez Perce Tribe
CTUIR = Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
SB = Shoshone-Bannock Tribes
YN = Yakama Nation
BN = Blackfeet Nation
NA = Northern Arapaho Tribe
CT = Crow Tribe

Recognizing Tribal Treaty Rights for Hunting Bison

CSKT and NPT are also signatories to an inter-tribal Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) intended to increase hunter safety and success, increase communication and reduce conflict in the Beattie Gulch area. The other MOA signatories include Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation in Oregon (CTUIR) and Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation in Washington. Under the MOA participating Tribes agree to limit the number of their respective tribal member hunters that are permitted to hunt in the Beattie Gulch area.

Early in the season CSKT had hunters in the WMA and throughout the season in the NMA. In connection with AMP Management Action 1.4a, CSKT does not track hunter days. CSKT's hunting season ran from September 1, 2023 through January 31, 2024 pursuant to annual regulations adopted by the CSKT Tribal Council. The CSKT is part of the inter-tribal MOA for Beattie Gulch. CSKT hunt harvest totals were:

- NMA—None.
- WMA—1 adult bull; 2 adult cows; 1 female calf.
- Total CSKT harvest was 4 bison.

NPT's bison hunt season in the WMA and WMA opened on August 11, 2023. Both areas closed on March 31, 2024. The Tribe issues general permits for both areas and special permits for the Beattie Gulch Area per the inter-tribal MOA. NPT hunt harvest totals were:

- NMA—3 adult bulls; 1 adult cow; 1 female calf.
- WMA—None.
- Total NPT harvest was 5 bison.

Coordination of Management Activities

Bison season was open for Montana state-licensed hunters November 15, 2023-February 15, 2024. MFWP issued 85 licenses, distributed across Hunting Districts 385 and 395. MFWP also provides informational resources for bison hunters on its webpage (<https://fwp.mt.gov/hunt/regulations/bison>) and on a pre-recorded Bison Hunt Hotline (406 - 577-7889).

NPT reports that inter-tribal MOA by and between the NPT, CSKT, Yakama, and CTUIR reflects those Tribal sovereigns' efforts to maintain a regular, predictable, safe, and respectful bison hunt in Beattie Gulch. The MOA specifies mutually agreeable hunt protocols for Beattie Gulch as well as common safety regulations and provisions

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intended to prioritize enforcement. Weekly Tribal and state hunt coordination calls occurred every Wednesday from about January 10, 2024 to April 3, 2024.

Hunting on National Forest System lands in Zone 2 during the 2023-2024 season was limited compared to previous years. Thirty-two harvests occurred in the WMA around Hebgen Lake, and 16 in the NMA. No conflicts were noted on National Forest System lands.

7. Culling (Capture and Removal)

The NPS captured 29 bison on March 22nd, during a period when there were regularly 50-100 animals in the Stephens Creek Area. These captured bison were believed to originate from the central herd. The NPS placed five bison in the Bison Conservation Transfer Program. Fourteen bison testing positive for brucellosis were donated to the CSKT through the Tribal Food Transfer Program to provide food to tribal members. Nine bison testing negative for brucellosis were released back into the park. One animal died during capture and handling.

Bison Consigned to Slaughter and Transfer to Tribes

CSKT received 14 bison over the winter operations period from the NPS through the Stevens Creek trap.

8. Hazing

Hazes by MDOL

In Figure 4 and in Table 3, MDOL describes bison herding actions (also termed “hazing”) taken. No bison were lethally removed by MDOL. A single hazing even occurred in May 2024 in the Western Management Area. A single bull bison was also observed in Zone 3 of the Western Management Area in July 2024. That animal was not a candidate for hazing and crossed into Idaho.

Figure 4: Total number of bison hazed in the NMA and WMA

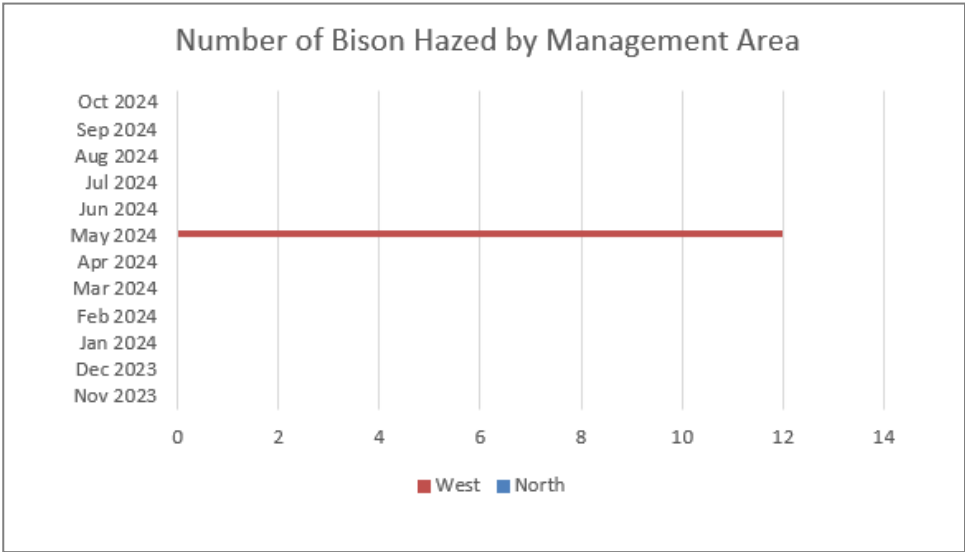
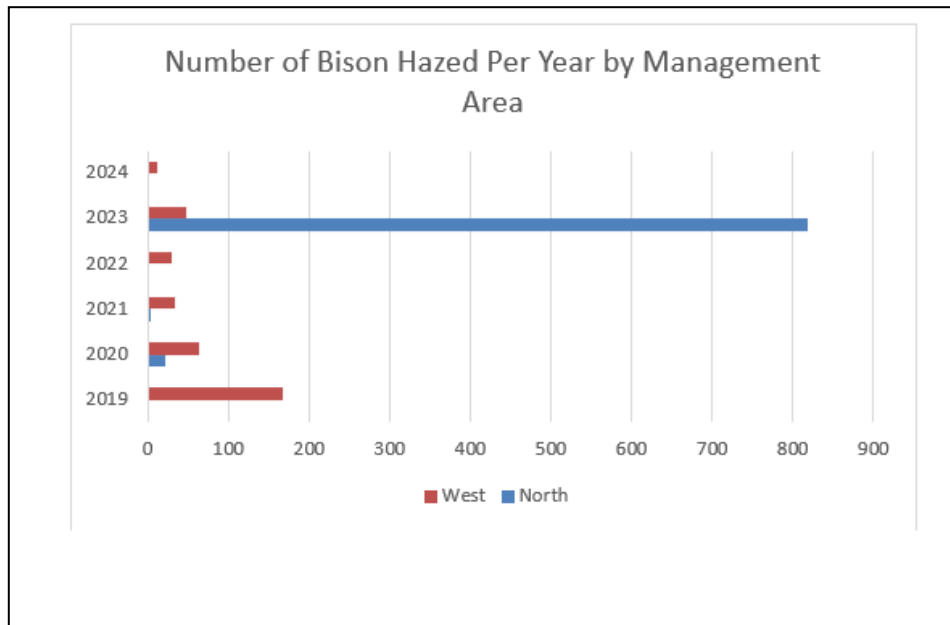


Figure 5: Total number of bison hazed per year in the NMA and WMA since 2019.



The winter saw a large number of bison exiting YNP into Zone 2 of the NMA.

Hazes by Tribal Hunters

CSKT is not aware of any hazing operations that affected the hunt, and the CSTK did not participate in any IBMP hazing operations. NPT did not conduct any hazing operations.

10. Brucellosis Testing and Vaccination

The NPS tested 27 of the 29 bison captured on March 22nd with the following brucellosis seroprevalence based on FPA tube: 1 of 4 calves (25%), 1 of 3 yearlings (33%), 6 of 13 adult females (46%) and 6 of 7 adult males (86%) for a population prevalence of 52%. The NPS does not vaccinate bison for brucellosis as described in the 2024 Record of Decision on Bison Management.

10. Post-Winter Status and Trends

Bison Quarantine

NPS transferred 116 bison to the Assiniboine and Sioux of Fort Peck for assurance testing. NPS entered 5 new animals into the Bison Conservation Transfer Program and transferred 4 bison to APHIS to undergo testing. APHIS continued Phase 2 testing at Corwin Springs.

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The numbers of bison in brucellosis quarantine fluctuate throughout the winter, with some bison going out to Fort Peck and others coming in from YNP. There were 87 bison in APHIS quarantine at the start of 2024. There were 86 bison in NPS quarantine at the end of 2024.

ITBC hauled 158 bison out of Fort Peck in January and distributed a mix of cows calves and bulls to: Northern Cheyenne Tribe (MT); Ponca Tribe (NE); Fort Peck Dam Display Herd (MT); Peoria Tribe (OK); and Eastern Shoshone (WY).

11. Human Safety and Property Damage

In 2024, of the over 4 million visitors to the park, three visitors were injured by bison after approaching too closely. A total of 15 bison were reported killed after being struck by motor vehicles in the park.

Vehicle Collisions with Bison

MFWP reported there were no documented incidents in the Gardiner area from November 2023–October 2024. See table below for documented incidents in the West Yellowstone area from November 2023–October 2024.

2023/2024 Bison MVA Deaths			
Date	Number	B/C	Location
12/12/23	1	Bull	Powerline by Warden Drive
4/14/24	1	Cow	MP4.5 HWY191
4/16/24	1	Cow Calf	MP5.5 HWY191
6/2/24	3	UNK	191 Duck Cr/Cougar Cr
7/12/24	2	Cow Calf	191 Warden Driveway

Human Safety and Property Damage

MFWP reports that during the 2023-24 season, there was:

- Little to no property damage in the West Yellowstone area and Gardiner area.
- No human safety concerns associated with bison.

12. Habitat Assessments and Enhancement

NPS will provide updates when research is published through peer review.

13. Research and Surveillance

APHIS Veterinary Services published Guidance Document 6605.1 regarding the quarantine period for bulls in November of 2023 based upon the peer reviewed JAVMA article by Browne et al. 2023. APHIS also published “Effects of the immunocontraceptive Gonacon on pregnancy in Brucella-seropositive bison” (Bigelow et al., JWD Feb 2024) and “Brucellosis in bison and the effects of pregnancy prevention on disease transmission” (Nol et al. JWD Feb 2024).

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NPS will provide other updates when research is published through peer review.

14. Landowner Engagement

Neighboring landowner and business operators engaged with the USFS to discuss neighbors desire for further shooting closures on NFS lands. Topic of public safety was shared on the weekly hunt coordination call with all partners to be aware local concerns around Gardiner.

15. Education and Outreach

Nothing reported on this topic by Partners.

16. Stakeholder and Public Engagement

The IBMP Partners held two public meetings during the reporting period: on May 15, 2024 in Pray, Montana; and October 29, 2024 in Missoula, Montana. The agendas and Meeting Reports can be found online (ibmp.info/meetings.php).

17. Adaptive Management Adjustments

While updates were discussed at the October 29, 2024 IBMP Partners Meeting, no changes were made to the AMP. The current AMP and history of adaptive changes can be found at ibmp.info/adaptivemgmt.php.

18. Environmental Compliance, Legislation, and Litigation

A. [NPS Record of Decision on Bison Management](#)—The NPS issued a decision on bison management in July 2024 that replaced the 2000 ROD as the guiding document for bison management by the NPS. The decision sets revised parameters for bison management while conserving wild, migratory bison and reducing the risk of brucellosis transmission from bison to livestock.

B. [Legal Cases](#)

- (1) [*Buffalo Field Campaign et al. v. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service et al., United States District Court for the District of Columbia, Case No. 1:20-cv-00798 \(2020\)*](#)—In June 2022, the Fish and Wildlife Service announced they would conduct a 12-month status review to determine if the petitioned actions are warranted (Federal Register 87:34228-34231). This review is scheduled to begin in 2026.
- (2) [*Neighbors Against Bison Slaughter and Bonnie Lynn v. the National Park Service et al., United States District Court for the District of Montana \(Billings\), Case No. 1:19-cv-00128-SPW \(2019\)*](#)— Case was officially closed on May 23, 2024. The NPS completed a new 2024 decision on bison management updating the 2000 ROD.

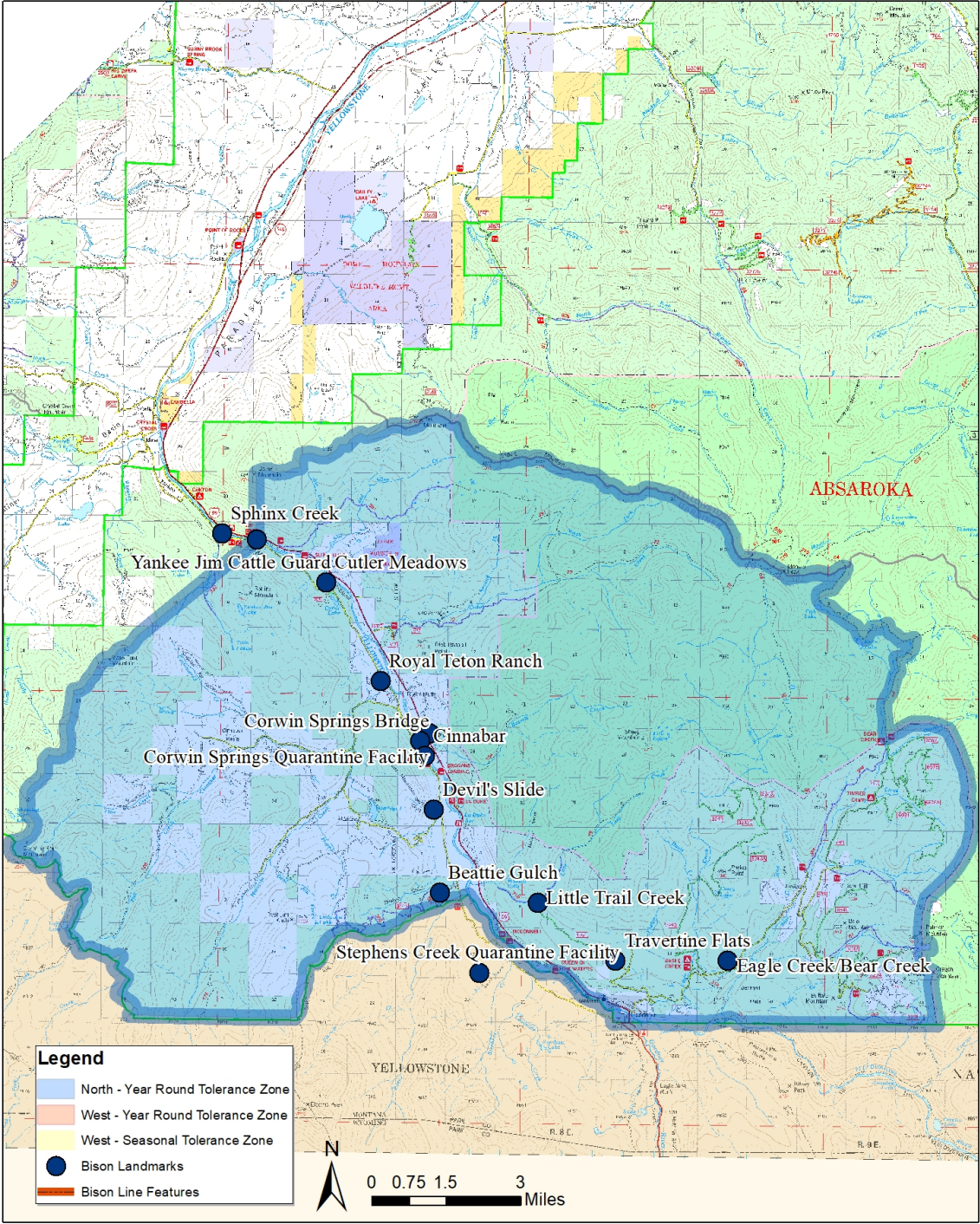
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- (3) *Cottonwood Environmental Law Center v. Secretary Bernhardt et al., United States District Court for the District of Montana (Butte), Case No. Case 2:18-cv-00012-SEH (2018)*— Case was officially closed on May 23, 2024.

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Appendix A. Maps of the Northern and Western Management Areas

Bison Tolerance Zone - North



Bison Tolerance Zone - West

