

INTERAGENCY BISON MANAGEMENT PLAN



FALL 2024 IBMP PARTNERS MEETING REPORT - FINAL

Tuesday, October 29, 2024 ~ Missoula, Montana

Approved by all Partners present at the May 14, 2025 IBMP Meeting

PARTICIPANTS

Lead Partner & Host: Custer Gallatin National Forest

IBMP Facilitator: Julie Anton Randall (ecomareterra@gmail.com)

IBMP Partner Primaries

Michael Thom, Gardiner District Ranger, Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF), USDA Forest Service (FS) [IBMP Lead Partner]

James "Bing" Matt, Tribal Councilman, Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes (CSKT)

Ervin Carlson, Board President, InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC)

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

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

Dustin Temple, Director, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP)

Tim Reid, Bison Program Coordinator, Yellowstone National Park (YNP), National Park Service (NPS)

Ashton Picard, Treasurer, Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee, Nez Perce Tribe (NPT)

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

IBMP Partner Seconds

CSKT—John Harrison (Staff Attorney); Dan McClure

NPS—Chris Geremia, Lead Bison Biologist, Yellowstone National Park

ITBC—Trudy Ecoffey, Interim Executive Director

MDOL—Lindsey Simon, Legal Counsel

MFWP—Marina Yoshioka, Chief of Operations

NPT—Eric Kash Kash, Wildlife Division Director; Erik Holt, Fish & Wildlife Commission Chair

APHIS—Rebecca Bigelow, Wildlife Biologist/Disease Specialist, Ruminant Health Center, USDA APHIS

USDA FS/CGNF—Jennie O'Conner Card, Ecosystem Staff Officer

Treaty Hunt Tribes (non-IBMP Partners)

Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR)—Andrew Wildbill; Garrett Brown

Shoshone-Bannock Tribes—Bret Haskett, Director of Fish & Game

Yakama Nation—Nick Kahmann; Kristi Olney; Caseymac Wallahee (Tribal Council)

Meeting Location: **Residence Inn Missoula Downtown**, Missoula, Montana

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

I. MEETING OPENING

The Fall 2024 Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) Partners Meeting started with a call to order by Lead Partner Mike Thom, Gardiner District Ranger, Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF). Ashton Picard, Treasurer of the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee (NPTEC), was invited to open the meeting with a Tribal prayer. After, Mike welcomed all those in attendance and set the tone for a productive meeting day. The IBMP Partner Primaries and their Seconds were asked to introduce themselves, along with Treaty Hunt Tribes and members of the public in attendance. Mike also reviewed the agenda (*Ref#1: Fall 2024 IBMP Partners Meeting Agenda*) available to public participants. He asked for any discussion of agenda amendments, and there being none, called for a vote.

IBMP Partners Decision #1—The Fall 2024 IBMP Partners Meeting Agenda was adopted by all Partners.

II. IBMP PAST BUSINESS

A. IBMP Partner Protocols

The Partners revisited a decision made during the Spring 2024 IBMP Partners Meeting to record IBMP Partner Meetings. Dustin/MFWP restated the commitment of MFWP to cover the cost of recording regardless of which Partner is currently Lead Partner. MFWP will clarify how/where these recordings will be stored, made publicly-accessible, and archived. MFWP tech Brad Cosper was on site with recording equipment and the meeting proceeded with the agreement of Partners to audio-record it. The decision to record meetings, including the Public Feedback Session, is part of the final draft Protocols that Partners reviewed before the meeting.

Protocols Subcommittee (PSC) Mike Thom/CGNF led a vote to approve the IBMP Partner Protocols (*Ref#3: IBMP Partner Protocols*) containing all edits adopted by the Partners at their Spring 2024 Meeting.

IBMP Partners Decision #2—The IBMP Partner Protocols were adopted by all Partners.

B. Annual Calendar + Approval of Spring 2024 IBMP Partners Meeting Report

The IBMP Calendar generated by Kathy Minor/CGNF (*Ref#2: IBMP Calendar 2024*) was shared on the screen. It complies with past IBMP decisions to encourage Partner engagement by setting document review deadlines well in advance of meetings. The Calendar launched Annual Report and Operations Plan development processes earlier with an intent to complete the Ops Plan to ensure it could be signed in person at the Fall Meeting.

The redraft of the Fall 2023 and Spring 2024 IBMP Partners Meeting Reports (*Ref#4: Spring 2024 IBMP Partners Meeting Report + Related Excerpt from Fall 2023 Report*) with all Partner-requested edits were made available to the Partners for review before the meeting. Lead Partner Mike Thom/CGNF asked the Partners for any amendments. With none offered, a vote was called with an agreement by all Partners to adopt both Meeting Reports as revised.

IBMP Partners Decision #3—The Spring 2024 IBMP Partners Meeting Report (amended) was approved by all Partners. The Fall 2023 (amended) IBMP Partners Meeting Report was approved by all Partners.

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 May 2024.

National Park Service/Yellowstone National Park (YNP)—YNP Bison Program Coordinator Tim Reid reported that the *Yellowstone National Park Final Environmental Impact Statement for a Bison Management Program* has been published.

InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC)—ITBC Acting Executive Director Trudy Ecoffey reported on the success of the Bison Conservation & Transfer Program (BCTP) and ITBC efforts to distribute the Yellowstone-origin bison to ITBC member Tribes, providing the following numbers:

Year	Number of Bison	Number of Tribes
2020	43	16
2021	45	1
2022	27	10
2023	150	7

Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes (CSKT)—CSKT Staff Attorney John Harrison reported briefly on last season's bison hunt in Tolerance Zone 2, indicating the season ran September 1-January 31. Each new hunter receives an orientation. Some hunters have been active for 15 years. John introduced Stephanie Gillin and Warden Dan McClure.

Nez Perce Tribe (NPT)—NPTEC Treasurer Ashton Picard had no updates to share. Erik Holt mentioned that NPT has provided disclaimer language for use on the new IBMP maps.

USDA Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)—Rebecca Bigelow reported on the new electronic form of identifying animals using tags. High-path avian influenza (AI) has been on the rise since March when birds were apparently found having infected a dairy herd in Texas. Lack of biosecurity was the issue; human cases of AI have a connection to the infected flock. Suspects get tested. Cats on a farm displaying odd neurological behavior are a good indicator of infection.

Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL)—MDOL Executive Officer Mike Honeycutt provided updates on impending regulatory changes regarding interstate movement requirements for cattle and bison. Montana State Veterinarian Dr. Tahnee Szymanski announced that Zach Martin, bison staff out of West Yellowstone, would be graduating from the Montana Law Enforcement Academy in November. Also, the Department is currently managing two brucellosis-infected herds and is conducting testing associated with two slaughter traces. Both of these traces are unlikely to be brucellosis

but the Department conducts follow up testing in the herd of origin to ensure disease free status. Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) has been detected in a backyard flock in Flathead County. The Department is once again communicating the risk of HPAI to domestic poultry flocks. This detection is likely due to wild bird exposure and the risk to humans and dairy cattle in Montana remains low.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP)—Director Dustin Temple reported on the reduction in State of Montana-issued hunting tags for bison, with Western Management Area-side tags reduced from 40 to 25.

USDA Forest Service Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF)—Gardiner District Ranger Mike Thom reported that Matt Jedra is the new Forest Supervisor, joining the team in mid-August. Bridget Guild is the new Tribal relations lead, engaging in several meaningful conversations as part of the consultation process. The Forest Service has issued a letter that identifies that the 2022 Forest Land Management Plan provides direction for the management of bison habitat on National Forest System lands and with the signing of the 2024 Yellowstone National Park Bison Management Plan Record of Decision, the Forest Service has fulfilled its role as a cooperating agency.

IV. OVERVIEW OF NEW IBMP WEBSITE (with Maps & Authorities & Jurisdictions Tool)

A. Adoption of New Website (and Retiring of Old Website)

Julie/Facilitator updated the Partners on IBMP website development and involvement of the IBMP Website Review Group (WRG), composed of Partner Primary-designated representatives. The contents and functionality of the old ibmp.info website is retained in the new website, which is modernized and easier to navigate and update. Julie mentioned the importance of Partners reviewing the provided Library contents outline (*Ref#6: New IBMP Website Structure + Library Outline*) which organizes documents in an orderly way. All e-file names for documents in the Library now follow a same format of year-month-day plus the exact title of the document.

Mike/CGNF noted that the original imperative for an IBMP website came out of a 2008 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report¹ and is useful for transparency.

Website content concerning Tribal cultural relevance and Treaty Hunt Tribe activity relevance is still needed. Whisper Camel Means/CSKT noted that Stephanie Gillin is available to assist with this.

Since the new website has been under development for well over a year, Mike/CGNF indicated it is time to set a deadline for it to go live and suggested this be December 10, 2024. Partners can review the format, navigational abilities, and content, track progress and provide input at any time. Ashton/NPT noted that with the disclaimer language (see below) included, the website is approved by NPTEC. Mike/CGNF led a vote, with all Partners in agreement that the new website shall go live on December 10, 2024, and the old website will be retired. With support from the Facilitator, CGNF/Lead Partner will reach out to the Partners to determine that all Partners have reviewed the new website. Thereafter the new website will go live.

¹ 2008 GAO Report to Congressional Requesters: *Yellowstone Bison: Interagency Plan and Agencies' Management Need Improvement to Better Address Bison-Cattle Brucellosis Controversy*. See p. 34.

IBMP Partners Decision #4—The new IBMP website was approved by all Partners to go live on December 10, retiring and replacing the old IBMP website. The Lead Partner, with support from the Facilitator, will reach out to the Partners to ensure they are comfortable with the new website before it is live.

B. New IBMP Maps & Uses + CGNF Grazing Allotments Map

Northern and Western Management Area maps of the Tolerance Zone (*Ref#7: Maps of Northern and Western Bison Management Zones + Grazing Allotments*) created by CGNF were previously approved by the Partners for use as reference tools and posting on the new IBMP website. Partners are welcome to add to the list of relevant locations on the maps (*Ref#8: Key Zone 2 Map Locations*) any time. Erik Holt indicated NPT has provided the language for a disclaimer for content related to hunting zones.

A map showing active and retired grazing allotments in and near Tolerance Zone 2 on the CGNF accompanies the Northern and Western Management Zone Maps. The red areas on the map indicate vacant lands. Turn on/off dates when cattle can be on the grazing land can be found in the IBMP Annual Report. Questions can be directed to CGNF.

Erik/NPT asked if the maps could be posted out on the landscape (e.g., at Beattie Gulch kiosk). Mike/CGNF noted maps posted there are specific to shooting closures and implementation of the hunt, put together by MFWP Tribal Liaison Kqyn Kuka.

Mike/CGNF called for a vote to adopt the three maps as IBMP Partners Reference Tools, with all Partners voting yes.

IBMP Partners Decision #5—All Partners approved use of the Zone 2 WMA+NMA maps and associated landmarks list and the CGNF Grazing Allotments map as IBMP Reference Tools for use the new IBMP website and in the Operations Plan.

V. ANTICIPATING THE NOVEMBER 2024-OCTOBER 2025 IBMP YEAR OF OPERATIONS

A. Review of the 2023-2024 Annual Report

Several Partners had responded to the IBMP Lead Partner's request that Partners to submit their IBMP Annual Report entries before the Fall Meeting. The Annual Report draft (*Ref#9: November 2023-October 2024 IBMP Annual Report Draft1*) in the Meeting Documents contains entries from all Partners except CSKT, ITBC and NPT. Mike/CGNF asked that all Partners submit entries by December 10, 2024, after which the Annual Report will be finalized by CGNF/Lead Partner and then posted on the IBMP website by December 31. The draft Annual Report contains subject matter relevant to preparing for the November 2024-October 2025 IBMP year of operations ahead. It includes known seasons reported by each Treaty Hunt Tribe active in the Tolerance Zone.

B. Bison Capture, Harvesting and Hazing Tables

The Excel table format for reporting Bison Capture, Harvesting and Hazing adopted at a previous IBMP Partners Meeting (*Ref#10: Summary of Bison Capture, Harvest and Hazing Table, 2022-2023*) continues to be utilized by MFWP and YNP to share numbers from the operations season . The table also includes bison hunt and loss numbers by bison class and whether Northern or Western Management Area as verified by Partners and Treaty Hunt Tribes. This table (*Ref#11: Summary of Bison Capture, Harvest and Hazing Table, 2023-2024*) appears in the Annual Report.

C. The NPS Yellowstone Bison Population Status Report – 2024

Chris Geremia/NPS shared a PowerPoint (see Appendix B) presentation on *Ref#12: 2024 NPS Population Status Report to YNP Superintendent*, which was provided to Partners on October 2, 2024 and also posted online (<https://ibmp.info/Library/OpsPlans/2024SE~1.PDF>).

Chris mentioned the 2024 ROD as the Park's guiding document in working to prevent brucellosis transmission to cattle while conserving the wild nature of bison in the Park with the 2000 ROD providing the overarching principles and framework for coordination between the NPS and its partners. The 2024 ROD:

- Sets a target population range.
- Includes adaptive management objectives related to demographics, genetics, ecology, social considerations, and reducing the risk of brucellosis transmission.
- Describes tactics for managing population size.

The target range for post-calving is 3,500-6,000. Post-calving (by August 2024), there were about 5,450 bison in the Park. Adaptive management objectives for the population include:

- Balanced sex ratio and age structure
- Maintain existing low risk of brucellosis from bison to cattle
- Protect human safety and property and mitigate conflicts
- Maintain or lower brucellosis prevalence (about 40.9%) in the YNP bison population
- More bison removed by harvest than the Tribal Food Transfer Program (TFTP).

Erik Holt/NPT asked whether or not elk are included in the studies of the prevalence of Yellowstone animals with brucellosis and is concerned that this information is not shared. It is difficult to gauge the impact of Yellowstone bison with brucellosis if elk are not considered. Chris/NPS shared that maintaining the low risk of brucellosis transmission from bison is YNP's goal.

Last year and over the last five years more bison were removed by harvest than donated to Tribes as food through the TFTP or the Bison Conservation and Transfer Program.

NPS would like to operate the BCTP at capacity, which would result in:

- 200-300 bison filling the holding capacity
- 100-300 bison transferred to Tribes annually (post successful quarantine and assurance testing).

There are about 135 bison in BCTP facilities currently, with 116 transferred to Fort Peck in 2024.

NPS tactics for managing the YNP bison population include:

- Taking precautions to manage within the 3,500-6,000-population range
- Taking precautions to ensure a population greater than 3,000 bison in late winter
- Using all tools to manage the population when the pre-winter population exceeds 5,200 animals

- In the season ahead, NPS asks its partners to help manage numbers within the range of 3500-6000, using the BCTP, donations of bison to the TFTP (prioritizing brucellosis-positive animals when feasible), and harvests by Treaty Hunt Tribes and Montana state licensed hunters.
- If the population exceeds 5,200 entering winter, NPS will consider all tools to manage for a decreasing population.

The upper limit of 6,000 exists, because it is a challenge to keep bison inside the Park in extreme winters when there is a large migration. To manage the population, NPS will:

- Enter capture animals into the BCTP.
- Remove identified brucellosis-positive animals. Chris/YNP noted that removing only negative animals may actually increase the proportion of positive animals in the population (e.g., brucellosis prevalence).
- Rely on Montana state-licensed and Tribal harvests.
- Then if the population exceeds 5,200 (“assurance threshold”), NPS will use all tools to manage for a decreasing population.

NPS hopes to work with partners to reduce the population over winter 2024-2025 within a removal limit of 1,375 (25%) and removing the ages/sexes proportional to current population composition.

Chris/NPS shared a decision tree that describes how NPS will “balance capturing bison for the BCTP and TFTP while supporting harvest opportunities outside the Park.” See Appendix B.

In response to a question from NPT, Chris/NPS noted that the highest number of bison to date was in the summer of 2023, when the population was just under 6,000. The prior record was around 4,000 in the year 2000.

The population has oscillated but the Partners have successfully managed it.

Going into this winter, the Partners will undertake a shared effort to collectively reduce the population. Chris/YNP noted that taking too many bison in a single winter upsets the population demography; thus respecting the upper limit of 1,375 (25% of current population) is important in a strong migration year. The age-sex structure helps maintain the population. It is important not to be overly prescriptive during this time. YNP needs to hear from Partners what is happening on the ground in the Tolerance Zone. How close is the take to 25%? The weekly check-in calls with Tribal hunters are vital.

Erik/NPT asked why treaty-reserved rights appear at the bottom of the decision tree. This makes Tribes feel that their access is secondary. Hazing (or trapping) while there are hunters on the landscape is a concern because Tribal hunters have only limited time and space to be out there.

Since 2018, Treaty Hunt Tribes have harvested bison in the Tolerance Zone at a scale that was not envisioned at the start of IBMP. The situation of 1,700 bison harvested since about 2018 and 400-500 donated as food through the TFTP creates a need to “keep the conversation current” through the major changes happening on the ground.

John Harrison/CSKT described how weather conditions can affect bison movements and challenge Partner collaboration. Hunt managers calls start about the time bison start coming out of the Park. Early capture creates friction as it affects bison coming out that could be harvested. Yet NPS cannot wait so long to capture bison that females are late term. Perhaps a rolling capture scenario would work.

The hunt manager calls are vital; this season they will be run by Tom Wadsworth/Shoshone-Bannock Tribes (SBT). They will start in November and communicate the weekly or even day-by-day situation on the ground. Full participation in these calls is vital. The calls start with roll call but often lacking participation by all 8 active THTs.

In response to a question by Whisper/CSKT, Chris/NPS noted that in a big migration year, it is important to maintain the herd structure to preserve the equal sex ratio (males-females) and 70% older animals plus 30% calves + yearlings. And the recommendation is not specific to Northern or Western Management Areas. YNP views the northern and western herds as a single metapopulation with two breeding units; there does not seem to be a significant difference in the original lineage of the two YNP subpopulations. YNP sees its fellow IBMP Partners as co-stewards and disease managers of this population.

D. Partners' Operational Perspectives on Planning for Managing Bison in Tolerance Zone 2

Mike/CGNF lead a roundtable sharing by Partners of their respective roles in relation to bison in Tolerance Zone 2. Annual Reports from previous years (*Ref#13: IBMP Annual Report Nov 2022-Oct 2023* and *Ref#9: Draft Annual Report, Nov 1, 2023-to October 31, 2024*) provide insights on operations to occur over the year ahead.

Mike/CGNF—CGNF provides habitat for bison coming out of the Park, and also a place where Tribes can exercise their Treaty-reserved rights. CGNF will be relying on lessons learned from the 2022-23 season about carcass management to address challenges like potential brucellosis transmission risk, removals under frigid conditions, and readiness of the Logan landfill to accept bison carcasses and will look to Partners to collaborate on a step-wise plan.

CGNF is working with Kqyn/MFWP on a “pregame” plan for the season that includes conveying to THTs where to be/go plus food storage rules as well as CGNF Travel Planning information. Could the Partners develop a short orientation for THT hunters that stop in at the District Ranger’s office? The new IBMP website could also help. Moreover, how can the Partners collectively build relationships with the Gardiner and West Yellowstone communities to enable them to understand the purpose of bison management and the BCTP?

Tim/NPS—With the Status Report/ROD 2024 strategy and tactics in place, NPS is prepared for snow this winter that would facilitate a good level of migration. The decision tree will guide operations. Chris/NPS and Kevin Dooley both play roles in ensuring the boundary interface with Partners balances with what NPS is legally charged with doing.

Ervin/ITBC—No bison came out of BCTP quarantine this year. A new facility on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming is under consideration that would enable ITBC member Tribes to receive more bison. Bringing bison out of the Park alive improves the genetics of Tribal buffalo herds, some kept as separate Yellowstone animal herds. The Three Affiliated Tribes in North Dakota received a family group through ITBC, which they may grow or put into a bigger herd. Generally, Tribes can manage the received Yellowstone-origin bison as they see fit, but Yellowstone genetics are revered. Tribes may ultimately trade bulls to increase genetic diversity among Tribal herds. Trudy/ITBC introduced Foster Cournoyer, who is working with ITBC to collect traditional ecological knowledge of Yellowstone and seeks to interview the THTs to get the “Tribal story.”

Mike/MDOL—The migration year was light but with conducive weather, MDOL may be called upon to act, e.g. if female bison are in Zone 2 close to May. The goal is to keep pressure off the Zone 2-3 boundary to avoid a breach. If

bison get out and pop up on private property, MDOL has a limited ability to act. MDOL prefers THT hunting over MDOL hazing to manage bison at the NMA boundary. On the WMA there is more latitude for year-round bison presence. MDOL will act if a citizen's property is threatened or, for instance, if a large group of bison is in a campground. The MDOL veterinary diagnostic lab in Bozeman is available to conduct brucellosis testing for animal's potentially entering quarantine. Dialogue followed about the issue of availability of a processing facility willing/able to take bison that are brucellosis-positive. MDOL can advise on which facilities might be amenable to modifying to accommodate bison. Erik Holt/NPT noted that NPT appreciated the coordination with MDOL to hunt the bison approaching the Zone 2-3 boundary in 2023.

Tahnee/MDOL—Essential are good communications between Partners on test results, classification of test results, on-the-ground staffing for potential movements, and documentation of operations.

John/CSKT—CSKT hunters receive orientations. CSKT is part of the Beattie Gulch MOA on hunter safety. Also, the Tribal Council is informed of results from hunt coordination meeting calls. The CSKT hunt is adaptively managed within the season. While CSKT partners with NPS on the Tribal Food Transfer Program, generally CSKT prefer to harvest bison in the traditional way. CSKT would still like to see some translocation of bison within the Tolerance Zone to establish herd memory. For example, Taylor Fork is closed to CSKT hunters and CSKT encourages other THT hunt managers to do the same. Stephanie can be tapped for her wealth of knowledge. Also, John reminded the Partners that for CSKT, the hunt is “not a function or tool of operation” but a treaty-reserved right to manage in their traditions.

Ashton/NPT—Noting that he is a NPTEC member (Treasurer), Ashton expressed NPT's desire for as much opportunity to hunt as possible as part of NPT's treaty-reserved rights. Ashton also asked about long-term goals for the BCTP offspring. What if the off-site (in Tribal herds) population becomes larger than the Park's? Will the BCTP sunset or continue? Hunt opportunities for the next generation are paramount. Could the Yellowstone bison transferred to Tribes be someday reintroduced to the Park to keep the genetics diversifying? Erik/NPT also noted that NPT looks forward to participating in the important weekly hunt coordination calls.

Burke/APHIS—APHIS supports the BCTP and quarantine to determine bison are brucellosis-free. He noted that facility costs are the same whether the facility is empty or full. APHIS is “in it” for the period of time needed and also asked about a long-term goal so that properties can be leased accordingly. See also [*Ref#14: JAVMA Article on Duration of Quarantine for Bison.*](#)

Dustin/MFWP—MFWP will be monitoring safety closures in the Tolerance Zone, participating in the hunt coordination calls, and assisting MDOL in any way it can.

E. Bison Use of the Western & Northern Management Areas of Tolerance Zone 2 on CGNF

With Tolerance Zone maps ([*Ref#7: Maps of Northern + Western Bison Management Zones*](#)) on the screen, Mike Thom/CGNF introduced this session describing how within the sideboards of Partner authorities, Partners could consider whether or not bison are using the Tolerance Zone to the extent they could. Recognizing the need to avoid pressure on the boundaries, the Tolerance Zone is there for a purpose. Partners might look at the habitat and how the population could naturally dissipate—also enabling the Tribal hunts to occur on a broader landscape.

1. Hunt Concentration Areas of the Tolerance Zone

Erik/NPT described the competition among Tribes with more entities hunting now and how it is like “every man for himself.” He mentioned the near-miss accident involving a NPT hunter in 2023. He also mentioned that not every THT participates in the weekly hunt coordination calls. Moreover, not every hunter is seasoned and prepared for what a bison harvest involves; NPT has had to help others. Generally, it has been hard to plan out the hunt day-to-day. The MOA is helpful for safety, but not all THTs have signed on. There is still not enough bison to meet hunter demand; 75 NPT hunters were ready last winter. Hunting occurs in a congested, confined space. Even with a first-come, first-serve approach, the hunt is sometimes not equitable.

John/CSKT noted that with every entity having its own mission and goals, coordination is essential to avoid stovepiped decisions. A good example of coordination was when bison got past Cutler Meadows, MDOL got on the hunt coordination call and THT hunters fulfilled their tags. John also suggested that Partners consider managing to the point of conflict versus to a number. Moreover, it is important to build social tolerance for bison on the landscape. IBMP needs to evolve as a group to “adaptively manage.”

2. Tribal Hunt Results and Plans

There are 8 “Treaty Hunt Tribes” (THTs) known to be acting upon Treaty-reserved hunting rights in Tolerance Zone 2 ([Ref#16: Treaty Hunt Tribes Directory](#)): the four that have signed a Treaty Tribe Hunt MOA (CSKT, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, NPT, Yakama Nation) and four others (Blackfeet Tribe, Crow Tribe, Northern Arapaho Tribe, and Shoshone-Bannock Tribes). Those with representatives present reported:

- CSKT hunt season runs September 1, 2024 to January 31, 2025. CSKT wardens will be on the ground in January but are available earlier if needed. About 300 permits have been issued to CSKT hunters.
- NPT hunt season started on August 15, 2024 and will close on April 15, 2025. For enforcement questions, contact Erik Holt or Eric Kash Kash. Permit numbers are set each week after the hunt coordination calls.
- Shoshone-Bannock’s season will be the same as last year (year-round), according to Bret Haskett.
- Andrew Wildbill reported Umatilla’s hunt season runs December 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025 (bulls only). Two conservation officers will be on site when Umatilla hunters are on the ground. Umatilla will not hunt the WMA.
- Yakama’s season runs January 6 to March 22, 2025, according to Kristi Olney, Yakama Big Game Biologist. It is unlikely any Yakama hunters will hunt the WMA.
- Devin Oldman reported that Northern Arapaho’s season runs November 1, 2024 to April 30, 2025 (or year-round). Because there are two Tribes involved, game wardens are not assigned because of potential conflict. However, Northern Arapaho hunters know the regulations.

No representatives of the Crow or Blackfeet reported on their hunt seasons.

VI. OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC FEEDBACK SESSION

The morning session concluded with the Public Feedback Session. Individuals who had signed up by 10:00a that morning were given the opportunity to speak for a period of time determined by 30 minutes (as stated in the Protocols) divided by the number of presenters (for October 29, five). The following members of the public spoke during this session:

- *Ellie Brighton, Montana Stockgrowers Association*
- *Jaedin Medicine Elk, Roam Free Nation*
- *Michael Saul, Defenders of Wildlife*
- *Stephanie Seay, Roam Free Nation*

- *Wendy Whitehorn, Concerned Montanan*

Lead Partner Mike/CGNF dismissed the group for a lunch break.

VII. IBMP OPERATIONS PLAN REVIEW & PLANNING

A. Decision-Making and Operations Plan Protocol & Process Review

IBMP Lead Partner Mike Thom opened this session with a review of past Operations Plan issues. The Ops Plan had become unwieldy and overly prescriptive, drifting away from the charter of IBMP. Over the past year or so, the Partners deconstructed the Ops Plan to establish fidelity to its original intent and purpose. It is intended to be an annual coordinating effort to address the migration of bison out of Yellowstone National Park and into the Tolerance Zone. Accompanying the Ops Plan is *Ref#17: IBMP Partner Statutory Authorities & Jurisdictions*, with individual Partner entries kept up to date by the respective Partner entities. without weighing in on another Partner's entries.

The Operations Plan Subcommittee met with facilitation in September and reviewed last December's unsigned draft Ops Plan updated with edits from each Partner. The Partners continued to work on their Ops Plan entries to their satisfaction. This enabled all Partners to be prepared to vote on the Ops Plan at the October 29 meeting. Shared on the screen, the Ops Plan format (approved by Partners in meetings prior) was described by the Facilitator; it includes a table summarizing areas of Partner coordination requested by each Partner.

B. Adopting the IBMP Operations Plan

Mike/CGNF called for a vote, and the Ops Plan was approved with all Partners voting yes. The Partners then agreed it was most efficient to sign the Ops Plan onsite, a process facilitated so that all Partners signed prior to departing.

IBMP Partners Decision #6—The November 1, 2024-October 31, 2025 IBMP Operations Plan was adopted and signed by all Partners.

VIII. UPDATES ON PAST TOPICS PRESENTED TO IBMP

The Partners were invited to share any updates on past topics of IBMP meetings. Mike/CGNF commented that updates to the Adaptive Management Plan are important to regaining traction; some changes are merely grammatical. On the topic of hunters in the Tolerance Zone converting lead to nonlead ammunition, Whisper/CSKT noted that CSKT is offering \$40 gift certificates to hunters willing to make the switch and seeing some progress. Erik/NPT said the Tribe has a 6-year grant to help Tribal members convert to nonlead ammo use, including on Tribal land, with a trade-in of lead for copper. NPT also wrote a large America the Beautiful grant proposal which would enable THTs in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem to convert for the purpose of eagle conservation.

Andrew Wildbill/Yakama indicated that the morning coordination meeting location will be at the check station across from Cutler Meadows. He asked if there might be an alternative location closer to Gardiner. Kevin Dooley/NPS suggested that hunts staged from near Cinnabar Basin be coordinated well before shooting light and coordinating from there could reduce those setting up a line at Beattie Gulch. NPT suggested meeting one hour before sunrise. Eric Kash Kash requested more dialogue on carcass cleanup plans. NPT is willing to involve Tribal volunteers to help alleviate community concerns. Mike/CGNF will involve Kqyn/MFWP to start that dialogue.

IX. IBMP CALENDAR FOR 2024 WITH LOOK TOWARD 2025

The Partners agreed to set dates and locations for the 2025 IBMP Partners meetings:

- The Spring 2025 IBMP Partners Meeting will take place in Bozeman, Montana on May 14, 2025
- The Fall 2025 IBMP Partners Meeting will take place in Butte, Montana on October 28, 2025.

X. CLOSING

MFWP will be IBMP Lead Partner in 2025 (starting in January). Mike/CGNF wrapped up the IBMP Meeting thanking all for coming and welcoming Dustin/MFWP as new Lead Partner starting in January and thanking the Partners for a very productive meeting. Ashton/NPT was invited to share a concluding Tribal prayer that he sang to commemorate the conclusion of a successful IBMP Meeting.

APPENDIX A

Attendance Record

(In addition to IBMP Partner Primaries, Seconds and Treaty Hunt Tribe Representatives listed on pages 1-2)

IBMP Partner Staff

CSKT— Whisper Camel Means; Shannon Clairmont; Sattie Fisher; Stephanie Gillin; Kari Kingery

InterTribal Buffalo Council—Mikiah Reuther; Foster Cournoyer

Nez Perce Tribe—James Holt

Others

- Billings Gazette—Brett French
- Buffalo Field Campaign— Darrell Geist
- Defenders of Wildlife—Michael Saul
- Greater Yellowstone Coalition— Shana Drimal
- Idaho Conservation League— Jeff Abrams
- Montana Governor Gianforte’s Office—Celia Rigler; Rachel Meredith
- Montana Stockgrowers Association—Ellie Brighton
- National Park Conservation Association—Dominique LaFarge
- Northern Arapaho—Devin Oldman
- Roam Free Nation—Jaedin Medicine Elk; Stephanie Seay
- Sierra Club—Nick Gevock
- Wendy Whitehorn, *Concerned Montanan*

APPENDIX B

REFERENCE #12: 2024 NPS Population Status to Yellowstone National Park Superintendent

Status Report can be found at: <https://ibmp.info/Library/OpsPlans/2024SE~1.PDF>

Presentation by Chris Geremia, Lead Bison Biologist, Yellowstone National Park

Status Report on the Yellowstone Buffalo Population

National Park Service
2024

NPS Record of Decision 2024

The NPS will manage bison following the 2024 ROD that supports a wild and free ranging bison population and reduce the risk of brucellosis transmission

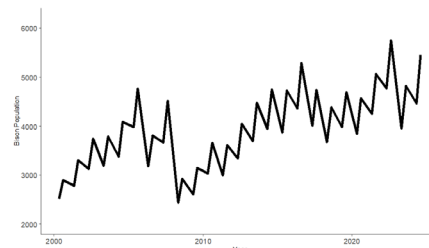
NPS Record of Decision 2024

- Set target population range
- Adaptive management objectives related to demographics, genetics, ecology, social considerations and reducing the risk of brucellosis transmission
- Tactics for managing population size

- ✓ 3,500 – 6,000 bison post-calving

April 2024: 4,469

August 2024: 5,449



✓ Balanced Sex Ratio & Age Structure

- 54.7% female & 45.3% male
- 67.2% adult & 32.8% juvenile
- 47 calves per 100 2+ year old female

✓ Maintain existing low risk of brucellosis transmission from buffalo to cattle

- 0 transmission events
- 0 bison outside MT tolerance area

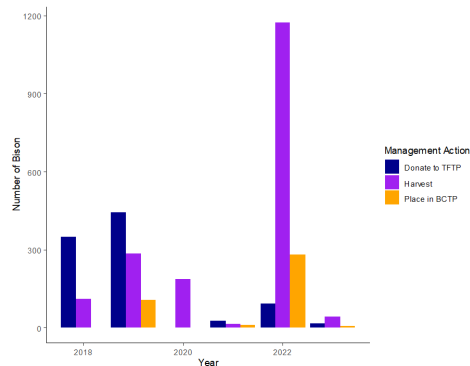
✓ Protect human safety and property and mitigate conflicts

✓ Maintain or lower brucellosis prevalence

- 2,260 brucellosis tests since 2018
- 40.9% population prevalence

✓ More bison removed by harvest than the Tribal Food Transfer Program

- In 2024 – 5 BCTP, 14 TFTP, 41 harvest
- Past 5 years – 402 BCTP, 581 TFTP, 1700 harvest



Operate BCTP at Capacity

CAPACITY

- 200-300 animal holding capacity
- 100-300 animals to tribes annually

2024

- ~135 in BCTP facilities
- 116 transferred to tribes

Tactics for Managing Population

NPS take precautions to manage within 3,500-6,000

<3,000 late winter: take precautions to protect the population

3,500-5,200: BCTP, donate brucellosis positive to TFTP & rely on harvests to control numbers

>5,200: use all tools to manage for a decreasing population

Winter 2024-25

Work with partners to reduce the population

Removal limit of 1,375 (25%)

Remove age/sex proportional to current conditions

Balance capturing bison for the BCTP and TFTP while supporting harvest opportunities outside the Park

1. **Have removals surpassed 25% of the population?**
 - o Yes → Go to Step 2.
 - o No → Go to Step 3.
2. **Are harvests continuing, or is the state tolerance area full?**
 - o Yes → Coordinate with partners to reduce harvests and NPS capture; hold animals if necessary.
 - o No → Continue monitoring and coordinating with partners.
3. **Is the BCTP at capacity?**
 - o No → Use passive capture to support both capture and harvest opportunities. Place animals in the BCTP and donate brucellosis-positive animals to TFTP.
 - o Yes → Go to Step 4.
4. **Are harvests on track to reduce the population and remove up to 25%?**
 - o Yes → Continue monitoring and coordinating with partners.
 - o No → Go to Step 5.
5. **Are there logistical (i.e., weather, time of year, facility) constraints on meeting the objective?**
 - o No → Intensify capture and prioritize donating brucellosis-positive animals to TFTP when feasible.
 - o Yes → Greatly intensify capture and donate all bison to TFTP.