

Interagency Bison Management Plan



Annual Report

November 1, 2022 through October 31, 2023



This report summarizes progress under the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) during the annual period from November 1, 2022, to October 31, 2023. 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), including meeting reports, key science reports, and historical documents.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).

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1. Background

In 2000, the Federal government and the State of Montana agreed to an Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) 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 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 objectives²:

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 status³.
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.

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 The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation 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 Objectives are from the 2017 Winter Operations Plan and based on the 2000 Final Environmental Impact Statement and Records of Decision.

³ 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.

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

NPS reports the population ranged from about 5,472 animals in June 2021 to about 5,020 animals at the end of winter before increasing to 6,013 animals in summer 2022. Few bison were removed over the past two winters when snow conditions were well below average, resulting in a 27% increase in numbers since 2020. The proportion of females in the population increased over the last year with 91 males per 100 females (excluding calves). Over the last five years, the sex ratio averaged 52% males and 48% females. The population consisted of 31% juvenile animals (0 to 16 months of age), including 45 calves per 100 adult females and 39 yearlings per 100 adult females. Over the past five years, the age composition averaged 28% juveniles and 72% adults. Aerial surveys in August 2022 counted 4,420 and 4,507 bison in the Northern herd (5-year average 3,760), and 1,284 and 1,432 bison in the Central herd (5-year average 1,318).

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.

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

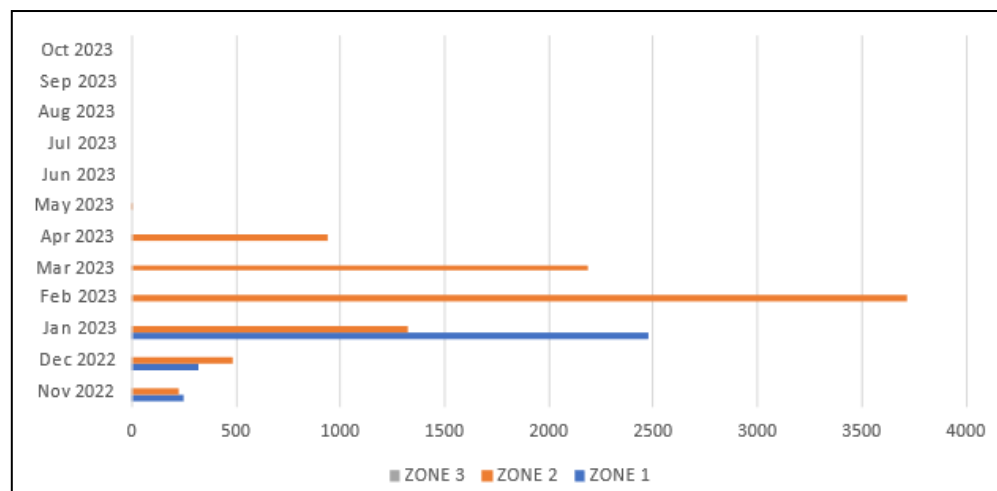
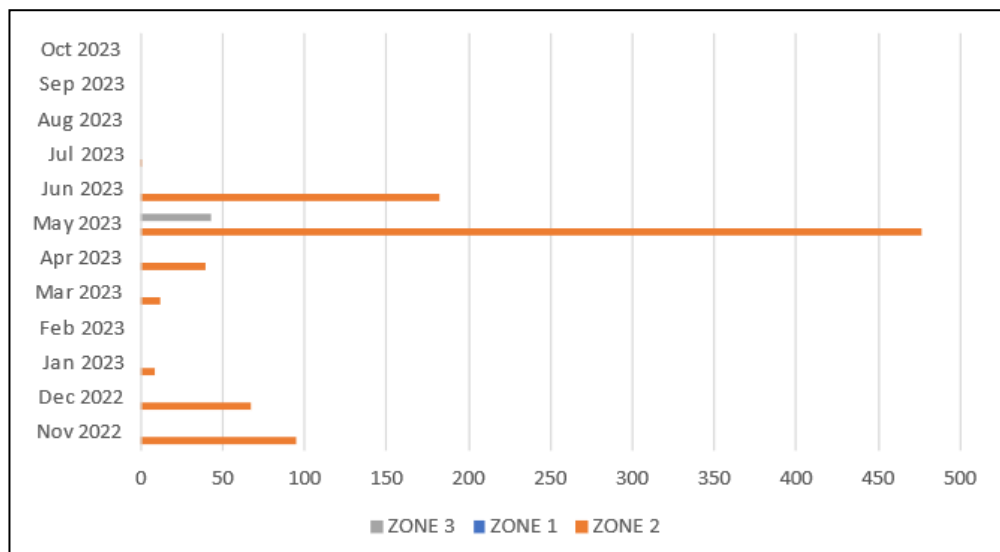


Figure 2: Number of Bison Observed per Month in Zones 1-3 of Hebgen Basin



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.

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

OWNER	ZONE	EST. # OF CATTLE	CLASS	ON-DATE	OFF-DATE
Bridger Cunningham	2	60/6	Pairs/Bulls	June 24	Oct 1
Cinnabar Basin (leased)	2	20	Pairs	June 20	Oct 15
Yellowstone Cattle Co	3	100	Pairs	May 21	Oct 14
B-Bar	3	150	Yearlings	June 15	Nov 15
Anderson Ranch	3	92	Pairs	July 1	Sep 1
West Creek Ranch	3	150	Pairs	Year-round	N/A

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

PROPERTY OWNER	LIVESTOCK OWNER	ZONE	DATE IN	EST. # OF CATTLE	CLASS	DATE OUT
Whitman	West Yellowstone	2	Year Round	200/4	Pairs/Bulls	N/A
PP—Deep Well Ranch	LM—Twin Bridges, MT	3	June 15	320/10	Pairs/Bulls	Nov 3
LD—Quarter Circle JK	CC/BF—Cameron, MT	3	July 1	22/1	Pairs/Bulls	
USFS—South Fork Allotment	CC/BF—Cameron, MT	3	July 1	11/1	Pairs/Bulls	Oct 17
USFS—Watkins Cr. Allotment	CC/BF—Cameron, MT	3	July 1	55/4	Pairs/Bulls	Oct 17

4. IBMP Operations Plan

NPS recommended that removals should be reflective of number of animals migrating to the northern park boundary, capacity for live transfer of animals, hunter success outside the park, and number of conflicts outside the park. NPS recommended that removals should not exceed 1,500 animals through all methods combined. IBMP Partners were unable to reach consensus for a removal recommendation in November 2022 and did not construct an Operations Plan. For the year ahead, the Partners are turning to a new, more workable format for adoption.

5. Bison Migration and Distribution

Bison Movement and Trends

The maximum count of bison north of Mammoth Hot Springs was 2,172 on March 18, 2023. This equates to a migration of more than 4,100 bison when accounting for additional bison held within the capture facility or harvested prior to counting. The migration was more than twice the previous high of 1,978 bison in 2008. More than 1,000 animals were north of Mammoth Hot Springs from January 3–April 3, 2023. Numbers outside YNP varied through winter, averaging 34 animals/day in November, 40/day in December, 206/day in January, 558/day in February, 410/day in March, and 140/day in April. More than 100 bison were counted outside the park on 83 days, more than 250 on 52 days, more than 500 on 23 days, and more than 1,000 on 3 days. Counting did not occur on 14 days during November thru April. Bison movements were coordinated with large aggregations moving from within YNP near the north entrance area to northern extent of the Tolerance Zone and returning over approximate 8-16-day periods through winter. Numbers moving out of the park peaked in March. Bison used the full extent of the State of Montana Tolerance Zone along the Yellowstone River from the YNP boundary to Yankee Jim Canyon.

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 this summary of total bison harvested by hunters in the Tolerance Zone:

- **NMA**—An estimated total of 1,100 bison were harvested by hunters, including 50 by state-licensed hunters, 1,000 by Treaty Hunt Tribes, and 47 by unidentified hunters.
- **WMA**—An estimated total of 41 bison were harvested by hunters, including 25 by state-licensed hunters and 10 by Treaty Hunt Tribes.
- The combined estimated total is **1,138** bison harvested by hunters.

Table 2. 2022-23 Summary of Capture, Harvests, and Hazing

Updated 10/25/2023

		Northern Management Area - Gardiner Basin									Western Management Area - Hebgen Basin											
							Calves									Calves						
		Adult Bulls	Yearling Bulls	Adult Cows	Yearling Cows	Unknown	Male Calves	Female Calves	Unknown Calves	Subtotal North	Adult Bulls	Yearling Bulls	Adult Cows	Yearling Cows	Unknown	Male Calves	Female Calves	Unknown Calves	Subtotal West			
Harvest by Hunting																						
MT State-Licensed Hunters		28	0	20	0	1	1	0	0	50	14	0	10	0	0	1	0	0	25	75		
Hunting by Treaty Tribes		401	0	347	0	20	97	124	11	1000	2	0	3	0	0	1	4	0	10	1010		
CSKT		69	0	45	0	0	14	20	0	148	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	151		
Nez Perce Tribe		155	0	100	0	0	59	87	11	412	0	0	2	0	0	0	3	0	5	417		
CTUIR		28	0	44	0	0	17	10	0	99	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	99			
Shoshone-Bannock		15	0	8	0	0	1	4		28	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	28			
Yakama Nation		4	0	16	0	0	6	2	0	28	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	30		
Blackfeet Nation		70	0	101	0	0			0	171	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	171			
Northern Arapaho		53	0	25	0	0			0	78	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	78			
Crow		7	0	8	0	20		1	0	36	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	36			
Unidentified Hunters		0	0	0	0	47			0	47	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	6	53		
Total Harvests by Hunters		429	0	367	0	68	98	124	11	1097	16	0	13	0	6	2	4	0	41	1138		
Wounded Shot/Found Dead by NPS in YNP		3	0	13	0	1	0	0	9	26	0	0	0	0	0			0	0	26		
Wounding Loss Reported by MFWP Outside YNP		0	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	10	1	0	0	0	0			0	1	11		
Total Wounding Loss		3	0	13	0	11	0	0	9	36	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	37		
TOTAL BISON HUNT		432	0	380	0	79	98	124	20	1133	17	0	13	0	6	2	4	0	42	1175		
Bison Loss																						
NPS Consigned to Slaughter		18	0	70	0	0	0	0	0	88	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	88		
NPS Capture Pen Mortality		0	0	4	0	0	0	0	2	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6		
MDOL Management Shooting		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
TOTAL OTHER BISON LOSS		18	0	74	0	0	0	0	2	94	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	94		
TOTAL BISON MORTALITY		450	0	454	0	79	98	124	22	1227	17	0	13	0	6	2	4	0	42	1269		
Entered into BCTP		0	43	0	66	0	0	0	173	282	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	282		
TOTAL REMOVAL		450	43	454	66	79	98	124	195	1509	17	0	13	0	6	2	4	0	42	1551		
Released into YNP		55	34	242	54	432	0	0	20	837	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	837		
Motor Vehicle Collision										3									22	25		

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, 2022-January 31, 2023 pursuant to annual regulations adopted by the CSKT Tribal Council. CSKT hunt harvest totals were:

- NMA—69 adult bulls; 45 adult cows; 14 male calves; 20 female calves (total 148)
- WMA—2 adult bulls; 1 female calf (total in Western Area 3)
- Total CSKT Harvest was 151.

NPT's bison hunt season in the WMA opened September 1, 2022 in the WMA, and December 14, 2022 in the NMA. Both areas closed on April 1, 2023. 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—155 adult bulls; 100 adult cows; 59 male calves; 87 female calves; and 11 sex-unknown calves (total 412)
- WMA—5 cows; 3 female calves (total 5)
- Total NPT harvest was 417.

Coordination of Management Activities

Bison season was open for Montana state-licensed hunters November 15, 2022-February 15, 2023. 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 intended to prioritize enforcement. Weekly Tribal and state hunt coordination calls occurred every Wednesday from about February 1-May 3, 2023.

USFS reported that the heavy bison harvest season left bison carcasses and remains, that were not utilized by hunters, scattered across National Forest System lands. Some locations, like Beattie Gulch, had heavy concentrations of carcasses while other locations had lighter concentrations. USFS coordinated a partner effort to remove carcasses from the landscape at Beattie Gulch, necessary because:

- Tourists and residents also utilize the Old Yellowstone Trail South corridor past Beattie Gulch for wildlife watching, hiking, dog walking, and other recreational uses. Removing the bison remains improved the visual quality to these users.
- Removal of remains also decreased the amount of wildlife attractants on the landscape in closer proximity to private land, residents, and vacation rentals.
- Removal of remains also theoretically removed the presence of some lead ammunition. The risk and prevalence of lead ammunition use was presented by the NPT during the Fall 2022 IBMP Partners Meeting.

7. Culling (Capture and Removal)

NPS reported 1,213 bison captured through winter, including 837 released back into YNP, 282 entered in the Bison Conservation Transfer Program, 88 consigned to slaughter, and 6 dying while held.

Bison Consigned to Slaughter and Transfer to Tribes

CSKT received 88 bison over the winter operations period from the NPS through the Stevens Creek trap, and an additional 23 in September of 2023.

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. In March 2023, 7 bulls traversed over the frozen cattle guard on Highway 89 at the boundary of Zones 2 and 3 and were hazed back. The remainder of hazing events took place within Zone 2, with many being pre-emptive in nature.

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

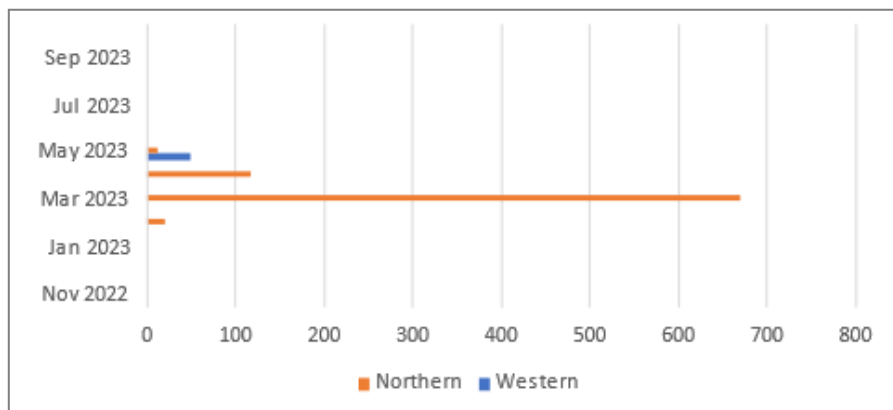


Figure 5: Total number of bison hazed per year in the NMA and WMA since 2017.

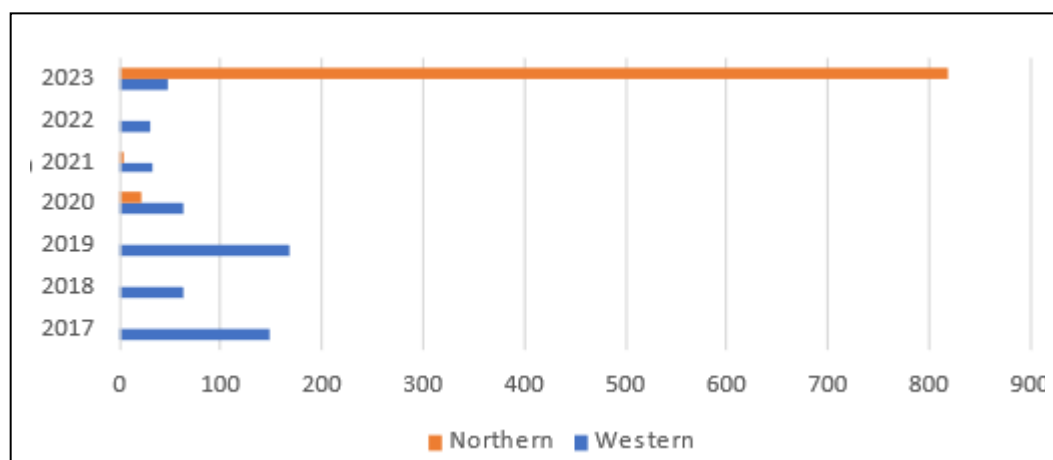


Table 3: Summary of Hazing Activity in Zones 2 and 3 in Northern Management Area

Date	Head Count	Sex	From	To	Zone
2/17/2023	16	mixed	Jack Leg fence and bison guard at Yankee Jim	Cutler Meadow	2
2/18/2023	5	bulls	Private driveway	Highway	2
3/5/2023	2	bulls	OYT cattle guard	Cutler Meadow	2
3/6/2023	91	mixed	OYT cattle guard	Cutler Meadow	2
3/8/2023	51	mixed	Hwy 89 cattle guard	Old Shooting Star Property	2
3/8/2023	24	mixed	Hwy 89 cattle guard	Old Shooting Star Property	2
3/8/2023	100	mixed	OYT cattle guard	Cutler Meadow	2
3/9/2023	48	mixed	Hwy 89 cattle guard	Old Shooting Star Property	2
3/10/2023	42	mixed	Hwy 89 cattle guard	Old Shooting Star Property, then animals took off north on their own	2
3/12/2023	107	mixed	7 bulls on Hwy 89	Into Zone 2, then picked up an additional 100 head mixed sex and hazed them to Old Shooting Star Property	3
3/13/2023	25	mixed	OYT cattle guard	Cutler Meadow	2
3/22/2023	30	mixed	Joe Brown Fishing Access/ Hwy 89 South	Old Shooting Star Property	2
3/30/2023	150	mixed	Cattle guard	Cutler Meadow	2
4/4/2023	7	bulls	Joe Brown Fishing Access	Old Shooting Star Property	2
4/4/2023	7	bulls	Joe Brown Fishing Access	Cutler Meadow	2
4/4/2023	30	mixed	OYT cattle guard	Cutler Meadow	2
4/5/2023	50	mixed	Cattle guard	Cutler Meadow	2
4/5/2023	7	bulls	OYT cattle guard	Cutler Meadow	2
4/7/2023	11	mixed	OYT cattle guard	Cutler Meadow	2
4/11/2023	1	bull	Hwy 89 cattle guard	Old Shooting Star Property	2
4/18/2023	1	bulls	Joe Brown Fishing Access	Old Shooting Star Property	2
4/20/2023	2	bulls	Cottonwood trees in Cutler Meadow	South end of Cutler Meadow	2
4/26/2023	1	bulls	Joe Brown Fishing Access	South of Francis Rigler's property	2
5/1/2023	9	cow/ calves	Royal Teton Ranch HQ below Beattie Gulch	Yellowstone National Park (YNP) boundary	2
5/2/2023	2	cows	Brogan's property on Hwy 89 South	YNP boundary	2
5/15/2023	16	cows/ calves	3 mi marker on Madison Arm Rd, along Hebgen Lake, swam across Madison River	Horse Butte area	2
5/15/2023	5	cows/ calves	3 mi marker on Madison Arm Rd, along Hebgen Lake, swam across Madison River	Horse Butte area	2
5/27/2023	27	mixed	2 mi marker on Madison Arm Rd, through timber along Madison Arm Rd, swam across Madison River	Horse Butte area	2

The winter saw a large number of bison exiting YNP into Zone 2 of the NMA. MDOL conducted numerous hazing operations of bison within Zone 2 as animals moved in proximity to the Zone 3 boundary or in proximity to geographic areas of concern for subsequent movement of animals into Zone 3. See Table 3.

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.

9. Brucellosis Testing and Vaccination

NPS reported 660 of 1,123 bison were tested for brucellosis exposure using onsite tests. Seroprevalence was 2% (n=183) for calves, 44% (n=199) for yearlings, 70% (n=234) for adult females, and 68% (n=44) for adult males. NPS did not vaccinate bison for brucellosis.

10. Post-Winter Status and Trends

Bison Quarantine

NPS transferred 50 bison to the Assiniboine and Sioux of Fort Peck for assurance testing. NPS entered 282 new animals into the Bison Conservation Transfer Program and transferred 80 bison to APHIS to undergo testing.

APHIS continued Phase 2 testing at Corwin Springs. 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 at certain times. There were 71 bison in APHIS quarantine at the start of 2023.

ITBC hauled a load of bison out of Fort Peck in January and distributed a total of 27 bison (a mix, mostly bulls): Blackfeet Nation (MT); Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe (SD); Forest County Potawatomi (WI); Lower Brule Sioux Tribe (SD); Oglala Sioux Tribe (SD); Osage Nation (OK); Ponca Tribe (NE); Prairie Band Potawatomi (KS); and Prairie Island Indian Community (MN).

11. Human Safety and Property Damage

NPS reported that at least 1 person was injured by bison and 13 bison struck and killed by vehicles in YNP.

Vehicle Collisions with Bison

MFWP reported eight Motor Vehicle Accidents (MVAs), as described in the table below.

Date	Location	Side of YNP	# Bison Injured	# Bison Deceased
12/15/2022	US191 MM10	West		2
12/26/2022	US191 MM4.5	West		1
12/28/2022	US191 MM4	West		13
1/5/2023	Rainbow Point Road MM2	West	2	1
2/9/2023	US89 MM3	North		1
4/4/2023	US191 MM4.5	West		1
5/1/2023	US191 MP6	West		2
9/15/2023	US191	West	unknown	

Human Safety and Property Damage

MFWP reports that generally these incidents include bison on roadways, bison on private property damaging fencing and irrigation equipment, deceased or injured bison in public recreation areas, as reported in the table below.

Side of YNP	Type of Incident	# of Incidents
North	Public Safety (including MVAs)	3
	Property Damage	3
West	Public Safety (including MVAs)	9
	Property Damage	0

There was one criminal case: a Notice-to-Appear issued for shooting bison from public roadway (occurred on Travertine Road on the north side).

Human Safety Issues During the Hunt

NPT reports that on January 17, 2023, Nez Perce Tribal Conservation Enforcement investigated reports of a Nez Perce Tribal member being grazed by a bullet in the Beattie Gulch area, resulting in non-lethal injury. NPT reported the incident to USFS, State of Montana, and Park County law enforcement for a full investigation. Investigation findings are pending. NPT had no other human safety incidents during the hunting season.

USFS reports that the large migration of bison in 2022-2023 brought in a corresponding high amount of hunters to the landscape. Working to continually equip hunters with tools to maintain personal safety, a non-verbal flagging system was created by CGNF and NPT at Beattie Gulch to notify hunters when other hunters were on the landscape actively field dressing and removing harvested animals. Conversations on the weekly hunt coordination calls daylighted the need for this further communication. Flags raised signifies the area is occupied with hunters and vehicles on the Beattie Gulch retrieval road and no shooting is permitted. USFS and NPT law enforcement officers managed this system.

12. Habitat Assessments and Enhancement

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

13. Research and Surveillance

APHIS Veterinary Services collaborated with NPS in the data compilation and modelling of a peer reviewed journal article to determine freedom from *Brucella abortus* (*B. abortus*) in American Bison published by the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* (JAVMA) in March 2023.

This research project reviewed the testing history and management of 578 bison from YNP quarantined for *B. abortus*. Modeling was used to predict the probability of not detecting a *B. abortus* seroreactor over time, and the probability of seroconversion by days in quarantine. The model predicted 99.9% of bison would seroconvert by day 294, and 12.8% of the bison enrolled in quarantine would seroconvert over time. Using a 300-day quarantine period, it would take 30 years to potentially miss 1 seroreactor out of over 8,000 bison enrolled in the quarantine program. Reducing the quarantine program requirements from over 900 days to 300 days would allow management of quarantined bison in coordination with seasonal movement of bison herds and potentially triple the number of brucellosis-free bison available

for distribution. Further evaluation and refinement of the quarantine procedures is planned by APHIS based on this new information.

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

14. Landowner Engagement

Nothing reported on this topic by Partners for 2023.

15. Education and Outreach

Nothing reported on this topic by Partners for 2023.

16. Stakeholder and Public Engagement

The IBMP Partners held two public meetings during the reporting period: on June 7, 2023 in Gardiner, Montana; October 31, 2023, in Pray, 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 31, 2023 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 Draft Environmental Impact Statement on Bison Management

On August 10, 2023, YNP released its Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for a Bison Management Plan for a 45-day public review and comment period. At the request of its partners and the public, NPS extended the public comment period by 15 days, for a total comment period of 60 days. NPS hosted two virtual public meetings during the comment period on August 28 and August 29. Over 150 people participated in the virtual meetings. NPS received 27,143 public comments on the DEIS. Of those comments submitted, 2,771 comments were unique correspondences, meaning not Form Letters. The NPS is currently reviewing all substantive comments submitted during the public comment period and preparing responses. NPS anticipates releasing the Final EIS for public review in June 2024 and completing its NEPA process with a signed Record of Decision detailing the selected action in July 2024.

CSKT is a cooperating agency for the NPS Bison Management Plan EIS. CSKT has participated in consultations with the NPS on the planning process and reviewed and commented on draft documents. CSKT will continue to participate as a cooperating agency throughout the development of the EIS.

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)*

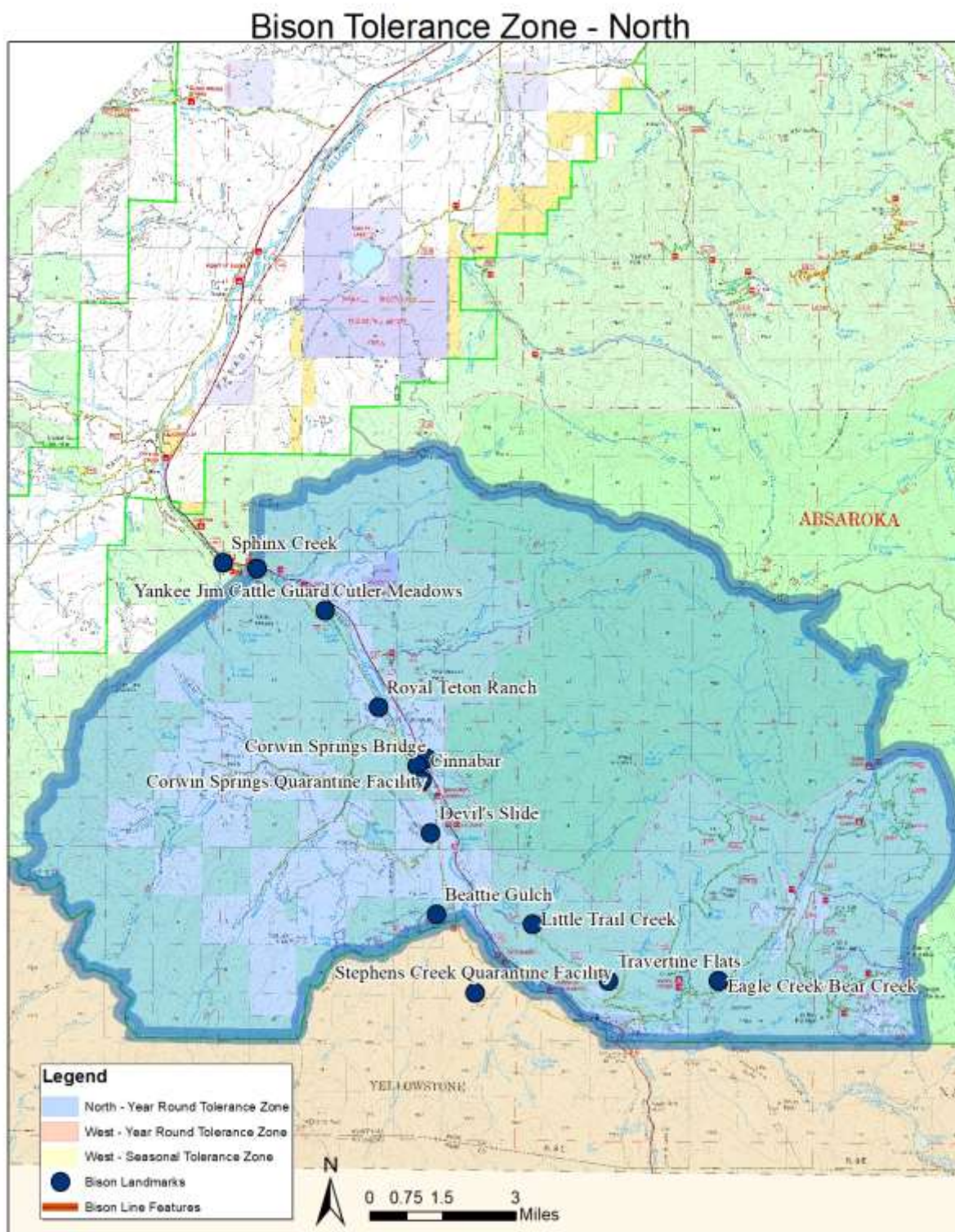
On February 5, 2021, the District Court for the District of Montana granted the NPS a voluntary remand without vacatur to conduct additional NEPA analysis of the IBMP and issue an appropriate final decision. The IBMP would remain in effect until this decision is reached. On July 14, 2021, the plaintiffs appealed the decision to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals requesting a deadline for completion of the NEPA analyses. The Court held a hearing on February 11, 2022, and issued a decision on May 3, 2022, against the plaintiffs. The Department of Justice submits status reports to the Court approximately every 90 days.

- (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)*

On July 9, 2020, the Department of Justice filed a motion for voluntary remand without vacatur (i.e., IBMP remains in effect) or stay of the proceedings until additional NEPA analysis is completed. On December 10, 2020, the District Court for the District of Montana granted NPS a voluntary remand without vacatur to conduct additional NEPA analysis of the IBMP and issue an appropriate final decision. The IBMP would remain in effect until this decision is reached. On May 7, 2021, the plaintiffs appealed the decision to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals requesting a reversal of the court order dismissing the Governor, reversal of the court order granting remand without vacatur, ordering a new district court judge, and partially vacate or enjoin the defendants from hazing Yellowstone bison on federal land under the IBMP until NEPA analyses are complete. The Court held a hearing on February 11, 2022, and issued a decision on March 2, 2022, against the plaintiffs.

Appendix A. Northern and Western Management Area Maps

[Also to be made available online with the new IBMP website, likely in 2024.]



Bison Tolerance Zone - West

