

INTERAGENCY BISON MANAGEMENT PLAN



SPRING 2024 IBMP PARTNERS MEETING REPORT

Tuesday, May 15, 2024 ~ Pray, Montana

Final Approved by All Partners on October 29, 2024

PARTICIPANTS

Lead Partner & Host: Custer Gallatin National Forest

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

IBMP Partner Primaries

Kathleen Minor, Acting Forest Supervisor, Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF), USDA Forest Service [IBMP Lead Partner]

Tom McDonald, Tribal Council Vice Chairman, 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)

Cam Sholly, Superintendent, Yellowstone National Park (YNP), National Park Service

Erik Holt (for **Ashton Picard**, Chaplain, Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee), Nez Perce Tribe (NPT)

Dr. Jennifer Siembieda, Cattle Health Assistant Director, Ruminant Health Center, USDA APHIS VS Strategy & Policy (for **Dr. Burke Healey**, Senior Leader for Policy & Operations), USDA Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

IBMP Partner Seconds

NPS—Tim Reid, Bison Program Coordinator; Jennifer Carpenter, Chief, Yellowstone Center for Resources

ITBC—Majel Russell, Legal Counsel

MDOL—Lindsey Simon, MDOL Legal Counsel

MFWP—Adam Pankratz, Acting Region 3 Supervisor

NPT—Eric Kash Kash, Wildlife Division Director; Mike Lopez, Legal Counsel

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

USFS/CGNF—Jennie O’Conner Card, Ecosystem Staff Officer; Mike Thom, Gardiner District Ranger; Wendi Urie, Hebgen Lake District Ranger.

Treaty Hunt Tribes (non-IBMP Partners)

Blackfeet Nation—Brandon Kittson

Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR)—Andrew Wildbill, Andrea Brown

Shoshone-Bannock Tribes—Bret Haskett

Yakama Nation—Nick Kahmann

Meeting Location: **Chico Hot Springs Convention Center**, Pray, Montana

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

I. MEETING OPENING

The Spring 2024 Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) Partners Meeting started with a call to order by Lead Partner Kathy Minor, Acting Forest Supervisor, Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF). Erik Holt, NPT Fish & Wildlife Commission Chair (at the Deliberative Table to represent Ashton Picard, Chaplain of the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee (NPTEC)) was invited to open the meeting with a Tribal prayer. After, Kathy 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 members of the public in attendance. Kathy also reviewed the agenda available to public participants. She asked for any discussion of agenda amendments, and there being none, called for a vote.

IBMP Partners Decision #1—The Partners approved the Spring IBMP Partners Meeting Agenda.

II. IBMP PAST BUSINESS

Annual Calendar—As Lead Partner, Kathy Minor had generated and shared an IBMP Calendar for approval by the Primaries. It complies with past IBMP decisions to encourage Partner engagement by setting document review deadlines well in advance of meetings. The Calendar also starts the Annual Report and Operations Plan development processes earlier with the hope of completion and Ops Plan signing at the Fall Meeting, to take place on October 29 of this year.

Approval of Last IBMP Meeting Report—The draft Fall 2023 IBMP Partners Meeting Report was posted online in December 2023. Edits were requested from Primaries in advance of posting. Lead Partner Kathy Minor/CGNF asked the Partners for any amendments. Tahnee Szymanski/MDOL asked for a revision to the meeting report and following discussion, it was agreed that alternate language would be provided by MDOL and NPS at a later time. Tahnee/MDOL conferred with Chris Geremia/NPS on amended language in the second paragraph of Section VII regarding the discussion of proposed AMP changes. They requested that the paragraph reads as follows: “Bison vaccination arose as sticking-point topic, with NPS and MDOL on either side of the issue. The Partners decided to review each AMP update and vote on individual clauses.” Because of this amendment, the ***Ref#3: Fall 2023 IBMP Partners Meeting Report (Draft)*** was not approved in final at the Spring 2024 Meeting.

III. IBMP PARTNER UPDATES

The Partners were asked to share any news and legislative, policy, or Tribal Council actions since October 2023 and how those might impact the IBMP.

USDA Forest Service Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF)—Acting Forest Supervisor Kathy Minor described several personnel transitions. The new Forest Supervisor should be announced soon. Wendi Urie is the Hebgen Lake District Ranger, taking the place of Jason Brey. Gabe Gassman is Acting Patrol Captain, taking the place of Nate Card.

Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes (CSKT)—Tribal Council Vice Chair Tom McDonald described new funding achieved for the meat processing facility that can handle bison.

InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC)—ITBC President Ervin Carlson noted that new Tribes are receiving Yellowstone bison through the Bison Conservation & Transfer Program (BCTP) and ITBC distribution efforts, such as the Peoria Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma.

Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL)—Mike Honeycutt was unable to attend in person due to a broken ankle but participated virtually in reporting updates with Dr. Tahnee Szymanski. The Madison County cattle herd tested negative for brucellosis. No bison were found outside the Western part of the Tolerance Zone, so no hazing plan was needed. Zach Martin has started as new MDOL staff. MDOL Legal Counsel Lindsey Simon, sitting at the Deliberative Table, was also introduced with Mike noting her deep experience at the Departments of Justice and Labor.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP)—Director Dustin Temple reported that FWP is working on mule deer and big horn sheep provisions. State hunt numbers are set.

National Park Service/Yellowstone National Park (YNP)—YNP Superintendent Cam Sholly reported that 2024 Yellowstone National Park visitor numbers will likely exceed the 2023 number of visitors (4.5 million). Also, an independent science panel has found cutthroat trout on a path to full recovery in the park. YNP is launching an Environmental Assessment for a permanent new road from the north entrance in Gardiner to Mammoth Hot Springs, as the current temporary road constructed post-flood is not adequate for the scale of use. It's a vital road for access to and by the gateway towns of Gardiner and Cooke City-Silver Gate, and for Lamar Valley visitors. Finally, the cooperating agencies have by now received the final draft bison Environmental Impact Statement and a record of decision (ROD) is expected by July 2024.

Nez Perce Tribe (NPT)—Erik Holt reported that the Tribe is very focused on chronic wasting disease (CWD) outreach to the public. The Tribe is also actively engaged in expressing salmon fishing rights, with concern for a closure of Zone 6 (where the most fish come from). NPT was able to pull a total of 529 salmon for the Tribe's ceremonial needs. The Tribal Council is conducting government-to-government relations with Idaho Fish & Game. Finally, three officers will be elected/re-elected in May.

USDA Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)—Dr. Jennifer Siembieda, standing in for APHIS Partner Primary Dr. Burke Healy/APHIS, reported that DHS with APHIS and CDC support has proposed that brucellosis be removed from the Select Agents & Toxins List. APHIS completed its biennial review of the Biological Select Agents

and Toxins (BSAT) list. Removal of Brucella from the BSAT list will enable more research and development capabilities for brucellosis . diagnostics and management.

Veterinary Service Guidance (VSG) 6605.1 was published in November 2024 updating the quarantine process for bull bison. This creates an opportunity to decrease the period of Yellowstone bull bison quarantine.

IV. PRESENTATION OF NEW IBMP WEBSITE & MAP TOOLS

Julie/Facilitator updated the Partners on IBMP website progress and involvement of the IBMP Website Review Group (WRG), which is composed of Partner Primary-designated representatives. The tasks of the WRG are to review and compare it to the contents and functionality of the old ibmp.info website (still live) as they consider commenting or making edits to the new IBMP website as laid out page by page in a Word document prepared by the Facilitator. Becky Bigelow/APHIS and Christina White/NPS provided ample input on the design, and their suggestions have influenced the next draft for review. Bridget Burns presented the website's technical functionality and requested that Partners provide more photos to enrich the site. Julie shared the Library outline and requested that the Review Group specifically consider the order and contents as reorganized from the current Library to modernize it. Bridget noted that the website will have a search function to improve ease in locating documents. Every document in the current IBMP website library will be carried over to the new website once that Library outline is approved by the Review Group.

Partners noted that the original imperative for an IBMP website came out of a 2008 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report¹.

Randy Scarlett/CGNF presented the current Northern and Western Management Area maps of the Tolerance Zone and explained the markings. A separate list is kept of the locations on the maps and Partners are welcome to add to that list at any time. Randy also shared a current map showing active and retired grazing leases within the Tolerance Zone on the CGNF.

The point was raised last October that hunters might be accessing old maps of the Tolerance Zone, and the new maps that will be placed on the website can be linked from Tribes' websites. Erik Holt reminded Partners that Ashton/NPT requested that the website include a disclaimer for content related to hunting zones. He promised to email the exact language to appear.

Julie/Facilitator noted Treaty Hunt Tribe-provided content is needed for the new website. Whisper Camel Means/CSKT indicated that a well-evolved hunt section could be printed for CSKT's hunter orientation.

Partners will continue to have access to the mock-up website to review the format, navigational abilities, and content, track progress and provide input at any time. The goal is to complete the website by the end of July. Julie/Facilitator noted that this will likely require singular meetings with Partner entities to ensure their review is complete.

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.

V. IBMP PARTNER PROTOCOLS

A. Protocols Subcommittee Report

Protocols Subcommittee (PSC) Chair Majel Russell/ITBC provided an update on PSC meetings since October, and progress generally which has led to reaffirming agreement on decisions by consensus and improved timing for adequate advance review of documents so decisions can be made at Partner Meetings. The Partner Primaries approved the PSC-recommended set of revised Protocols in October, and three vital Protocols issues remained or were raised for PSC work during the 7 months between Partner Meetings:

- (1) The New Partner Protocol.
- (2) Participation by Treaty Hunt Tribes in the Partner Meetings.
- (3) How to report on Public Feedback received at Partner Meetings.
- (4) Updating the Operations Plan Protocols to match the new Ops Plan format and process.

2. Adopting the Updated IBMP Partner Protocols

Protocols for “Documentation of IBMP Partner Meetings” (*Ref#8 IBMP Partner Protocols, page 5*)—The Partners discussed the various ways that Public Feedback could be documented at Partner Meetings. Options were to: have the Facilitator summarize the Feedback; record and provide a verbatim transcript of the Feedback; video the Public Feedback providers; and request that Public Feedback providers submit their script in writing. Several Partners expressed concern for the burdensome nature of several of the options and that while the intent is to respect Montana’s Open Meetings law, Public Feedback at IBMP Meetings is not the same as a public comment period. Moreover, there could be data management issues associated with capacity to store lengthy transcripts/video recordings.

Dustin/MFWP expressed that the experience of MFWP is that videoing the entire meeting works well and ensures public transparency. He committed MFWP to coordinate the videoing and bear the cost. Tahnee/MDOL supported the idea. A vote was taken and the videoing of IBMP Partner Meetings (including Public Feedback) was approved.

IBMP Partners Decision #2—IBMP Partner Meetings, including Public Feedback received during those meetings, will be recorded and an electronic version of the recording made available.

The “Documentation of IBMP Partner Meetings” section will be revised by the Facilitator to reflect this change.

Protocols for “Process for Developing the Operations Plan” (*Ref#8 IBMP Partner Protocols, page 10*)—The Partners discussed the recommended changes, including those that had been agreed to by the PSC as a group and additional requested changes made by Tahnee/MDOL on April 17, 2024. Mike and Lindsey/MDOL requested that further, under provision #1, that the segment, “and an acknowledgement that one Partner cannot infringe on the authorities of another” be removed, since that point is covered by the Statutory Authorities & Jurisdictions document. The Partners otherwise agreed to all the changes recommended by the PSC.

IBMP Partners Decision #3—The other Protocols updates recommended by the Protocols Subcommittee are approved, including:

- (1) The “Process for Developing the Operations Plan” section of the IBMP Protocols recommended by the PSC are approved, with the edit to remove “and an acknowledgement that one Partner cannot infringe on the authorities of another” from provision #1 for reasons of redundancy.
- (2) The “Participation of Treaty Hunt Tribes in IBMP Meetings” (*Ref#8 IBMP Partner Protocols, page 5*) [accepting the Partners’ standing practice].

3. IBMP Partner Authorities & Jurisdictions Reference Tool

PSC Chair Majel/ITBC introduced the updated “IBMP Partner Reference Tool: Partner Statutory Authorities & Jurisdictions Relevant to IBMP” for adoption (*Ref#9 IBMP Partner Statutory Authorities & Jurisdictions*). Tim Reid/NPS pointed out it was masterminded by Marty Zaluski/MDOL and P.J. White/NPS over the past year and a half as a way to support the achievement of Partner consensus in IBMP Meetings. All Partners had an opportunity to update the previous version presented at the June 2023 Meeting, which was a compilation of the independent statutory authorities and jurisdictions written by the individual Partners. The idea of this tool is to deconstruct (in particular) the IBMP Ops Plan, which had become a morass that confused independent Partner authorities and jurisdictions with IBMP decisions. Tim/NPS indicated that the old Ops Plan had “massive creep, adding over-inference, blurring legal requirements and charters and agency administrators.” John/CSKT noted that the Ops Plan process had reached an “impasse,” and that the Partners needed to figure out how to move ahead—to look at what are individual Partner entity versus IBMP “missions, roles and tasks to do.” The Partners reviewed the May 11, 2024 draft and discussed the following before voting to adopt it with amendments:

- (1) NPT’s request that the second sentence in the introduction, “Adoption by the IBMP Partners is not an endorsement of the validity of the other Partners’ Authorities,” be replaced with language requested by NPT on 4/25/2024.
- (2) Tahnee/MDOL pointed out that MDOL revisions to its section were made following the vote by the Partners during the Fall 2023 meeting to limit authorities to citations to prevent any individual interpretation of authorities. With the exception of MFWP, the other Partners provided their authorities and jurisdictions in narrative form.
- (3) The value of making this tool available on the new IBMP website.
- (4) Removing the examples of IBMP Management Decisions.

IBMP Partners Decision #4—The “IBMP Partner Reference Tool: Partner Statutory Authorities & Jurisdictions Relevant to IBMP” is adopted and can be made available on the new IBMP website, with the following amendments:

- (1) Replace the second sentence of the introductory paragraph with, “No IBMP Partner endorses the content or accuracy of any other Partner’s representations related to statutory authorities and jurisdictions relevant to the IBMP.”
- (2) Remove “Examples of Bison Management Decisions Made Under IBMP Partner Exclusive Authority and Jurisdiction.”

4. “New Partner Protocol” Proposal

PSC Chair Majel/ITBC introduced the topic of the protocol needed for adding new Partners to IBMP. PSC member John/CSKT provided a history of how Partners (CSKT, ITBC, and NPT) were added in 2010, when Suzanne Lewis/NPS made the request with an indication that Tribes managing a hunt could come to IBMP meetings. As John described it, Park County was denied a seat at the Deliberative Table on the basis that it “did not have a direct role in management operations.” Since that time, requests to join IBMP as a Partner consist of the verbal request by a Blackfeet Tribal Council member in April 2022 and a written resolution of the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council dated April 17, 2024 and shared with the IBMP Partners prior to the meeting.

A Partner discussion of what qualifies an entity to request to be a new Partner ensued. Positions held by Partners included the State of Montana’s responsibility to manage wildlife, treaties convey hunting rights by Tribes on federal open land and how Tribes “manage hunts.”

Cam/NPS indicated that if “Treaty Hunt Tribe” and “bison management” are to be new Partner eligibility criteria, then those terms need definition. A value of having Treaty Hunt Tribes at the Deliberative Table is that they hear and participate in decisions that are made for the whole of IBMP and its mission. Partners that do join the Table are expected to be able to speak and vote on behalf of their entity.

Six Treaty Hunt Tribes currently harvesting bison in Tolerance Zone 2 are not IBMP Partners. Concerns were raised about the IBMP Table becoming too large and making consensus decisions that much more difficult.

ITBC shared that it became an ITBC Partner after litigating the ship-to-slaughter situation and when the State of Montana opened up Treaty Tribe hunting, as managing a process whereby bison clearing quarantine through the evolving Bison Conservation & Transfer Program (BCTP) could be received by additional Tribes [that are members of ITBC]. Majel/ITBC asserted that preserving Yellowstone bison genetics “begins in the park under park authority.” Moreover, ITBC runs a request for proposals process for Tribes seeking Yellowstone bison and those given Yellowstone bison have expressed their desired to restore their relationship with bison deriving from the last vestiges of wild bison which were found in Yellowstone.

NPT has complained about the BCTP taking bison for these other Tribes. Ervin/ITBC expressed that “Those buffalo brought here had roamed the whole country, not just this area...[the idea is to put [Yellowstone] genetics into their herds.” Some have singular YNP-origin herds.

A discussion involving all Partners resulted in edits to New Partner Protocol sections 1a-d, 2a, and 3 (*Ref#10 New Partner Protocols Draft (Spring 2024 Meeting Documents [May 12, 2024] pages 43-44)*).

IBMP Partners Decision #5—The New Partner Protocol as amended to that below is adopted.

The Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) partnership consists of governmental agencies and entities that carry out some aspect of management and/or hunting of bison that migrate from Yellowstone National Park into the Tolerance Zone within the state of Montana.

1. All requests to join the IBMP as a Partner shall be made in writing to the IBMP Partners and shall include the following:
 - a. The full name of the federal agency, state agency, or federally-recognized Tribe;
 - b. Citation to the agency's or Treaty Hunt Tribe's statutory or legal jurisdiction and direct role in managing migratory Yellowstone bison habitat outside of Yellowstone National Park and/or hunt operations within the Western and Northern Management Areas of the bison Tolerance Zone 2 in the state of Montana; and
 - c. In the case of a federal or state agency, direction or authorization from the state governor or federal department secretary directing the agency to seek inclusion as an IBMP Partner; or
 - d. In the case of a federally-recognized Tribe, a resolution from the governing body of the tribe formally seeking inclusion as an IBMP Partner.
2. Any written request to join the IBMP partnership shall also include a statement:
 - a. Acknowledging the obligations and duties incumbent with membership in the IBMP, including the financial and administrative obligations;
 - b. Acknowledging the requesting entity shall assume all obligations and duties of an IBMP Partner, including the financial and administrative obligations, upon joining the IBMP as a full Partner; and
 - c. The Partner Primary will come to the IBMP Partners Meetings with the capacity to vote on IBMP Decisions.

Blackfeet Nation Tribal Business Council resolution requesting inclusion of the Blackfeet Tribe in IBMP—Next discussed was the specific Blackfeet Tribal Business Council's request to include the Blackfeet Tribe as an IBMP Partner. Ervin/ITBC argued that the Tribe has met the provisions of the New Partner concept and process and beginning to feel they are "not wanted." The Blackfeet Tribe has requested participation under the same legal authority (Laramie Treaty signatory) as other Partners. Cam/NPS suggested a vote and the value of their cooperation on "suitably harvesting" as a large Tribal nation. Other Partners (APHIS, CSKT, ITBC) also expressed a readiness to vote. NPT pointed out that the Blackfeet Nation's request was not on the Spring 2024 Meeting Agenda and indicated that it needed authorization from NEPTEC to vote. John/CSKT suggested that Blackfeet Tribe Partner approval would enable the Blackfeet to come to the Fall 2024 IBMP Partners meeting as a participant. The Tribal Council needs to empower the Primary/Acting Primary to vote and act at IBMP Partner Meetings. The Partners agreed that the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council would be asked to resubmit its request to comply with the newly adopted New Partner Protocol, and the Partners agreed that they would be willing to meet virtually and vote on this singular issue.

IBMP Partners Decision #6—After resubmission of the request, the IBMP Partners will meet virtually and solely on the topic of the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council's request for the Blackfeet Tribe to join IBMP as a Partner, amply in advance of the Fall Meeting to enable the Blackfeet Tribe to prepare and empower its Primary to represent the Blackfeet Tribe and vote/act on IBMP matters.

With it being 11:30a, Kathy/IBMP Lead Partner called for the next two agenda items to shift to after lunch so that those signing up to give public feedback could do so at the time indicated on the agenda.

VI. OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC FEEDBACK SESSION

The afternoon session launched 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 May 15, this was 8). The following members of the public spoke during this session.

- *Ellie Brighton, Montana Stockgrowers Association*
- *Chamois Anderson, Defenders of Wildlife*
- *David Eich, Buffalo Field Campaign*
- *Angela DeSapio, Buffalo Field Campaign*
- *Jaedin Medicine Elk, Roam Free Nation*
- *Scott Christiansen, Greater Yellowstone Coalition*
- *Nick Gevock, Sierra Club*
- *Don Woerner, DVM*

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

VII. REVISITING THE ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT PLAN

A. AMP Updates Needed

Tim Reid/NPS gave an overview of work by the AMP Review Group (made up of members appointed by all Partner Primaries) since the October meeting, prefacing with a comment about how the AMP is composed of expected outcomes and measures of accountability and there are elements that are “underachieved.” The AMP Review Group focused mostly on cosmetic updates. Chris Geremia/NPS reminded the Partners of the protocols that must be followed to make an AMP change. This was noted in the introductory paragraph to the “AMP Review Group Process and Recommended Updates” document (*Ref#11*), which states: “Each Partner entity represented on the R[eview] G[roup] will need to approve a language amendment in order for it to go forward as a ‘Proposed AMP Change’ for adoption by the Partner Primaries at an IBMP Partners Meeting” and is followed by an excerpt from the Partner Protocols adopted in October 2023. The Protocols state:

...For an AMP change to be considered an IBMP Decision:

- *It must be preceded by a **Briefing Statement** in this format:*
 - (1) IBMP Partner proposing and contact person.*
 - (2) Date of Briefing Statement and meeting at which the Partner would like the proposed AMP change considered.*
 - (3) Rationale for submitting the requested AMP change.*
 - (4) Background, situation appraisal, and/or current state of knowledge related to the rationale.*
- *This Briefing Statement must be sent to all Partners at least 4 weeks before the scheduled IBMP Partners Meeting at which the proposing Partner would like the AMP change to be considered.*

Thus, to comply with the Protocols, no formal change was put to a vote. Tim Reid/NPS stated that the majority of the proposed AMP changes would not be ripe for discussion until the Fall 2024 IBMP Partners Meeting, which will take place after the adoption of the YNP Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)/Record of Decision. However, the Partners did discuss some of the “low hanging fruit” updates that could be proposed formally as an AMP change for vote at the Fall Meeting. Jeff Richards/APHIS noted that his several AMP language suggestions to the RG came from having

“fresh eyes” on IBMP materials. He asked about AMP language related to public education and what the metric could be. AMP items discussed specifically were Objective 1.3, adding “Custer” to “Gallatin” and referencing the new maps. The new maps show the currently active/inactive grazing leases on Forest Service land. They also depict bison habitat areas of Tolerance Zone. Lindsey/MDOL voiced objections to inclusion of Management Action 1.3(c) as it did not relate to the conflict.

VIII. REVIEWING IBMP PARTNER ROLES IN THE TOLERANCE ZONE

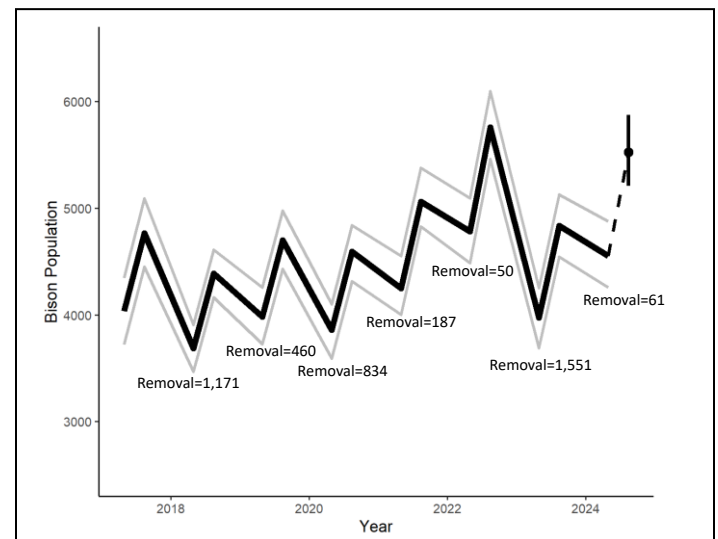
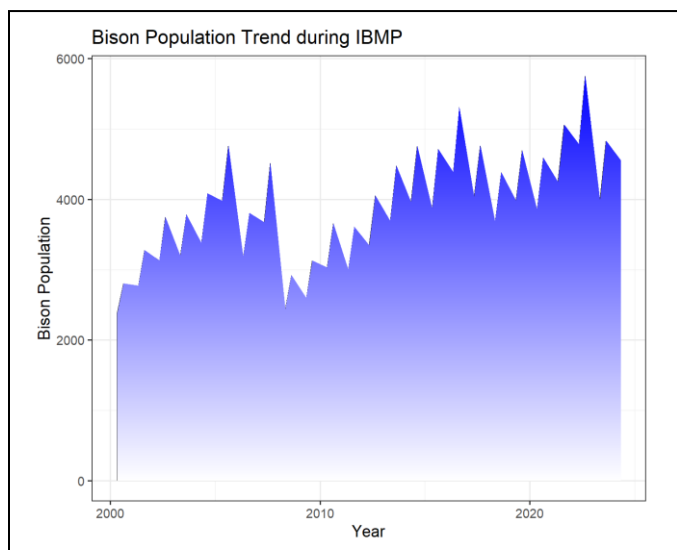
A. Review of the 2022-2023 Annual Report

IBMP Partner Kathy/CGNF asked the Partners to start preparing now for Annual Report November 2023-October 2024, and use last year’s report as a guide for what to update.

B. Yellowstone Bison Population Situation After Winter 2023-4

Chris Geremia/NPS shared a report on the Yellowstone bison population of around 3,900, indicating that this past winter was slightly milder than the one two years ago. In January and February, there were zero bison in Gardiner Basin. During March, some animals started moving up into the Management Zone out of Hayden valley Madison Valley area. There was a lighter migration of bison out of the park and into the Tolerance Zone. An average of 50 bison in the Gardiner Basis on a given day through March and that increased to about 150 during April.

There was a very light migration compared to last year when compared to the estimated migration of about 4,000 bison. About 61 bison were removed through various removal methods. About 41 harvests by hunting occurred (to be confirmed next week at the Hunt Meeting in Missoula). Park took 20 animals—five placed into BCTP and 15 bison given to the CSKT to support their Food for Families program.



The Yellowstone bison population fluctuates through the years, and removals do vary according to the migration. The Park is predicting about a population of 5,500 bison this summer after calving.

Adam Pankratz/MFWP had nothing further.

C. Bison Conservation & Transfer Program Results & Proposed Changes to Quarantine Protocol

There have been a total of 414 bison moved and cleared from quarantine and moved to Fort Peck to finish end-testing and move to other conservation herds.

Last year between YNP and APHIS, 116 bison were moved; this is the same as what happened 2 years ago.

There are 81 bison undergoing quarantine in the Park; 60 at Corwin. No bison are anticipated to clear quarantine this winter.

APHIS finalized guidance document in November 2023, shortening the quarantine period to no less than 300 days and applied it to that group of males that were trapped in winter of 2023, so they were moved to assurance testing in February of 2024.

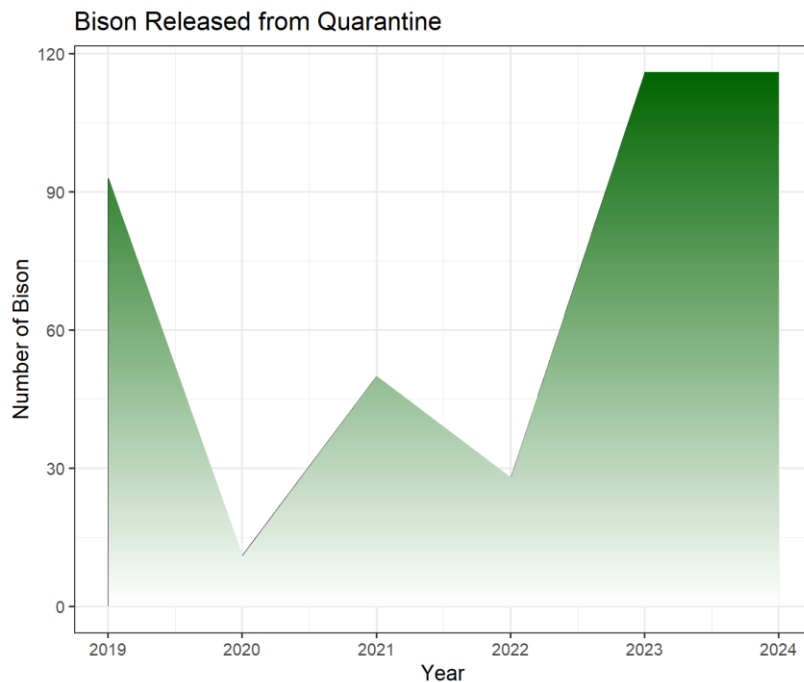


Table 1. Removal Summary. Number of Yellowstone bison removed through state and treaty harvests, sent to slaughter, placed in the Bison Conservation Transfer Program or otherwise removed from the population. Table abbreviations are adult (A), yearling (Y), calf (C), and unknown sex (Unk). Harvest numbers are preliminary, in-season totals that may change.

	Removal Method	NORTH							WEST						
		Male		Female		Unk			Male		Female		Unk		
		A	Y	A	Y	Unk	C	A	Y	A	Y	Unk	C		
Tribal and State Hunting	Harvest	Harvest (Mont)	2	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	3	0	0	0	
		Harvest (CSKT)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	1	
		Harvest (NPT)	3	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		Harvest (CTUIR)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		Harvest (SB)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		Harvest (YN)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		Harvest (BT)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	
		Harvest (NARAP)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		Harvest (CROW)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		NPS ¹	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		MTFWP ²	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
NPS Capture Operation	Other Removal	Consigned to Slaughter	5	1	7	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		Capture Pen Mortality	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		MTDOL Management Shooting	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	BCTP	Entered in BCTP	0	1	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	Holding	Holding for BCTP selection	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		Holding for release	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		Released into park	1	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	Removed to Date	Harvest	5	0	1	0	0	1	12	0	6	0	0	1	
		Other Removal	6	1	7	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		BCTP	0	1	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Total Removed		11	2	8	1	0	5	12	0	6	0	0	1		
		27							19						
									46						

- **Nez Perce Tribe**—NPT hunters took 3 bulls, one cow, and 1 female calf for a total of 5 bison in the Gardiner Basin. NPT hunters also took 5 elk from this area. The low bison migration caused NPT to consider new regulations that increase opportunities for NPT to hunt other types of ungulates. As they see bison migrating into the Tolerance Zone, they can cease hunting other species mid-season.

b. Other MOA Tribes

- **Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR)**—The CTUIR had no success hunting bison this year, although hunters came to Gardiner. The bison hunting season is December 1-March 31, although during March, only bulls may be hunted. CTUIR has not had a hunting season for the Western herds for 4 years—since the decline in population there.
- **Yakama Nation**—No bison were hunted.

i.

c. Other Treaty Hunt Tribes

- **Blackfeet Nation**—No representative present to give report.
- **Crow Tribe**—No representative present to give report.
- **Northern Arapaho Tribe**—No representative present to give report.
- **Shoshone-Bannock Tribe**—As of the weekend prior, 9 bison had been hunted by ShoBan in the WMA. The bison season is year-round.

3. Other Operational Perspectives & Tools Deployed in Tolerance Zone 2

- Mike Thom, CGNF Gardiner District Ranger, reported that carcass management was not an issue of concern this year given the low migration and hunting opportunities.
- Mike Honeycutt/MDOL described very little activity by bison on the northern boundary. MDOL actively monitored for bison on the Idaho boundary of the WMA.
- No other Partners reported beyond the above.

IX. IBMP OPERATIONS PLAN REVIEW & PLANNING

Kathy/CGNF and Tahnee/MDOL led the discussion of the Ops Plan format, which reassembles and streamlines Partner roles and generates a balance between Partner collaboration and fidelity to the Partners' individual authorities and jurisdictions and legal mandates. 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.

Mike Lopez/NPT described its past frustration trying to collaborate to come to agreement on signing the 2023-2024 Ops Plan, which stalled because there was no agreed-upon Protocols for the Ops Plan development process. With that now in place, the Partners should be able to proceed to signing.

Discussion points included:

- The NPS *Status Report on the Yellowstone Bison Population to the Superintendent* provides the ideal bison population numbers and sex and age ratios based on surveys conducted by Lead Bison Biologist Chris Geremia; this is shared by YNP by September 30, according to the Protocols calendar.
- Hunt-trap decisions depend on the capacity of the two quarantine facilities run by NPS and APHIS. Filling the BCTP to capacity is a high priority for YNP. YNP then considers the current degree of out migration and opportunities to support Treaty Hunt Tribes. Only then is ship-to-slaughter a consideration, with the exception of brucellosis-positive

animals that go to the CSKT Food for Families program (access to local processing facilities that take bison plus CSKT willingness to take brucellosis positive animals for meat consumption). YNP is committed to keeping the park's bison population within a certain size range. Cam/NPS would like to see permanent Ops Plan parameters set for IBMP Partner decision-making.

- Erik/NPT indicated NPT would like to have input on the BCTP decisions that it considers might supersede the park's treaty and trust responsibilities. Erik also indicated NPT is receptive to discussing this with ITBC.
- Adam/FWP stated that the Ops Plan should be informed by the AMP. And when changes to the AMP are made by the Partners, the Ops Plan parameters could then change to align with the AMP.

The Partners discussed the option of standing up an Operations Plan Subcommittee in order to hammer out an Ops Plan that could be signed this year and voted to approve that action.

IBMP Partners Decision #7—An IBMP Operations Plan Subcommittee will be initiated and charged with producing an Operations Plan signed by all Partners at the Fall IBMP Partners Meeting.

X. SPECIES STATUS ASSESSMENT FOR YELLOWSTONE BISON

Amity Bass, Field Supervisor from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) Montana Ecological Services Field Office, delivered a PowerPoint presentation on the USFWS Species Status Assessment, including three-stage history of responding to petitions for declaring the Yellowstone bison a "Distinct Population Segment of Plains Bison," and the current USFWS approach of pulling all threats together into one finding about Yellowstone bison biology and threats to the species. This assessment will include five factors in determining whether the Yellowstone bison are Threatened or Endangered.

A facet of the assessment is collecting indigenous knowledge. ITBC was selected to collect traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) from Tribal elders, providing a layer of security for the responses since ITBC is not subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). ITBC will provide its findings from the elders in the form of a report, so the raw interview data is not publicly available. This report is due at the end of 2025.

Dear Interested Party letters were sent out in 2024, and the strategy is also being shared with organizations such as the Native American Fish & Wildlife Society and Great Plains networks. The federal and state agencies and other Tribal partners will be commenting to inform the ESA listing decision that is due in September 2026 and will combine indigenous knowledge and western perspectives.

Amity's presentation is available as Appendix B.

XI. CITIZEN'S WORKING GROUP PAST & PRESENT

Kathy Minor/CGNF raised the topic of reviving the concept of a Citizen's Working Group (CWG) such as activated prior to the advent of the AMP in 2010-12 or so. The GAO had reported that the IBMP was not fully engaging all perspectives and CWG evolved, co-led by Aerial Overstreet (Montana Stockgrowers Association) and Matt Skoglund of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and was diverse in composition. Tom/CSKT described the opportunity of a CWG to be more informative than the short Public Feedback session at each Partner Meeting allows. He shared the

precedent of the Going to the Sun Road instance where a CWG-type group found a solution to keep the road open in Glacier National Park. Encompassing livestock and wildlife stakeholders in dialogue, a CWG may come forward with a solution to dilemmas that IBMP Partners are faced with. CWG members would have terms tied to the IBMP management year and represent a broad spectrum of interests.

Erik/NPT noted the value of a “Treaty 101” workshop with USFS for locals when the 2013 elk hunt by Tribes stirred concerns in Gardiner. Ervin/ITBC favored the CWG, indicating IBMP Partners don’t know everything and a CWG could come up with new ideas to think about and work on. Adam/FWP noted the importance of setting goals or identifying projects to consider versus appearing to be public scoping. Tom/CSKT expressed concern that if the AMP is not put to use there is a risk it will just be “shelf art.” He asked the Partners to consider that the CWG might look at habitat for use by bison in the Tolerance Zone. Tahnee/MDOL expressed the need for a specific target/ask to help inform the work, and sideboards to keep it from drifting. John/CSKT warned about triggering the Federal Advisory Committee Act rules if a charter is created for the CWG and IBMP Partners tasked the CWG with specific objectives or advisory request. Becky/APHIS also noted that to the other extreme, the CWG should not make recommendations like to do away with the IBMP.

Future meeting agendas would routinely create a place for CWG report-outs. IBMP could come up with some high-level questions that establish the needed sideboards so that the CWG is constructive and useful to IBMP deliberations.

XII. UPDATES ON PAST TOPICS & UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Cougar Creek Bridge & Underpass

Wendi Urie, CGNF Hebgen Lake District Ranger, gave. An update on the Montana Department of Transportation (MDOT) Cougar Creek project presented by Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) design consultants JR Taylor and Josh Springer from HDR, Inc. at the June 2023 IBMP Partners Meeting at the request of Deb Wambach. The idea is to raise and widen the bridge and create a better hydrologic and wildlife passage at a place where bison often try to cross 191 (a dangerous endeavor for both bison and vehicles, especially at night). New technology for heat and movement wildlife detection will be tried out, creating a model in Hebgen Basin for elsewhere in Montana. MDOT is seeking funding for this project. Please see June 2023 IBMP Partners Meeting Report for more detail.

B. Non-Lead Ammo

Erik/NPT followed up on a November 2022 presentation by NPT to the IBMP Partners on educating hunters about the stewardship value of using copper over lead bullets. NPT provides bison hunting classes that convince hunters to switch. Lead poisons carcass scavengers like eagles and bears in Gardiner valley and West Yellowstone. NPT needs the State of Montana to support this and would like to do more concerted outreach to Treaty Hunt Tribes. “It only takes a grain of lead to kill an eagle or coyote.” Since 2016, Erik has switched to non-lead ammunition himself. The NPT Wildlife Division offers Tribal members free trade-ins of lead for non-lead ammo.

C. Unfinished Business

Kathy/CGNF suggested that the Highway 89 report on wildlife and vehicular accidents be a topic for the Fall Meeting agenda.

XIII. IBMP CALENDAR FOR 2024

The 2024 IBMP Calendar was revisited, with a reminder to the Partners of the various due dates, including the intent to have the Ops Plan signed at the Fall Meeting on October 29, 2024 (date set during the October 31, 2024 meeting). The Partners decided on a location for this meeting also.

IBMP Partners Decision #8—The Fall 2024 IBMP Partners Meeting will be held on Tuesday, October 29, 2024 in Missoula, Montana.

XIV. CLOSING

Kathy/IBMP Lead Partner expressed thanks to all the Partners, their staff, and public in attendance. She then invited Erik/NPT to deliver a closing Tribal prayer to commemorate the conclusion of a successful IBMP Meeting.

APPENDIX A

Attendance Record

(In addition to IBMP Partner Primaries and Seconds listed on pages 1-2)

IBMP Partner Staff

CSKT—Whisper Camel Means (Division Manager, CSKT Fish, Wildlife, Recreation, and Conservation Division), John Harrison (Staff Attorney)

InterTribal Buffalo Council—Trudy Ecoffey (Technical Services Director), Mikiah Reuther (Biologist)

Nez Perce Tribe—Lee Whiteplume (NPT FCE)

NPS/Yellowstone National Park—Chris Geremia (Lead Bison Biologist), Morgan Warthin (Public Affairs Officer)

USDA APHIS—Aimee Hunt (Veterinary Medical Officer (VMO), Ruminant Health Center, Cattle Health Center), Jeff Richards (Veterinary Medical Officer (VMO), Ruminant Health Center, Bison and Cattle Team, Montana, GYA)

U.S. Forest Service/CGNF—Brad Bolte, John Hag (sp?), Randy Scarlett (West Zone Wildlife Biologist), David Sindall

Others²

- Billings Gazette—Brett French
- Boise State University—Madison Stevens
- Buffalo Field Campaign— Anna Connors, Angela DeSapio*, David Eich*, Joaquin Flores, Maya Lee, Anna Connors
- Defenders of Wildlife— Chamois Anderson*
- Greater Yellowstone Coalition— Scott Christiansen*
- Idaho Conservation League— Jeff Abrams
- Montana State Legislator Marty Malone
- Montana Stockgrowers Association—Ellie Brighton
- National Park Conservation Association— Michelle Uberuaga
- Roam Free Nation—Jaedin Medicine Elk*
- University of New Mexico at Taos—Aicha Bech, Elias Griego, Coman Lee, Angeles Ribeiro, Katie Stolte, Brooke Woodmansee
- Office of Congressman Rosendale—Randy Boaden
- Sierra Club—Nick Gevock
- Office of U.S Senator Jon Tester—Caitlin Avey
- USFS Region 1 Office—Tammy Fletcher, Barbara Garcia, Bridgette Guld, Autumn Keller
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Montana Ecological Services Field Office—Amity Bass
- Don Woerner, DVM*
- Elisa Hardy, Student (University of New Mexico-Taos)
- Karen Loveless, Student (University of New Mexico-Taos)
- Nathan Oswald, Student

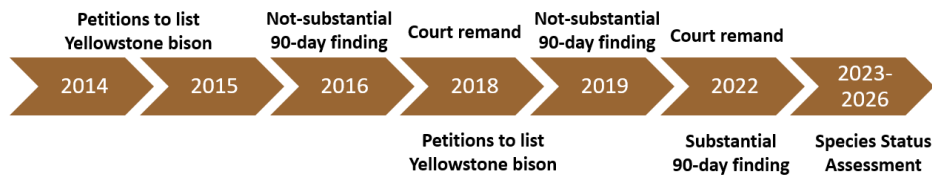
² An (*) next to a name means that person participated in the Public Feedback session.

Species Status Assessment for Yellowstone Bison

Presentation by Amity Bass, Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Ecological Services, Helena, Montana

Yellowstone Bison Regulatory and Legal History



Species Status Assessment

- Compile scientific information
- Foundation for Endangered Species Act:
 - Decision to list/not list species
 - Periodic reviews
 - Recovery
- Historically, primarily western science
- Indigenous Knowledge is important



Outreach

- DIP letters sent January 2024
 - Western science
 - Indigenous Knowledge
- Presentations
 - Great Plains Native American Fish and Wildlife Society Conference
 - National Native American Fish and Wildlife Society Conference
 - IBMP Spring meeting



InterTribal Buffalo Council

- Collect Indigenous Knowledges
- Represent over 80 Tribes
- Known tribal entity
- Established working relationships
- Information security



Next Steps

- Coordination with InterTribal Buffalo Council on Indigenous Knowledge gathering
- Tribal coordination
- Agency coordination



Tribal Involvement in the Species Status Assessment



Summary

- Species Status Assessment informs ESA-listing decision
- Listing decision due Sept. 2026
- Blend of Indigenous Knowledge and western science
- InterTribal Buffalo Council gathering Indigenous Knowledge
- Continued coordination with Tribes and Agencies

