

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Disposition of Quarantine Facility Bison

Deadline for submission: April 30, 2014

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) is seeking proposals from agencies and organizations with interest and capability to house/hold brucellosis-free bison resulting from the Bison Quarantine Feasibility Study (hereafter referred to as QFS bison) conducted by MFWP and USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), as described in the Bison Quarantine Feasibility Study Phase II/III (MFWP December 2005). Approximately 135 bison that have completed all phases of the quarantine study and are currently being held at the Green Ranch near Bozeman Montana will be available for translocation.

Proposals will be evaluated by May 31, 2014. Once any proposal (proposals) is/are selected, MFWP will begin the necessary analysis and planning processes, depending upon the location of the preferred applicant's site. If, after the analysis the decision is to proceed, the final recommendation will be submitted to MFWP's Fish and Wildlife Commission for approval. If approved, bison could be translocated as early as November 2014. Before the quarantine bison are transferred, the successful applicant will be required to sign an MOU agreeing to specific provisions contained in the proposal and agreed to by MFWP and the applicant (see example at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/bison/>).

Background:

The primary goal of the Bison Quarantine Feasibility Study was to develop quarantine procedures that would allow bison originating from YNP to be accepted as free of brucellosis and suitable for the establishment of new conservation herds of American bison, or to augment existing public and tribal herds in North America. The quarantine protocol is described in the 2005 Environmental Assessment, <http://fwpiis.mt.gov/content/getitem.aspx?id=11375>

These brucellosis-free QFS bison have been part of the research herd since 2005 and 2006 (two capture groups). All animals have been tested for brucellosis twice a year, with most tested at least 10 times, some up to 15 times, and have tested negative each time. Both Montana Department of Livestock and APHIS consider this group of bison to be brucellosis free.

Conservation Goals:

In 2010, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) American Bison Specialist Group (ABSG) published *American Bison: Status Survey and Conservation Guidelines* that reported on the current status of American bison, in the wild and in conservation herds, and makes recommendations on how to ensure that the species is conserved for the future. According to ABSG, there are 44 conservation herds of plains bison containing an estimated 20,500 animals, as of 2008.

For conservation herds, the overall objective is to retain allelic diversity, which is the best indicator of the genetic resources available to the population. The Yellowstone National Park (YNP) bison herd provides a very good genetically diverse source of bison that have been free ranging for many decades (Halbert 2003). In addition, this is a population that has been

influenced heavily by natural selection forces. Brucellosis-free bison from YNP that have completed the quarantine feasibility study (QFS) serve as a reliable source of genetically pure bison to contribute to the continued conservation of this species.

It is desired that as many of these QFS bison as possible contribute to the long-term conservation of bison in North America. While long-term bison conservation efforts are the Department's priority for these animals, MFWP will ultimately consider all feasible options as necessary.

Instructions:

Applicants are requested to submit a full proposal describing how they meet the criteria outlined below by April 30, 2014 to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Wildlife Division, P.O. Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620.

Proposals should clearly articulate the applicant's vision for bison conservation, and how these QFS bison fit within that vision.

Required Information and Factors That Will Be Considered: The following factors must be adequately addressed in any final proposal. Proposals must include/address each of the following points as completely as possible to enable evaluation for further consideration:

- ⇒ Name of organization, address, phone number, and email of contact person. If the proposal is submitted on behalf of an agency, Tribe, or NGO, the proposal should be submitted by the leader of that organization. Please indicate if additional approval processes will be required.
- ⇒ Description of overall project, including how the project serves the long-term greater conservation needs of plains bison, *including maintaining genetic diversity* (see Page 23 of the 2005 EA). If bison already exist on the project area or another bison herd is owned by the applicant, include description of how those bison would be separated from or integrated with the QFS bison. All proposals should include longer-range vision for long-term management of the bison.
- ⇒ Provide site/location information where the bison will be maintained, including a map, description of the location, and habitats in the project area. Site must be within suitable habitat within the historic range of plains bison. Preference will be given to those areas within the State of Montana.
- ⇒ Provide a comprehensive management plan that includes: population objectives and clearly defined means to control herd size and distribution; habitat management objectives; containment measures; measures to prevent genetic introgression; disease monitoring plans; and conflict management strategies. Identify and describe potential conflict management strategies (e.g., bison escapes, conflict with neighboring landowners, predators (e.g., grizzly bear), issues with other wildlife, etc).
- ⇒ Provide information about the capacity (size of area, carrying capacity, etc.) of the site to house bison in the year the bison would be translocated, as well as future years, including offspring that might be born.
- ⇒ If applicable, describe how hunting could be used to aid in population management, including any access provisions.

- ⇒ If dispersal to additional sites in the future is a management tool, describe processes that would be used to evaluate and designate where those bison will go, and how many/what percentage of bison could be available for such efforts.
- ⇒ If eventual incorporation of additional bulls is desired to help with genetic integrity, describe how that would be done – where they would come from, assurances they are genetically pure, etc.
- ⇒ Identification of secured and potential funding sources – to maintain animals per proposed plan (e.g., fencing, management, water development, handling facilities).
- ⇒ Letters of support from all partners and a definition of the role of each partner in the conservation program, and any necessary MOUs as applicable.
- ⇒ Describe how the translocated bison will contribute to or impact the local ecosystem. Identify if there are potential impacts to other local wildlife species (prairie dogs, ferrets, swift fox, etc.) from bison or from infrastructure such as fencing, and how those impacts will be minimized or mitigated.
- ⇒ Describe any additional measures that would be considered to help achieve the conservation goal for these bison (i.e., making bulls or future offspring available to other conservation efforts).
- ⇒ Include agency authorities and how they would be addressed if the applicant is successful, and incorporation of the applicable activities of other land management agencies or entities in your proposal.
- ⇒ Plan must comply with all applicable local, state, federal, and tribal laws associated with translocation/import of these bison, as well as compliance with applicable environmental regulations of recipient jurisdictions.
- ⇒ Clarify any legal or policy constraints: MEPA/NEPA/Tribal constraints, any legislative or statutory constraints. Provide a clear description of environmental review process to be conducted, if required.
- ⇒ If the recipient site is outside of Montana, please provide documentation from the state where the receiving site is located providing assurances that importation will be allowed into/through that state.

If additional information or clarification is needed, contact: Ken McDonald, Wildlife Division Administrator, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks at 406-444-5645 or kmcdonald@mt.gov.