

June 19, 2015

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

FROM: Gary Frazer, Assistant Director, Endangered Species

CC: Regional Director, Region 6

SUBJECT: Not substantial 90-day finding on 2 petitions to list the Yellowstone National Park bison (*Bison bison bison*) Distinct Population Segment as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act

I. INTRODUCTION

On November 13, 2014, the Western Watersheds Project and Buffalo Field Campaign petitioned the Service to list the Yellowstone National Park (YNP) bison Distinct Population Segment (DPS) under the Endangered Species Act (Act). In addition, on March 2, 2015, Mr. James A. Horsley petitioned the Service to list the YNP bison DPS under the Act. This finding addresses both petitions.

The YNP bison herd is the only free-roaming herd left in the United States. In the late 1800s, North American bison were hunted to near extinction in the wild, save a few remaining individuals in YNP. Presently, the YNP population ranges from 2,500-4,500 individuals annually and its status is stable-to-increasing. During the winter, YNP bison frequently move beyond YNP boundaries into areas used for domestic cattle grazing. Concerns for the spread of brucellosis, a bovine disease transmitted interspecies, from bison to cattle in the spring when the two species occupy the same areas has led to the development of the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) in 2000. The IBMP has successfully prevents the spread of brucellosis by hazing bison back into YNP and lethally removing others during annual culls.

II. PETITION EVALUATION

We found that the YNP bison meet the distinctness and significance criteria for classification as a DPS. Guided by the 5 listing factors, we assessed potential threats to the YNP bison using the information presented by the petitioners and the sources cited within the petitions. The lethal control of YNP bison under the IBMP was the primary concern expressed by the petitioners and threats related to these activities and others were evaluated:

- The petitioners claimed threats due to IBMP management practices and these concerns were addressed with respect to its effects on range curtailment (Factor A), hunting (Factor B), and disease (Factor C). However, we found no substantial information suggesting IBMP activities are a threat to the status of the YNP bison such that listing the herd may warrant listing as threatened or endangered.
- In addition, we found no substantial information that listing may be warranted due to threats from livestock grazing, development and infrastructure, and invasive species (Factor A); overutilization through hunting (Factor B); predation (Factor C); inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms (Factor D); or genomic extinction and climate change (Factor E).

III. MAIN DECISION and POSITION of INTERESTED PARTIES

Our review of the petitions and sources cited within suggests there is not substantial information indicating that listing the YNP bison DPS under the Act may be warranted. Therefore, we will be publishing a negative 90-day finding on the petitions, and will not be initiating a status review on this taxon. Other than the petitioners, no additional parties have expressed interest concerning the petition. However, any changes in the status and management of the bison may impact a number of Federal, State, Tribal, and private wildlife managers.

Comment [SJA1]: Should I list some agencies here? NPS, USFS, Montana, cattle ranchers, etc...