

July 21, 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 two petitions to list the Yellowstone National Park bison (*Bison bison bison*) 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.

Compared to other bison populations across North America that are managed similar to livestock, YNP bison are unique because they are closely integrated with the natural processes of the landscape in which they reside. In the late 1800s, North American bison were hunted to near extinction, save a few remaining individuals in YNP. Through supplementing from other herds and their protection in YNP, the herd now 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 cattle grazing areas. Concerns for the spread of brucellosis, a disease transmitted from bison to cattle, in the spring when the two species may occupy the same areas, led to the development of the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) in 2000. The IBMP prevents the spread of brucellosis by annually hazing bison back into YNP and culling others.

II. PETITION EVALUATION

Since our 2011 position that the YNP bison may not be considered a DPS, new citations provided by the petitioners present substantial information that the YNP bison may qualify as a DPS. Guided by the five listing factors, we then 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 IBMP management activities threaten the YNP bison and these concerns were addressed as they relate to range curtailment (Factor A); hunting and culling (Factor B); and disease management (Factor C). However, we found no substantial information suggesting IBMP activities are a threat to the YNP bison such that listing the DPS may be warranted.
- 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); disease and predation (Factor C); the 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 concludes that 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 DPS. Numerous Federal, State, Tribal, and private land and wildlife managers may be impacted by changes in YNP bison management plans. However, no additional parties other than the petitioners have expressed interest concerning a negative 90-day finding.