

Briefing Statement FY 2018

Bureau: National Park Service (NPS)

Issue: Long-Term Bison Management Strategy, including Quarantine

Park: Yellowstone National Park (YELL)

- Population size
 - Manage for 4,250 bison (range 3,500-5,000), with less than 3,000 in the central or northern regions of YELL
 - Remove 300 to 1000 bison per winter using harvests and shipments to quarantine, research, and slaughter
 - Maintain the historic lineages (indigenous, Pablo-Allard) and existing genetic diversity
- Culling
 - Make capture, culling, shipping, and distribution operations a shared commitment among the agencies
 - Evaluate establishing and using capture facilities outside YELL near the outer boundaries of the northern and western management areas, perhaps on National Forest System lands, to facilitate greater bison distribution and harvest opportunities before capture
 - Initiate discussions between the State Attorney General and Department of Justice regarding the Executive Order preventing bison shipments, which is counterproductive, likely invalid, and possibly unenforceable
- Hunting
 - Allow many hundreds of bison to migrate outside YELL to support public and treaty hunting opportunities
 - Develop a unified harvest strategy that allows bison to disperse across the landscape, regulates hunter numbers in space and time, standardizes regulations, and initiates autumn hunts in year-round tolerance areas
 - When possible, use hunters to harvest bison that move outside the northern and western management areas
- Quarantine
 - Implement a quarantine program that provides brucellosis-free bison for relocation to public and tribal lands
 - Use the Stephens Creek facility in northern YELL to conduct brucellosis screenings for quarantine (~7½ months) and complete the testing protocol at Corwin Springs and/or Fort Peck (see attached Scope of Work)
 - Continue to refine quarantine procedures, including testing frequency and duration, as data become available
- Tolerance and relocation
 - Encourage an incremental and success-driven shift in Montana from a zone-based management approach with delineated tolerance areas to targeted, site-specific management similar to wild elk infected with brucellosis
 - Increase year-round tolerance for bison on public lands near YELL, similar to elk, by incrementally allowing for increased seasonal and year-round use by female and young bison in suitable habitats
 - Work with Montana to evaluate the relocation of bison to other suitable public and tribal lands
- Conflict resolution
 - Identify likely conflict areas for targeted surveillance and monitoring, and initiate conflict resolution activities when necessary
 - Use targeted fencing, hazing, and hunting to maintain separation between bison and cattle and protect people and property (similar to elk)
 - Capture or kill bison that cannot be hazed or pose an imminent risk to humans, property, or livestock
 - Coordinate with the State of Montana to reduce nighttime speed limits and vehicle strikes of wildlife on Highways 89 and 191
- Brucellosis
 - No brucellosis suppression actions would be taken, but collaborative research on brucellosis dynamics, diagnostic procedures, and various potential suppression methods would be conducted
 - Continue to manage the already low risk of brucellosis transmission from bison directly to cattle
 - Monitor brucellosis exposure and culture rates over time
- Organization and Involvement
 - The State of Montana could establish a Bison Working Group (similar to elk) representing a broad set of interests to increase public participation and input into decision-making
 - Establish an Intertribal Council/Alliance to discuss bison management topics and provide recommendations
 - The tribes and tribal organizations could assume a greater role in the management and implementation of bison quarantine and as advocates for greater year-round distribution of bison on public lands
 - Establish an independent scientific panel to periodically review data, analyses, plans, and outcomes
 - Continue to hold quarterly meetings with local officials (e.g., county commissioners)
 - Continue to hold public meetings and consider workshops on relevant management issues

Scope of Work, Bison Quarantine, 2018-2019

Stephens Creek

- APHIS certify the two double-fenced pastures as a quarantine facility
- NPS capture, test, and isolate ~20 yearling females and ~40 male calves testing negative for brucellosis
 - NPS uniquely mark each animal with RFID tags approved by APHIS and the Montana State Veterinarian
- NPS complete serial testing every 30-45 days until no new test-positive animals are identified for two successive testing periods (expected to take 6 to 8 months for bison captured in February-March)
 - NPS perform two screening tests (BAPA, CARD) and one confirmatory test (FPA) on-site and place a unique back tag identifier on each bison during each testing occasion
 - NPS remove bison testing suspect or positive using the onsite confirmatory test (FPA) into a separate holding (suspect) pen.
 - Keep animals in this pen and test at least one additional time every 30-45 days
 - NPS submit serum samples from bison to the Montana Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory and request two screening tests (BAPA, CARD) and two confirmatory tests (FPA, Complement Fixation)
 - NPS interpret results with APHIS and determine bison disposition, which would include consignment of test-positives to slaughter and/or holding suspect animals in a separate pasture for further testing
 - NPS consign bison testing positive or repeatedly testing suspect to slaughter and collect mandibular, parotid, retropharyngeal, mesenteric, hepatic, and internal iliac lymph nodes along with a piece of spleen tissue
 - Submit these samples to the National Veterinary Services Laboratories for culture assays
 - NPS maintain appropriate records to allow bison repeatedly testing negative to be certified as brucellosis free, including copies of SV-2A forms and serology and culture results
- NPS move bison continuing to test negative for brucellosis exposure to quarantine facilities in Corwin Springs and/or on the Fort Peck Reservation to undergo the appropriate quarantine testing protocol for bison by age and sex as described in the 2003 Uniform Methods and Rules (APHIS 91-45-013)¹
 - These transfers should occur prior to the potential transmission period beginning about January 1st
- At the end of the quarantine testing period, APHIS and the Montana State Veterinarian certify bison remaining test-negative as brucellosis free and vaccinate them before they are released or relocated elsewhere
 - An additional blood test is recommended between 6 and 12 months after these bison are released
- If any of the 52 bison that were illegally released from the isolation pastures during January 2018 are recaptured, either transport them to Corwin Springs and/or Fort Peck to undergo quarantine or release them
 - These male bison are reaching adult size and will be hard to hold for another 1½ years at Stephens Creek

Fort Peck Reservation

- APHIS certify the double-fenced pastures as a quarantine facility
- APHIS write a letter to the Governor of Montana supporting the transfer of groups of bison, all testing negative for brucellosis exposure for at least two consecutive months (as described above), from YELL to the Fort Peck Reservation to undergo the quarantine testing protocol for bison by age and sex (APHIS 91-45-013)
 - The letter should indicate such transfers will not affect the brucellosis-free status of Montana
- APHIS consult with the Fort Peck Tribes to implement a record keeping system to identify the original bison transferred to the facility for quarantine, their offspring, deaths and additions, and all procedures done to each animal for the duration of the testing period described in the quarantine protocol
- APHIS assist with the testing of the bison under quarantine and the removal and diagnostic testing of aborted fetuses, stillborn animals, or other animals dying during the surveillance process
 - The testing procedures should be similar to those described above for Stephens Creek
- At the end of the quarantine testing period, APHIS and the Montana State Veterinarian certify bison remaining test-negative as brucellosis free and vaccinate them before they are released on the Fort Peck Reservation
 - An additional blood test of all bison is recommended 6 and 12 months after they are released

¹ Portions of the Uniform Methods and Rules pertaining to quarantine were adopted for the confinement and testing of Yellowstone bison. However, the use of these rules should not be construed to indicate wild bison are subject to, or bound by, federal or state livestock regulations.

Corwin Springs

- Per previous agreements with the NPS, APHIS is responsible for putting ~62 test-negative bison in double-fenced pastures at Corwin Springs, Montana (north of YELL) through quarantine over the next several years
 - APHIS has committed to providing ~\$100,000 over the next three years, which is well below the projected cost of about \$700,000 total over the next five years to complete quarantine for these bison
 - Montana maintains bison undergoing quarantine at Corwin Springs are subject to MCA 81-2-120 and 87-1-216, which gives the State Veterinarian authority over their final disposition and requires Fish, Wildlife & Parks to approve a bison transfer and relocation plan; the NPS would no longer be involved in decisions
- APHIS has had discussions with Colorado State University and several non-governmental organizations about this effort and, in turn, these organizations contacted YELL about fund raising and financial accounting through the park's partner organization (Yellowstone Forever)
 - The costs of quarantine at Corwin Springs should be shared by all involved parties, not primarily the NPS
- NPS should endorse the use of this facility as part of a collaborative quarantine program to increase the overall capacity for bison to undergo quarantine
 - NPS should support another agency or organization overseeing quarantine efforts at this facility, while the NPS continues to oversee the Stephens Creek facility and support quarantine and bison restoration efforts on public and tribal lands
- NPS should consider participating in quarantine at Corwin Springs if:
 - There is a collaborative, longer-term plan for continuing quarantine after APHIS' commitments are fulfilled for the existing 62 bison (expected to take ~5 years); and
 - A memorandum of agreement ensuring collaborative funding commitments, tribal participation, and that bison completing quarantine will be declared brucellosis free and transferred to tribal and public lands