

What is a “Wild” Bison?

IUCN Group Discussion

The Principle Concept	Explanations and Key Questions	Responses
Free Ranging-not in captivity	Bison are able to move freely across a landscape and make habitat use decisions without intervention. Landscape is large enough to enable this decision making. However do we know the minimum or optimum scale for unhindered decision making? How much free-ranging is required for the full expression of behaviors?	9
Maintaining ecological processes.	Bison are able to engage in all natural inter- and intra-specific behaviors and interactions. Population demography reflects environmental conditions. What does natural population demography look like?	6
Expressing bison ecological function	Meaning enough animals with enough freedom of movement to interact with and shape their environment. To operate as a natural bioengineer as they once did. How much function and interaction is required? How do we measure this?	4
Lack of selective culling by humans. Natural Selection is operating.	Harvests emulate natural selection. No human mediated selection based on behavior or other traits defined by humans. Human culling has always been present.....so what human decisions are considered natural and what are unnatural selection pressures?	4
Minimal Management intervention	Bison are managed like other wildlife. Management interventions do not hinder natural ecological processes. However we are not sure where the line for minimal intervention is?	4
Ownership is in common or typically Public	Not owned by an individual, group or organization. Typically managed in trust for members of a tribe state, province or country. Can this definition be extended to an NGO or publicly supported charity? Can there be shared ownership? When bison migrate across various jurisdictions does ownership shift in a legal and policy sense?	3
Maintaining “natural” sex and age ratios	Males and females are represented in the population at natural levels. Males are able to compete for reproductive rights. Age structure resembles a natural population. (IUCN guidelines are available)	3
Genetic Integrity	Cattle genes should be limited to some threshold and selected against. Enable evolution to proceed naturally. What is that threshold for cattle genes?	3
Occurring within the original range of bison	Within the original range of the species/subspecies. Which historic range map and time baseline do we use?	1

Some Current Definitions available in the Literature:

National Park Service

A wild bison population can be defined as one that is free roaming within a defined conservation area that is large enough to sustain ecological processes such as migration and dispersal, sufficiently abundant to mitigate the loss of existing genetic variation, and subject to forces of natural selection such as competition for breeding opportunities and food, predation, and substantial environmental variability (White and Wallen 2012).

SARA and COSEWIC terms

Wild Population: A population within its natural range in which the individuals are the result of natural production (i.e. not the result of human-mediated release or translocation); if a population is the result of a benign introduction that is now or has previously been successful (i.e. self-sustaining), the population is considered wild. (Source: IUCN 2010)

Definition of wildlife species includes the term "wild by nature" which could include captive individuals with recent wild ancestors.

IUCN definitions

Wild fauna: Land animal species that subsist subject to the natural selection processes and are freely developed. It includes the smaller populations that are under man's control, as well as household animals that turn wild

Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online

- *Living in a state of nature and not ordinarily tame or domesticated <wild ducks>*
- *Growing or produced without human aid or care <wild honey>*
- *Of or relating to wild organisms <the wild state>*

USFWS <http://www.fws.gov/le/ports-contact-information.html>

Wildlife means any wild animal, whether alive or dead, including any wild mammal, bird, reptile, amphibian, fish, mollusk (i.e. clam, snail, squid, octopus), crustacean (i.e. crab, lobster, crayfish), insect, sponges, corals, or other invertebrate, whether or not bred, hatched, or born in captivity, and including any part, product (including manufactured products and processed food products), egg, or offspring.

Best Wild Quote--Walt Disney

You can't just let nature run wild!