

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Disposition of Quarantine Facility Bison

Deadline for submission: August 10, 2009

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks is seeking proposals from agencies and organizations desiring to house/hold bison resulting from the bison quarantine feasibility study (hereafter referred to as quarantine bison) being conducted by MFWP and USDA APHIS, as described in the Bison Quarantine Feasibility Study Phase II/III (MFWP December 2005). Proposals will be evaluated by early September 2009. Once a final recommendation is made, MFWP will complete an Environmental Assessment of the proposal. If, based on the assessment, the decision is to proceed, and if MFWP Commission approves, then bison could be translocated by December, 2009. Before the quarantine bison will be transferred, the successful applicant will be required to sign an MOU agreeing to specific provisions contained in the proposal.

Instructions: Applicants are requested to submit a full proposal describing how they meet the criteria outlined below by July 31, 2009 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 quarantine bison fit within that vision. Options might include, but are not limited to: housing bison for later distribution to other restoration efforts or housing bison for incorporation into a free-ranging bison herd.

Proposals must meet and agree to all of the criteria listed below.

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.

Background:

Bison that have tested negative for brucellosis through an extensive quarantine and testing protocol are available for placement within contained facilities for eventual use for conservation purposes. The purpose of the bison quarantine feasibility study is to determine whether it is possible, using the protocol described in the 2005 Environmental Assessment, to certify that individual or groups of YNP bison are free from brucellosis, including latent infections of brucellosis <http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/show.aspx?id=987>. The need for such a study is to demonstrate whether quarantine is a feasible management tool for the management of YNP bison. The study also responds to a growing interest in using surplus YNP bison as part of a broader bison conservation strategy.

The primary goal of the bison quarantine feasibility study is to develop quarantine procedures, using the best available science and adaptive research strategies, that would allow bison from YNP to be accepted as free of brucellosis and suitable for the establishment of new public and Native American bison herds or to augment existing public and tribal herds in North America. Completion of the study also might provide insight to the feasibility of quarantine protocols and

the reintroduction of bison to large grassland systems as one component of a broader bison conservation strategy.

As part of the quarantine feasibility study, a total of 100 bison calves that originated in YNP were brought into the quarantine facilities in 2005 and 2006. Four of those sero-converted and were destroyed. Half of the remainders were slaughtered and extensively tested for brucellosis, resulting in a 95% probability of detecting brucellosis prevalence. Three of the remaining bison were suspect and were killed and tested, resulting in 45 bison – 37 females and 8 males. These were moved into Phase II of the study.

All of the cows were bred with the bulls in 2007. Twenty-one cows became pregnant, and 16 successfully delivered offspring in June 2008. These cows were allowed to breed again, and as of June 2009, at least 10 additional calves have been born, with up to 10 more expected. This group of cows, yearlings, and young-of-year, plus four to six bulls, comprise Group 1.

Thirteen females that did not successfully breed in 2007 were bred again in 2008. They are all pregnant and are expected to produce 13 calves. Two to four bulls will be moved with these bison, hereafter referred to as Group 2.

	Cows	Yearlings	Young of Year	Bulls	Total
Group 1	21	16	10-20	4-6	51-63
Group 2	13	0	13	2-4	28-30

Both Groups (1 and 2) of bison need to be removed from the facility to create space for a second repetition of the feasibility study. Group 1 bison can be moved as early as November 2009. Group 2 bison can moved after January 1, 2010. All of the cows will be bred in Fall 2009 and could be pregnant when they leave the feasibility study facility.

In winter 2008, another 100 bison calves were brought into the facility for a second repetition of the quarantine protocol. These will be bred in 2009, resulting in an additional 40-80 bison needing to be placed in 2010. After that time, the agencies will evaluate the quarantine feasibility protocol, and determine whether to continue the process.

NOTE: All of the above is contingent upon continued negative brucellosis testing of the quarantine bison.

All animals have been tested for brucellosis twice a year, so all have been tested between 6-13 times. Most have been tested at least 9 times.

Upon placement outside of the quarantine facility, the quarantine bison must be maintained in a closed herd, isolated from domestic cattle or other bison, and contained in a pasture where they can be readily accessible for continued intensive monitoring for the next year. Each group of bison must remain in a closed herd for five additional years, and be sufficiently contained to enable continued brucellosis surveillance following the attached monitoring and surveillance

protocol. However, during years 2-5, the intent is to progressively expand area from soft release area to a larger five-year perimeter.

All quarantine bison and their offspring are and will continue to be classified as public wildlife under the management jurisdiction of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks or the appropriate state or Tribal jurisdiction where they reside.

Criteria: The following criteria for quarantine bison apply to all sites/scenarios:

- Translocation site must be within suitable habitat within the historic range of plains bison.
- Agreement to a surveillance and monitoring plan, and a response protocol developed by APHIS (attached) if brucellosis is detected.
- Any decision to translocate quarantine bison for the purpose of establishing new or augmenting existing conservation herds requires the consent of the entity that receives the bison and that entity's commitment to manage the bison in a manner that supports the purposes of the North American Bison Conservation Strategy.
- All applicable import rules and laws apply.
- Quarantine bison, including any offspring, cannot be used for commercial purposes – i.e., sold as livestock (vs. ecotourism, outfitting, etc.).
- Quarantine bison (and any offspring) must be managed as native wildlife (pre- and post 5-year closed herd). Bison will be public/Tribal wildlife (not private) forever.
- On public land, a suitable comprehensive management plan to address population management, control of distribution, management of wildlife conflicts and habitat management within the project area would be required.
- As much as is practical, hunting should be part of the population management program (as appropriate) on any restoration area.
- All restoration projects must comply with environmental regulations of recipient jurisdictions.
- A public involvement process must be completed to assure a degree of social acceptance of the project.
- Intent is to enable expansion of founders rather than hold them at the number initially dispersed.

Required Information: The following information must be adequately addressed in any final proposal. Proposals must include/address each of the following points 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 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*). Should be consistent with IUCN restoration planning (see Page 23 of the EA). If bison already exist on the project area, include description of how those bison would be

separated from the quarantine bison. Should include what you foresee at end of 5-year study – (e.g., relocation, translocation, dropping the fence, supplementing with other bison, etc. (i.e., longer-range vision)).

- ⇒ Provide site/location information where the bison will be housed in Year 1, Years 2-5, and thereafter, including a description of the location and habitats in the project area. Must be within suitable habitat within the historic range of plains bison. Preference will be given to those areas within the State of Montana boundaries.
- ⇒ Applicants may apply to receive bison in any or all years bison are anticipated as being potentially available. Provide description of what year's animals you are submitting the proposal for (e.g., Group 1, Group 2, and/or bison that may be available in 2010, 2011, all, or combination thereof).
- ⇒ Provide information about the capacity 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.
- ⇒ Please address how the bison will be maintained in a closed herd, free of contact with domestic livestock or other bison.
- ⇒ A comprehensive management plan that includes: population objectives and clearly defined means to control herd size and distribution; habitat management objectives; a disease monitoring plan; and, conflict management strategies. Management plan should address Years 1-5, and then long-term thereafter (if applicable).
- ⇒ Address conflict management strategies – during and post 5-year period (e.g., what if one or more bison breaks out, if there are issues with neighbors, predators (e.g., grizzly bear), issues with other wildlife, etc).
- ⇒ Clarification of any legal or policy constraints and or treaty constraints that impact the project.
- ⇒ Identification of secured and potential funding sources – to maintain animals within a closed herd and meet the surveillance plan requirements within the required area (e.g., fencing, management, water development, handling facilities).
- ⇒ Proposal should note if one or more of the agencies will commit to assistance if agencies are involved in the proposal.
- ⇒ 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.
- ⇒ Include description of assurances/means to prevent commercialization of these bison and their offspring.
- ⇒ Address whether there are potential impacts to other animals (prairie dogs, ferrets, swift fox, etc.), and how those impacts will be minimized or mitigated.
- ⇒ Describe how you will comply with and assist with the brucellosis monitoring plan – compliance with minimum standards to be developed by interagency committee, and then any other health or brucellosis monitoring they propose. Include contingency if brucellosis breaks.
- ⇒ Include agency authorities and how they would be addressed if the applicant is successful and incorporates other land management agencies or entities in your proposal.
- ⇒ Clarification of any legal or policy constraints: MEPA/NEPA/Tribal constraints, any legislative or statutory constraints, any restrictions associated with designation as a “research herd”.
- ⇒ Clear description of environmental review process to be conducted, if required.

- ⇒ To the degree appropriate, include a description of socio-economic cost vs. benefits associated with the project (optional)
- ⇒ If dispersal is a management tool, describe processes that would be used to evaluate and designate where those bison will go.
- ⇒ If desire to incorporate additional bulls to help with genetic integrity, include how that would be done – where they would come from, how the surveillance would be affected, etc. NOTE: No additional bulls from other populations would be allowed until after the 5-year closed herd monitoring is completed.
- ⇒ Description of how hunting could be used to aid in population management (after the initial 5 years, as appropriate), including any access provisions.
- ⇒ If the recipient site is outside of Montana, please provide documentation from the state where the receiving site is located providing assurances that they will allow the import of the quarantine bison into/through that state.

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Protocol for the monitoring and surveillance of herd groups of bison during the first five years after translocation from the Bison Quarantine Feasibility Study.

If brucellosis testing remains negative for the Group 1 and Group 2 bison cows calving in the summer of 2009, a group of cows, calves, and bulls will be available for translocation to tribal or public properties remote from the GYA in winter 2009/10. The recipient tribe or agency will maintain them in one or more fenced pastures, approved by Federal and State animal health officials, on site until fall of 2010. During winter and spring, bison will be observed daily for abortions. Any aborted fetuses will be reported immediately to investigators and submitted to the state veterinary diagnostic laboratory for an abortion work-up and *Brucella* culture. In the fall of 2010, all bison (cows, yearlings and calves) will be worked through a chute and blood samples collected for brucellosis serology testing. If animals are negative on serology, fences can be removed and the animals allowed to range.

Serologic tests will include the following: fluorescence polarization assay, standard card, standard tube, standard plate, complement fixation, rivanol, and BAPA. Interpretation of tests will be done by the designated brucellosis epidemiologist and the regional epidemiologist.

As part of the requirements of the project to ensure that latent infection is not present in the translocated bison, it is necessary to monitor the population for 5 years following translocation. During the first year (2010) every animal will be serologically tested as described above. Thereafter, a percentage of adult or adolescent bison will be tested. Using a calculation to determine a 5% or greater prevalence with 95% confidence, a figure of 45 to 53 bison will need to be tested each year as the population grows. Animal capture can be accomplished by setting up a trap and working them through a chute or by chemical immobilization delivered by dart, or by helicopter capture or a combination of techniques.

Should serologically positive animals be detected in 2010 or subsequent years, the positives will be sacrificed, necropsied, and specimens collected for culture. If *B. abortus* infection is confirmed, whole-herd testing will be necessary. With results of the whole-herd test, a disease management plan will be developed in cooperation with the recipient agency or tribe, the State Veterinarian's office, and APHIS epidemiologists. Depending on testing results, the disease management plan may consist of vaccination and rigorous test and slaughter, to whole herd depopulation.

It is anticipated that if the translocated herds remain seronegative for 5 years following quarantine, continued regular monitoring will not be required.

Example MOU that must be signed before bison are transferred:

Memorandum of Understanding
Between
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
And

December 2009

WHEREAS Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks is nearing completion of Phase III of the Bison Quarantine Feasibility Study and requires a location to hold up to (*insert number here*) wild bison to enable continued brucellosis testing of these bison;

WHEREAS these Quarantine Feasibility Study Bison (QFS) have been tested numerous time for brucellosis, and have repeatedly tested negative for brucellosis;

WHEREAS it is the desire of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and cooperating agencies that these genetically pure bison be maintained as wildlife and managed for conservation purposes;

WHEREAS the bison is a keynote species that has important biological, cultural, and recreational values;

WHEREAS _____ has expressed desire maintain and manage Quarantine Feasibility Study bison, with the longer-term objective of restoring and conserving bison:

THEREFORE, be it resolved:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Shall:

- Provide up to _____ genetically pure wild bison from the Quarantine Feasibility Study to recipient to be housed location.

Recipient Shall:

- Maintain and manage the Quarantine Feasibility Study bison and their progeny in a closed herd, isolated from other bison or cattle for a period of at least 5 years.

- Make the QFS bison available for continued brucellosis testing by USDA APHIS personnel per the attached monitoring and surveillance protocol.
- Follow applicable state and federal regulations pertaining to import, export, and disease management.
- Maintain fences appropriately to contain bison and will have a zero tolerance for bison leaving the range unit while in a closed herd status.
- Not utilize or allow the QFS bison to be utilized for commercial purposes.
- Once carrying capacity is reached and the herd is no longer closed, the herd will be maintained or reduced by making animals available to other Tribes or public entities for conservation purposes, or utilizing hunting as a means of reducing herd size.
- Implement agreed upon contingency protocols IF QFS bison or their progeny subsequently test positive for brucellosis per the attached protocol.

This agreement is effective upon signature.

For Fish, Wildlife and Parks:

Date

For Recipient:

Date