

## **Briefing Statement FY 2019**

**Bureau:** National Park Service  
**Issue:** Quarantine of Yellowstone Bison  
**Member:** General Interest  
**Park:** Yellowstone National Park

### **Key Points:**

- Yellowstone bison have ecological, genetic, and cultural value that would enhance conservation efforts for the species. Indian tribes and conservation entities are interested in obtaining live Yellowstone bison. However, the population is infected with the bacterial disease brucellosis, which could be transmitted to cattle.
- The NPS has proposed quarantine in Yellowstone National Park (YELL), at the Corwin Springs facility near Yellowstone, and at the Fort Peck Indian Reservation to identify brucellosis-free bison to: establish new conservation and cultural herds, enhance cultural and nutritional opportunities for Indians, and reduce shipments of bison to slaughter facilities.
- Parallel agreements for quarantine process and operations are being negotiated between the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), YELL and Assiniboine and Sioux tribes at Ft. Peck.
- Conducting quarantine in YELL and on the Fort Peck Reservation would not increase risk to livestock because the NPS and Fort Peck tribes will use facilities and testing protocols that meet APHIS-developed specifications and that have been found to effectively identify brucellosis-free bison.

### **Background:**

- The public disdains the practice of shipping bison to slaughter. As a result, bison managers have explored alternatives to preserve valuable brucellosis-free bison.
- The NPS and Fort Peck tribes adhered to specifications and requirements provided by APHIS and the State of Montana to construct double-fenced quarantine facilities and to establish testing protocols.
- The NPS has proposed to transfer male bison testing negative for brucellosis exposure for 7-8 months from YELL to a facility on the Fort Peck Reservation to complete quarantine (1-2 years) and, eventually, to be released on the Reservation. Bison transport would necessarily occur on Montana highways.
- Female bison and their offspring could be transferred to Fort Peck for additional testing and released after completing the entire quarantine protocol in the YELL facility or another double-fenced facility in Corwin Springs, Montana, which APHIS has used since 2005.

### **Current Status:**

- The NPS completed structural improvements to the proposed quarantine pastures in YELL; APHIS and State of Montana representatives inspected the facility on December 7, 2017. APHIS has verbally certified the YELL quarantine facility, as of inspection date, though written certification is still forthcoming.
- During December 2017, the NPS, APHIS, and the State of Montana developed and signed an agreement in principle which could facilitate the movement and future release

of YELL bison to tribal lands.

- Between January 15 - 16, 2018, someone released 52 male bison testing negative for brucellosis exposure from YELL's double-fenced isolation pastures. A criminal investigation of this trespass and tampering incident is ongoing. Security has been increased, and the planning and acquisition of long-term security staffing and technology is ongoing.
- On February 28, 2018, the Yellowstone Superintendent met with the Secretary of Interior and his staff, the USDA APHIS Deputy Administrator and staff, the Resource Policy Advisor for State of Montana Governor, and representatives from the Fort Peck Tribe, to discuss relocating YELL quarantine bison to Fort Peck. Crosscutting all discussions in this meeting was a commitment to tribes regarding bison.
- During the February 28 meeting, APHIS and the State of Montana posited that no bison can be transported to the Fort Peck Indian Reservation until they complete the quarantine protocol developed by APHIS, which will take about 2 years for males and more than 3 years for females.
- YELL believes quarantine science supports that male bison repeatedly testing negative for brucellosis after 7-8 months could be sent to Fort Peck for the 1-year quarantine testing protocol, and another year of post-quarantine testing, with negligible risk of brucellosis transmission to cattle. This would require a modification of the APHIS Uniform Methods and Rules (UM&R), the science-based protocols guiding quarantine of bison.
- During winter capture operations, 98 yearling bison were entered in to the quarantine facility at YELL (25 female/73 males). These animals are currently undergoing serial testing.
- On April 6, 2018, the Governor of Montana transmitted a letter to Secretary Zinke and Secretary Perdue. In the letter the Governor indicated support of transfer of YELL bison to Ft. Peck for completion of quarantine, and for modifying the Uniform Methods and Rules (UM&R) to expedite transfer of male quarantine bison. The Governor framed this support with three conditions relating to temporal aspects of the quarantine process. The NPS is arranging a meeting with APHIS and the State of Montana in order to ensure common clarity on these conditions.
- The Deputy Administrator of APHIS has analyzed current bison quarantine data and will render a decision on time frame for moving male bison to Ft. Peck. If affirmative, this would mean the current male quarantine cohort at the YELL facility could be relocated to Ft. Peck for completion of quarantine by the end of CY2018.
- On May 14, 2018, the YELL Bison Quarantine FONSI was signed by the NPS Intermountain Regional Director.
- The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), the State of Montana and YELL are finalizing agreements for quarantine process and operations at the Stephens Creek facility, and the NPS, APHIS and Ft. Peck tribes are negotiating a companion agreement for Ft. Peck. An agreement for quarantine process and operations at the Corwin Springs facility will be developed once cooperating partners are finalized.

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## Briefing Statement FY 2019

**Bureau:** National Park Service  
**Issue:** Bison Management Plan Interagency (Yellowstone NP)  
**Member:** General Interest  
**Park:** Yellowstone National Park

### Key Points:

- Approximately 4800 bison were counted during summer 2017. Yellowstone National Park (YELL) and other members of the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) agreed to manage for a decreasing bison population this winter using hunting in Montana and capture/culling to ensure removal of 600-900 bison.
- 1,173 bison were removed from the population through capture operations and public/treaty hunting outside the park (per state of Montana hunt update on 5/3/18).
- The late summer 2018 population estimate for Yellowstone bison is 4,200 (+/- 500).
- Without capture and culling, the population will continue to grow, which is not sustainable without access to additional habitat in Montana and other states surrounding the park in winter.

### Background:

- The federal government and State of Montana are signatories to the IBMP, which has been implemented since 2001 to manage bison numbers toward a negotiated guideline of 3000 and reduce the risk of brucellosis transmission from bison to cattle.
- The plan has been successful at conserving a viable population of wild, wide-ranging bison and there have been no transmissions of brucellosis from bison to cattle. Other members of the IBMP include the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Nation, US Forest Service, InterTribal Buffalo Council and the Nez Perce Tribe, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, and Montana Department of Livestock.
- Six tribes hunt bison on land outside the park boundary in Montana adjacent to YELL: the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Nation, Nez Perce Tribe, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation, Confederate Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation and the Blackfeet Nation.

### Current Status:

- There is limited tolerance for wild bison in Montana due to concerns about competition with cattle, human safety, property damage, and brucellosis transmission. The States of Idaho and Wyoming do not want wild bison.
- There is no social tolerance for harvesting 600+ bison in communities of Montana adjacent to YELL due to concentrations of hunters and carcasses near roads and residences, human safety issues, and hunting practices perceived to be unethical (e.g., firing lines of hunters along the park boundary, “flock” shooting).
- In 2018 captures at the Stephens Creek facility began on February 16 and ended on March 11. A total of 1,173 bison were removed from the population (694 captured by NPS and transferred to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes for slaughter, 377 harvested outside the park by public and treaty hunters, 98 entered in to Yellowstone Quarantine program, 4 capture facility mortalities).

- In January and February, 2018, four criminal acts occurred at the Stephens Creek facility including the release of 52 bison from quarantine, the release of 50+ bison from the capture facility, the brief self-chaining of two activists to the processing facility, and the self-chaining of two activists to an access gate. The individuals arrested in the two latter incident were arraigned, found guilty, and sentenced in federal Magistrates Court with conditions including probation, a variety of fines, probation, and a 5 year ban from the park.
- The NPS is in the final stages of negotiating with APHIS and the State of Montana to reach an agreement(s) to quarantine bison and send brucellosis-free bison to the Assiniboine and Sioux tribes at Fort Peck Reservation in NE Montana.
- Hunting is prohibited in YELL. However, when bison migrations into Montana are small or late, tribal hunters become frustrated and assert that treaty rights include hunting inside the park; a point that is encouraged by the state veterinarian and others associated with the livestock community. No tribe has formally requested treaty right hunts in YELL.
- Plaintiffs sought action against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for a 90-day determination that their petition failed to present sufficient scientific evidence that the listing of YELL bison as threatened or endangered was warranted. On January 31, 2018, the US District Court for the District of Columbia granted the plaintiffs' motion for summary judgment and remanded the case to the agency to conduct a new 90-day finding.

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