

Briefing Statement

Bureau:	National Park Service
Issue:	Interagency Bison Management Plan
Park Site:	Yellowstone National Park
Date:	December 13, 2019

Key Points:

- The maximum aerial count of bison during summer 2019 was 4,829, including 3,667 in northern Yellowstone (northern herd) and 1,162 in central Yellowstone (central herd). Three hundred and sixty bison were removed from the population last winter via harvests outside the park and shipments to slaughter.
- There is limited tolerance for wild bison in Montana due to concerns about competition with cattle, human safety, property damage, and brucellosis transmission. Idaho and Wyoming do not want wild bison.
- Under the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP), there has been no detected transmission of brucellosis from bison to cattle, while a viable, wild population of bison has been sustained in Yellowstone National Park.
- Without capture and culling, the population will continue to grow, which likely would increase conflicts with people outside the park and, ultimately, is not sustainable without bison having access to additional habitat in Montana and other states surrounding the park during winter.

Background:

- The federal government and Montana are signatories to the IBMP, which has been implemented since 2001 to manage bison migration into the state and reduce the risk of brucellosis transmission from bison to cattle.
- Current members of the IBMP include the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Nation, Forest Service, InterTribal Buffalo Council, Montana Department of Livestock, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, and the Nez Perce Tribe.
- Seven tribes hunt bison on land outside the park boundary in Montana, including the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Nez Perce Tribe, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation, Confederate Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Blackfoot Nation, and Northern Arapaho.
- Hunting is prohibited in Yellowstone National Park. However, when bison migrations into Montana are small or late, tribal hunters become frustrated and assert that treaty rights include hunting inside the park. No tribe has formally requested to hunt in the park.
- There is no social tolerance for harvesting 600+ bison in communities of Montana adjacent to the park 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).

Current Status:

- YELL biologists have recommended the removal of 600 to 900 bison during winter 2019-2020 to decrease the number of bison to fewer than 4,100 by the end of winter.
 - Focus removals on the northern herd; limit harvests outside the west boundary of the park (central herd).
 - Remove bison in proportion to their occurrence in the population (10 to 15% calves, 10 to 12% adolescents, 20 to 34% adult females, and 39 to 60% adult males).
- YELL biologists have recommended the NPS begin culling at Stephens Creek when more than 200 bison are north of Mammoth, while allowing many bison to migrate out of park to support public and tribal hunting.
- YELL biologists have recommended placing up to 110 juvenile and young adult bison into quarantine at NPS (Stephens Creek) and APHIS (Corwin Springs) facilities this winter.
- Per prior agreement, YELL has notified the Governor of Montana the NPS and tribes will be shipping bison in trailers to slaughter this winter using state roads. The park has agreements with American Indian tribes to transport bison to slaughter and provide meat, hides, and other bison parts to their members.
- Two lawsuits in the U.S. District Court for the District of Montana are currently challenging the management of Yellowstone bison and requesting supplemental NEPA analyses for the IBMP. The Court recently denied a request for a preliminary injunction to stop hunting outside the north boundary of the park.

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