

Briefing Statement FY 2019

Bureau: National Park Service
Issue: Interagency Bison Management Plan
Member: General Interest
Park: Yellowstone National Park

Key Points:

- Approximately 4,527 bison were counted after calving during summer 2018, which represents a 6% decrease since summer 2017 and 17% decrease since summer 2016.
- Park biologists recommended removal of 600-900 bison, through hunting and culling, during winter 2018/19 to decrease abundance towards 4,200 bison.
- About 462 bison were removed from the population during winter 2018/19 via shipments to slaughter (347), harvests outside the park (~115).
- No bison were placed into the quarantine program at the Stephens Creek facility due to the presence of the 2 current cohorts (58 male/21 female).
- Without human removals (harvests, culls), the bison population will grow exponentially, which is not sustainable without access to additional habitat in surrounding states.

Background:

- The federal government and State of Montana are signatories to the management plan, which has been implemented since 2001 to limit bison numbers and reduce the risk of brucellosis transmission from bison to cattle.
- Other members include the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Forest Service, InterTribal Buffalo Council, Nez Perce Tribe, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, and the Montana Department of Livestock.
- 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.
- The State of Montana and six tribes hunt bison migrating outside the park, including the Salish and Kootenai, Nez Perce, Shoshone-Bannock, Umatilla, Yakama, Blackfeet, and Northern Arapahoe.

Current Status:

- There is limited tolerance for wild bison in states surrounding the park due to concerns about competition with cattle, human safety, property damage, and disease transmission.
- There is no social tolerance for harvesting more than 600 bison in communities of Montana adjacent to YELL due to concentrated hunters and carcasses near roads and residences, human safety issues, and hunting practices perceived to be unethical.
- When bison migrations are small or late, tribal hunters assert treaty rights should include hunting inside the park; a point that is encouraged by the state veterinarian and some in the livestock community. No tribe has formally requested treaty right hunts in YELL.
- The Department of the Interior is negotiating with APHIS, the State of Montana, and the Assiniboine and Sioux tribes to send brucellosis-free bison to the Fort Peck Reservation in northeast Montana for quarantine and/or post-quarantine testing and eventual release. Approximately 55 male bison will complete phase 2 of quarantine and be eligible for transfer to the Ft. Peck Reservation in fall 2019.

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