Interagency Bison Management Plan
OPERATING PROCEDURES
Originally signed December 6, 2002
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Introduction

These operating procedures outline the action items necessary to implement the cooperative Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) as set forth in the Records of Decision issued by the State of Montana and the federal agencies. All actions described in this document are interpreted to be consistent with the IBMP. Cooperating federal and state agencies include the National Park Service (NPS), U.S.D.A. Forest Service (USFS), U.S.D.A. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Montana Department of Livestock (MDOL), and Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP). In compliance with the National and Montana Environmental Policy Acts, the IBMP has been analyzed in federal and state Environmental Impact Statements and the respective federal and state of Montana Records of Decision.

Purpose

The purpose of these operating procedures is to implement actions set forth in the IBMP, and will remain in effect until replaced by subsequent updated Operating Procedures.

Jurisdiction and Legal Mandates

All agencies involved have agreed upon a plan to manage bison in Yellowstone National Park and Montana as set forth in the IBMP contained in the Records of Decision. Outside the park, MDOL has the lead responsibility for all bison management actions and may request assistance from MFWP, USFS, APHIS and NPS. USFS personnel will be responsible for federal resource related violations on USFS administered lands. Property damage issues on private lands will be the joint responsibility of MFWP and MDOL. Upon request from MDOL, through the Gallatin and/or Park County Sheriff's Office, USFS law enforcement personnel will provide support, for hazing, capture and removal operations. MFWP and MDOL both have responsibility regarding the Montana bison hunt as directed by State statute. Inside the park, NPS has the lead responsibility for all bison management actions. As described in the IBMP, in step 1 the agencies will cooperate with the Royal Teton Ranch to develop a Bison Management Plan for the RTR that is consistent with the provisions of the IBMP.

Media Relations/Public Information

Each agency manages their media relations concerning bison management. For information on bison management procedures within the state of Montana, MFWP will take the lead responsibility for issues regarding the bison hunt and MDOL will take lead responsibility and coordinate media information on all other issues. For all activities occurring within the

boundaries of Yellowstone National Park, the NPS will take lead responsibility and coordinate media information. News releases or media contacts shall be handled by only those so designated. Cooperating agencies will also jointly represent and support management activities under this agreement with joint press releases and other associated media.

Organization

The Incident Command System will be used to implement actions/operations associated with the IBMP within the park. Positions in the command structure will be filled, as necessary, to assure effective mission accomplishment. All agency personnel conducting bison management actions as set forth in the IBMP remain subject to that employee's agency supervision and personnel management authorities. Bison management operations within the park will be under the authority of the Chief Ranger or designee. The Incident Command System will also be used to implement actions/operations associated with the IBMP outside the park. Bison management operations occurring outside the park will be under the direction of an on-site Operations Chief from MDOL. Hazing, shooting, capture, research and monitoring operations will include participants from MDOL, APHIS, MFWP, NPS, and USFS. Agencies expect to cooperatively support the numerous bison management activities described in this document below, but recognize that within any denoted management operation, any agency would not be required to provide all types of support concurrently (Attachment 1). Under a unified command structure, each agency involved may designate an Incident Commander to represent that agency in command decisions. At no time will there be more than one Operations Chief, regardless of the number of Incident Commanders.

Monitoring and Reporting of Bison Movement and Management Activity

Bison movement and activity within Yellowstone National Park: The Division of Resource Management and Visitor Protection in Yellowstone National Park will be responsible for monitoring, recording and notification of bison activity within the park and in the Eagle Creek/Bear Creek area. When it appears likely that bison will migrate out of the park (within 24 hours) near West Yellowstone, Montana, or Gardiner, Montana, or near the Little Trail Creek-Maiden Basin hydrographic divide, Yellowstone National Park shall notify the Helena office of the MDOL. Weekend and holiday notification of bison activity will be made to specific individuals, as designated by the Executive Officer for the Montana Board of Livestock. Monitoring activities in the park will increase in frequency as the distance of bison from the boundary decreases. Bison activity west of Hell Roaring Overlook and west of Seven-Mile Bridge will be reported, monitored, and recorded daily as bison activity dictates. Bison activity between Madison Junction and Seven-Mile Bridge will be reported, monitored, and recorded when logistically possible and as bison activity dictates under the following conditions 1) twice weekly between October 1 and November 30, 2) daily between December 1 and April 30. The park will determine when aircraft will be used to monitor bison movement within Yellowstone National Park. Inclement weather and observations from the road may prevent observation of all bison movements out of the park.

During the winter season, NPS personnel will prepare bi-weekly reports that summarize inter-agency bison monitoring, hazing, capture, vaccination, shooting and other management actions within these operating procedures and the IBMP, which will then be promptly shared by email with all agencies under the IBMP. Descriptions of respective agency bison management actions should be shared for incorporation into these bi-weekly bison management reports.

Monitoring Bison Movement and Activity Outside of Yellowstone National Park: The following general monitoring schedule will be in effect during those times when bison are most likely to move out of the park. This schedule will be considered the minimum acceptable monitoring frequency, with the understanding that more frequent monitoring may become necessary. The agencies shall monitor and record bison sightings and locations outside of Yellowstone National Park in both the western and northern boundary areas on a weekly basis or more frequently, if deemed necessary or as set forth in the IBMP. The agencies shall agree to any changes in a monitoring schedule for each of the agencies. The timely reporting of bison sightings and locations is necessary to facilitate operations necessary to fulfill the objectives set forth in the IBMP. The agencies will provide to NPS and MDOL copies of the pertinent monitoring and other management reports, as soon as available, to become part of the historical record to be maintained by the YCR and the Executive Officer of the Montana Board of Livestock.

The agencies will monitor bison in the Eagle Creek/Bear Creek area twice per week during the winter. If bison approach the Little Trail Creek/Maiden Basin hydrographic divide, they would be monitored daily or more often as needed. Yellowstone National Park shall notify MDOL when it appears likely that bison will migrate out of the park (within 24 hours) near West Yellowstone, Montana or Gardiner, Montana, or near the Little Trail Creek-Maiden Basin hydrographic divide. Bison in the Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness area would not be monitored or managed in any way, except for human safety concerns. The agencies may agree to other monitoring provisions on a case-by-case basis. The agencies will periodically monitor bison that may move in the Cabin Creek Recreation and Wildlife management area, the Monument Mountain Unit of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness or in the Upper Gallatin River above the mouth of Taylor Fork. Periodic monitoring of bison would facilitate actions that may be necessary to prevent bison from crossing the Sage Creek-Wapiti Creek divide. Bison may attempt to winter in these areas but are expected to return to the park in spring. Bison may use these areas during all seasons provided they are not causing property damage, or are approaching the cattle allotments in the Taylor Fork when cattle are present.

Hazing

Hazing of bison may be attempted to discourage bison from leaving the park, to move bison back into the park from outside the park, move bison within Zone 2, or to move bison further into the park away from the park boundary to achieve the risk management objectives of the IBMP.

Hazing may be accomplished by agency personnel using ATVs, snowmobile, on foot, horseback

and/or helicopters and may include the use of crackershells or rubber bullets. These methods may be used singly or in combination, subject to applicable restrictions. The safety of personnel will be the primary consideration in any hazing operation, and at no time will the safety of personnel be compromised.

The IBMP partners will make efforts to integrate the risk management interests of the IBMP with recognized aboriginal tribal hunting on unclaimed federal lands outside the park. MFWP will take the lead responsibility in communication on these mutual interests with the tribes. Efforts will be made to integrate tribal interests, along with public and personnel safety, during all hazing operations.

The Chief Ranger or designee will determine the timing, location, and duration of hazing within the park in accordance with the Records of Decision. The NPS is the lead agency to implement hazing within Yellowstone National Park. The NPS may request assistance from employees or personnel from other federal agencies or from MDOL and MFWP, acting as designated cooperating agencies. MDOL is the lead agency to implement hazing outside of Yellowstone National Park. Similarly, MDOL may request the assistance of MFWP, NPS, and USFS.

Bison Distribution

Subject to the criteria set forth in the IBMP, the distribution of bison outside Yellowstone National Park will be limited to certain lands adjacent to the park in Management Zone 2 in the West boundary area, Management Zone 2 in the Reese Creek area north of the park, and other areas described in the IBMP, including the Eagle Creek/Bear Creek area North of the park.

During Step 1, all bison that enter the western boundary area outside Yellowstone National Park during the period from May 15 through October 31 will be hazed back into the park or removed as set forth in the IBMP. During the period from November 1 through May 15, bison in the western boundary area may be hazed, captured, or subject to lethal removal according to provisions set forth in IBMP and Record of Decision for the Montana bison hunt.

From approximately November 1 to May 15, as determined by the State Veterinarian, the presence of a limited number of untested bulls may be tolerated in Zone 2 of the West boundary area that meet the following criteria: are not likely to move or travel to areas where they are co-mingling with livestock and are not currently co-mingling with livestock; are not damaging property; and are not considered a public safety risk.

In Step 1, seronegative pregnant bison may not enter Montana until cattle are removed in Zone 2 in the fall. If cattle remain on private lands in West Yellowstone area within Zone 2 during the fall or winter, a buffer as described in the IBMP will be maintained until the cattle are removed from those lands. The State of Montana maintains jurisdiction for management of bison within Montana and the Montana State Veterinarian will determine whether untested bison may be allowed on public lands in the west boundary area.

During Step 1, management actions in the northern boundary area will be taken to haze bison back into the park or capture all bison that move north of Stephens Creek within the park before they enter any private lands in the vicinity of Reese Creek. Bison outside the park in the Reese Creek area that cannot be hazed back into the park and evade capture would be subject to lethal removal. No effort will be made to haze or remove bison from the Eagle Creek/Bear Creek area until the animals approach Little Trail Creek/Maiden Basin hydrographic divide.

Capturing bison

The NPS is the lead agency to implement bison capture within Yellowstone National Park. The NPS may request assistance from employees or personnel from other federal agencies or from MDOL and MFWP, acting as designated cooperating agencies. The MDOL is the lead agency to implement bison capture outside of Yellowstone National Park. Similarly, MDOL may request the assistance of MFWP, NPS, and USFS. All bison captured will be handled according to applicable methods for blood testing, pregnancy testing, vaccination, tagging, sorting safety, and hauling.

Outside the Park. When bison are outside the park, they may be moved into a capture facility by hazing and/or the use of weed free hay. When bison are brucellosis tested at the capture facility, back tags and/or other identification will be used in order to easily identify and separate seropositive from seronegative animals. All tested bison will be identified with an official metal ear tag. All released seronegative bison will be identified with an additional visual marking (either by clipping or a dye marking).

The agencies will be responsible for capturing and assisting with processing and sorting. MDOL or federal veterinarians will conduct brucellosis and pregnancy testing. It may be necessary to use a MDOL and/or APHIS contract veterinary practitioner(s) if the workload becomes a continuous daily occurrence. Work assignments of individual agency personnel may change depending upon time constraints, workload, and other duties.

As set forth in the IBMP, seronegative calves and yearling bison captured outside the park will be vaccinated with a safe brucellosis vaccine (currently expected to be RB51).

As set forth in the IBMP, seronegative, pregnant bison in the western boundary area may receive telemetry devices to facilitate brucellosis management. The agencies (primarily APHIS and MFWP outside the park and NPS inside the park) will be responsible for monitoring and reporting of telemetered seronegative, pregnant bison location(s), collection and reporting of data from telemetered bison. If a telemetered bison calves or aborts in management Zone 2 outside the park, the agencies will capture or remove the telemetered bison for testing to determine if the bison seroconverted and/or is brucellosis infected. The agencies will be responsible for location of calving or abortion sites that might occur in management Zone 2. Monitoring, location, calving or abortion site information, and post-calving/abortion test results will be reported to the

agencies.

As set forth in the IBMP, the responsible agencies and/or contract haulers will transport those bison to slaughter. Appropriate law enforcement personnel will provide security while animals are in transit. Bison to be hauled in trailer(s) to a release location or slaughter will be sorted, as facilities permit, for sex, size, and age to prevent injury. Bison to be released will be released as soon as practical after testing and sorting. All brucellosis seropositive bison will be consigned to slaughter and will be delivered to slaughter facilities as soon as practical after capture and processing. All appropriate identification will be retrieved from bison consigned to slaughter.

MDOL will contact slaughter establishments based upon the size, number and sex of the bison captured, and the number each plant may be capable of handling on a particular day. MDOL may request assistance of APHIS for arrangement of out of state slaughter and distribution. The slaughter establishments will be asked prior to receiving the bison if they can handle such a shipment and the bison will be transported to the slaughter establishment. The MDOL or federal meat inspectors will provide for meat inspection. Blood samples and selected tissue samples may be collected at the slaughter establishment.

Inside the Park. In Step 1, if hazing is unsuccessful, the NPS will capture bison to prevent bison movement north of the Reese Creek boundary area. The NPS will maintain capture and handling facilities in the Stephens Creek area within Yellowstone National Park. The NPS will operate the Stephens Creek facility for the purpose of capturing all migrant bison at this location as set forth in the IBMP. At the request and under the direction of the NPS, cooperating agencies may provide personnel (depending on training and experience) to assist in the operation of the facility. The agencies will maintain a list of approved veterinarians that will perform brucellosis testing at the Stephens Creek facility. Bison captured at the Stephens Creek capture facility will be managed as set forth in the IBMP after discussion with coordinating agencies. Bison captured at the Stephens Creek facility that test brucellosis seropositive, with the exception of those identified for research purposes, will be consigned to slaughter as set forth in the IBMP. Calf and yearling bison captured at the Stephens Creek facility that test brucellosis seronegative will be vaccinated for brucellosis. Brucellosis seronegative bison, except those identified for research purposes, captured at the Stephens Creek capture facility may be temporarily held at the capture facility and released when winter weather moderates in spring as set forth in the IBMP. The National Park Service personnel will load all bison consigned to slaughter from the Stephens Creek facility into transportation vehicles. As set forth in the IBMP, the responsible agencies and/or contract haulers will transport those bison to slaughter. Appropriate law enforcement personnel will provide security while animals are in transit.

MDOL will contact slaughter establishments based upon the size, number and sex of the bison captured, and the number each plant may be capable of handling on a particular day. The slaughter establishments will be asked prior to receiving the bison if they can handle such a shipment and the bison will be transported to the slaughter establishment. MDOL may request assistance of APHIS for arrangement of out of state slaughter and distribution. The MDOL or

federal meat inspectors will provide for meat inspection. Blood samples and selected tissue samples may be collected at the slaughter establishment.

Lethal Removal of Bison - Risk Management

The NPS is the lead agency to implement lethal removal operations within Yellowstone National Park. The NPS may request assistance from employees or personnel from other federal agencies or from MDOL and MFWP, acting as designated cooperating agencies. The MDOL is the lead agency to implement lethal removal operations outside of Yellowstone National Park. The MDOL may request the assistance of MFWP, NPS, and USFS. Inter-agency requests for assistance before a shooting operation occurs will be as timely as possible to plan for carcass salvage.

The MDOL is the lead agency for field slaughter, field dress, and resultant transport of bison carcasses that are removed outside the park under the terms of this plan. MDOL may request the assistance of MFWP, NPS, APHIS and USFS. Charitable organization(s) and/or Indian tribal governments would receive carcasses for distribution through their social service system. Indian tribal organizations or their designee(s) may receive the bison heads and hides. Bison carcasses, heads, and hides may be sold as provided for in Montana law (MCA 81-2-120(3)). Only designated agency personnel shall remove offal, fetuses, or stillborn calves.

The MDOL and the landowner shall determine whether to leave offal at site on private land. No offal will be left on site when grizzly bears may be present in the area to avoid human-bear conflict. All gravid uteruses and stillborn calves will be disposed.

All bison carcasses that result from management actions and are fit for human consumption will be salvaged except those to be used for research purposes. Those carcasses designated for research will not be used for any other purposes. After veterinary inspection, carcasses that are deemed unfit for human consumption will be condemned.

Research

All research activities conducted by the agencies will satisfy applicable permitting processes. The agencies will mutually keep each other informed of progress and results.

Safety

The safety of all personnel and the public is paramount in all aspects of bison management operations. No actions will be taken which compromise the safety of any personnel. Personnel involved will take all precautions to protect the security of operations. MDOL will coordinate directly with Montana Department of Transportation (MDOT) when operations will be within the highway rights-of-way and will coordinate with the USFS when operations will be outside the highway rights-of-way but on the National Forest.

MDOL will work with the MDOT and appropriate County Commissioners to facilitate signage and reduce speed limits on highways as needed.

Conditions attached to hazing, lethal removal, and/or retrieval of dead bison on private lands, will be made clear to the hazing or lethal removal teams and those individuals responsible for slaughtering, field dressing, or transporting bison carcasses. Under leadership of the MDOL, when feasible, reasonable attempts will be made to notify affected private landowners prior to operations.

Access/Approval to Operate on National Forest System Lands

The MDOL will need written authorization from the USFS prior to conducting hazing operations involving the use of motorized vehicles on National Forest System roads, trails or areas otherwise closed to the use of motorized vehicles. The MDOL will contact a representative from the USFS prior to the time when bison are to be hazed, captured, shot, or otherwise removed from lands administered by the USFS. The USFS will also provide direction, including requirements for the retrieval and field dressing of dead bison on lands administered by the USFS.

Assurance of General Security

The MDOL will contact NPS, USFS, and MFWP and, if necessary and appropriate, the local and state law enforcement agencies with jurisdiction to assure that necessary and appropriate actions are taken to provide for the general security of all personnel involved in hazing, capturing, shooting, or processing bison outside the park. Security of the MDOL west boundary capture site(s) will be the responsibility of MDOL enforcement personnel with the assistance of the cooperating agencies. MDOL and/or the cooperating agencies may contract a security agency to provide general security if necessary. Security for bison management operations inside the park will be the responsibility of NPS.

Maintenance of Records and Accountability for Bison Removal

The NPS will be responsible for the accountability of bison management records for activities inside the park including hazing, capturing, brucellosis testing, brucellosis test results, and brucellosis vaccination. The MDOL will be responsible for the accountability of bison records for bison management activities outside the park including hazing, capturing, slaughter, lethal removal, brucellosis testing, brucellosis test results, and brucellosis vaccination.

Collection and Analysis of Blood and Tissue Samples

The MDOL with the assistance of federal and other state agencies will be responsible for the collection of blood and tissue samples from bison captured outside the park and that are

designated for sampling procedures. Outside the park, MDOL and APHIS will assure that appropriate personnel are on site to accomplish sample collection. Outside the park, the MDOL will be responsible for collection and brucellosis analysis of blood and tissue samples, with assistance from APHIS, United States Geological Service-Biological Resource Division (BRD), NPS and USDA-Agriculture Research Service (ARS). Inside the park, NPS will be responsible for collection of blood and tissue samples and analyses for management purposes. NPS may request assistance of APHIS, BRD, ARS, and MDOL with collection of blood and tissue samples. MDOL, BRD, ARS, NPS, and APHIS will share copies of the results of all analyses.

Hunting Bison

The Montana licensed bison hunt will be applied as an adaptive management strategy and additional IBMP management tool. The bison hunt was reviewed under the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) through an environmental assessment completed in 2004 by FWP. That assessment tiers off of the IBMP environmental impact statement, where a bison hunt was contemplated. The following are necessary conditions or criteria regarding this adaptive management adjustment to the IBMP Operating Procedures:

1. Hunting will be permitted from November 15 through February 15, when cattle are typically no longer present in the Northern and Western Boundary Areas.

2. Hunting will remain limited to the following areas where and when cattle are typically not present:

    a. Lands defined in the IBMP as "Zone 2" in the West Yellowstone Basin); and
    b. Areas where bison are currently allowed to roam freely (public land with no cattle allotments)
        i. The Cabin Creek Recreation and Wildlife Management Area,
        ii. The Monument Mountain Unit of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness,
        iii. The upper Gallatin River drainage south of the mouth of Taylor Fork,
        iv. The Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness (including the upper portions of Hellroaring and Sough Creeks), and
        v. The Eagle Creek/Bear Creek region in the northern boundary area up to the Little Trail Creek/Maiden Basin hydrographic divide.

3. During November 15 through February 15, hazing of bison will be suspended outside the park in hunt areas described above, unless hazing becomes necessary to prevent movement of bison into Zone 3, as determined by the state veterinarian. This is to ensure a fair chase hunt. Monitoring of bison abundance distribution and movement in Zone 1 in the West Yellowstone Basin will be conducted by the NPS and in Zone 2 by MDOL (assisted by FWP). MDOL will lead more intensive monitoring, and potentially other management actions, if required because of significant numbers of bison approaching or going beyond Witts Lake Road (North of Hebgen Lake on Hwy. 287), USFS Road 1731

(South of Hebgen Lake near Madison Arm Resort), the upper Gallatin River drainage south of the mouth of Taylor Fork, or the Little Trail Creek/Maiden Basin hydrographic divide. Desired field flexibility will be preserved in the area of Whits Lake Road (north of Hebgen Lake on Highway 287) to avoid the need for immediate cessation of the hunt. This Whits Lake Road area will be monitored, with a particular emphasis on early morning and late afternoon, and personnel will be ready to act to deter bison westward movement or remove bison when necessary.

4. The MFWP Commission will enact 24 hour notice of hunting closure, when determined to be necessary, to implement other management actions such as hazing, capture, or lethal removal. Hazing bison wholly within areas closed to hunting will not require a hunt cessation.

5. MFWP will provide brucellosis sampling kits to hunters as a public service and/or to assist in research for directed studies.

6. MFWP and MDOL will conduct critical evaluation of the bison hunt at conclusion of hunting season and propose necessary adjustments to future bison hunts based on conclusions derived from the evaluation.

Adaptive Management Review, Evaluation, and Modification

These procedures may be modified based on research results. A meeting will be held each year to determine if it is necessary to modify the operating procedures of the previous season to accomplish the objectives of the IBMP. A meeting of the cooperating agencies will be held each year to review, evaluate, and modify, if deemed necessary by the agencies, the operating procedures for accomplishing the objectives of the IBMP. These procedures may be modified at any time, with the agreement of the agencies, to facilitate and/or improve the operations procedures to accomplish the objectives of the IBMP. Additional meetings may be held if deemed necessary.

Attachment 1. Agency resource levels that may be necessary to conduct an array of bison management activities described in the Interagency Bison Management Plan.

Operation Size / Resources	**MDOL**	**MFWP**	**NPS**	**APHIS**	**USFS**
Hazing – Small to Medium (1-25 head)					
Horses & Riders	√	√	√	NA	NA
ATV	√	√	NA	NA	NA
Snowmobile	√	√	√	NA	NA
Law Enforcement Officers	√	√	√	NA	√
Hazing (>25 head)					
Horses & Riders	√	√	√	NA	NA
ATV	√	√	NA	NA	NA
Snowmobile	√	√	√	NA	NA
Law Enforcement Officers	√	√	√	NA	√
Shooting					
Law Enforcement Officers	√	√	√	NA	√
Lethal Control Teams	√	√	√	NA	NA
ATV	√	√	NA	NA	NA
Snowmobile	√	√	√	NA	NA
Tissue sample collector	√	√	√	√	NA
Capture					
Horses & Riders	√	√	√	NA	NA
ATV	√	√	NA	NA	NA
Snowmobile	√	√	√	NA	NA
Law Enforcement Officers	√	√	√	NA	√
Testing Personnel	√	√	√	√	NA
Bison Handlers	√	√	√	NA	NA
Bison Transport to Slaughter	√	√	NA	√	NA
Research and Disease Surveillance					
Personnel	√	√	√	√	NA

Note:

- MDOL may utilize contract haulers for any operation.
- Additional support may be provided by Gallatin County Sheriff Office and Montana Highway Patrol, as requested by MDOL.
- USFS law enforcement personnel will handle property damage and related violations on USFS lands. Upon request from MDOL made through the Park County Sheriff Office, Gallatin County Sheriff Office, USFS law enforcement personnel will provide support for hazing, capture and shooting.
- USFS will continue to assist in monitoring bald eagles and other support services to maintain the Horse Butte SUP.
- Lethal Control Officers will operate in agency teams.
- Authority for NPS personnel to respond to requests for assistance in implementing the IBMP outside the park is guided by US Department of Interior Office of Solicitor opinion.

Interagency Bison Management Plan
OPERATING PROCEDURES
Updated November 1, 2007

APPROVAL

Signature: Date:

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