Previous and Preliminary Evaluation of Potential Introduction Sites by Organizations Other than Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Private interests and nongovernmental organizations continue to explore possible sites for bison reintroductions in Montana and the surrounding region. In 2005 and 2006, the Wildlife Conservation Society hosted three meetings with a variety of stakeholders to begin to establish a vision for bison conservation (Sanderson et al., 2008). The outcome of one meeting was the creation of the "Vermejo Statement," which was created by an array of stakeholders, including indigenous groups, bison producers, conservation organizations, and government and private land managers from throughout North America (Sanderson et al., 2008). The statement envisions that "over the next century, the ecological recovery of the North American bison will occur when multiple large herds move freely across extensive landscapes within all major habitats of their historic range, interacting in ecologically significant ways with the fullest possible set of other native species, and inspiring, sustaining, and connecting human culture" (Sanderson et al., 2008).

As part of this project, Sanderson et al. (2008) created a map that outlined a set of 22 habitat types that were historically used by bison west of the Mississippi River. The mapped areas, which encompass parts of Montana, are further suggested as places "where ecological recovery might be possible over three time frames and considered future trends in land use, economic development, demography, and climate" (Sanderson et al., 2008, pp. 256).

In 2001, FaunaWest Wildlife Consultants (FaunaWest) prepared its own site evaluation of possible bison reintroduction sites in Montana. FaunaWest's criteria includes (1) at least 200,000 acres of federal lands, or (2) at least 100,000 areas of federal/state lands, or (3) rangelands to support 50 adult bison without causing an impact on forage "available to other wild and domestic ungulates" (Knowles, 2001, pp. 5). Based on this criteria, FaunaWest identified eight sites: Glacier National Park/Blackfeet Indian Reservation; Bob Marshall Wilderness/Sun River Game Range; Bitter Creek area, northwest of Glasgow; southern Valley County; southern Phillips and Blaine Counties; Terry Badlands, northwest of Terry; Lone Tree Creek, south of Ekalaka; Pryor Mountains and Pryor Mountains Wild Horse Range (Knowles, 2001, pp. 5). The potential of any region as a possible restoration site would be dependent on the parameters of the bison program that is developed.

In February 2011 the National Wildlife Federation funded a survey that was conducted by Moore Information, Inc, a national public opinion research company. Telephone interviews were conducted among a representative sample of 400 registered voters statewide. The response rates to certain questions are listed below, and the full survey results are available on the National Wildlife Federation website (www.nwf.org).

In response to the question, "In your opinion, is it possible for Montana to manage wild bison in the same way that other wildlife species are managed in the state, such as elk and deer, or not?" response rates were 63 percent yes, 27 percent no, and 10 percent did not know.

In response to the question, “Would you favor or oppose the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks investigating possible locations in Montana where wild bison populations could be restored?” response rates were 70 percent in favor, 24 percent opposed, and 6 percent did not know.

In response to the question, “Would you favor or oppose allowing hunters to hunt wild bison populations in Montana the same way they hunt other species like deer and elk?” response rates were 70 percent in favor, 23 percent opposed, and 7 percent did not know.