

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Draft Environmental Impact Statement : Bison Conservation and Management in Montana

What is the purpose of this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?

To determine if bison restoration is appropriate and if so, what potential opportunities are feasible and consistent within Montana's laws, policies, rules, and regulations.

How are bison currently classified in Montana?

Bison are designated as both a wildlife species in need of management and a species in need of disease control in Montana.

Don't the bison that migrate out of Yellowstone National Park count as wild bison?

Those bison are considered wildlife but they fall under management of the Interagency Bison Management Plan which is based in large part on minimizing disease transmission risk to domestic livestock; not restoring bison as a native species to Montana.

How does this process differ from the current Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) revision process?

Although the two projects focus on the same species, they are entirely separate efforts. One focuses on the potential of additional conservation bison herds in Montana and the other focuses on the on-going management of Yellowstone bison.

FWP's statewide bison restoration EIS has been developed to consider bison restoration somewhere in Montana where animals can be managed as a native species. The first step of the development process for this EIS (scoping) has been completed and the draft EIS has been published for review and comment by the public. The public comment period for this document is from June 11 – September 11, 2015.

The EIS for revising the IBMP, of which FWP and the National Park Service are co-lead agencies for developing, is the plan that will only guide management of bison that migrate out of Yellowstone National Park into Montana. The scoping process for the development of this draft EIS will conclude on June 15, 2015. The draft EIS for replacing the 2000 IBMP is tentatively scheduled to be available for public review and comment the summer of 2016.

What is FWP's statutory requirement to manage bison?

FWP is required to manage wildlife, fish, game, and nongame animals in a manner that prevents the need for listing under the state or federal list of endangered species and in a manner that assists in the maintenance or recovery of the species.

What alternatives are being analyzed in the draft EIS?

- Alternative #1: No Action
- Alternative #2: Restoration of a Publicly Managed Bison Herd on the Private and/or Public Lands of Willing Landowner(s)
- Alternative #3: Restoration of a Publicly Managed Bison Herd on Tribal Lands
- Alternative #4: Restoration of a Publicly Managed Bison Herd on a Large Landscape Where there are Minimal Conflicts with Livestock

How does FWP evaluate these alternatives when they are based on hypothetical scenarios?

At least one "case study" has been included for each of Alternatives #2-#4 to illustrate a real life scenario that fits the general criteria of the alternative. Potential impacts to the human and physical environment are evaluated for each alternative, however, the evaluation is indeed based on broad restoration scenarios.

Case Studies

- Alternative #2: American Prairie Reserve (Montana) and the Henry Mountains (Utah)
- Alternative #3: Book Cliffs (Utah)
- Alternative #4: Pink Mountains (Canada) and Wood Bison (Alaska)

What guidelines would FWP use to guide bison restoration within Alternatives #2-#4?

FWP worked with a constituent group to identify general guidelines that fall into four categories: 1) project site guidelines; 2) bison source herd guidelines; 3) herd management guidelines; and 4) program implementation guidelines. These guidelines are described within Chapter 3 of the draft EIS.

Some particular guidelines that would apply to any restoration project: 1) only animals free of reportable diseases and free of cattle gene introgression would be used; 2) a pre-restoration range assessment would be conducted; 3) a well thought out containment and management plan would be completed; 4) full funding would be secured for at least a five-year test period; and 5) local community involvement would be required.

How much would a bison restoration project cost?

It is difficult to determine costs of a restoration project in detail when no specific location for restoration has been identified. A full cost assessment would be conducted within a follow up site-specific Environmental Assessment if FWP determines to implement one of the alternatives calling for restoration.

What is the next step if the 'no action' alternative is selected?

Selection of the 'no action' alternative does not prevent FWP from engaging in discussions on bison restoration. However, FWP would likely reduce resources invested in these discussions until new opportunities or funding resources are identified to move forward with restoration.

Will the final Record of Decision for this EIS select a site for bison restoration?

No, the decision will identify potential opportunities and guidelines for restoration if it is determined to move forward with some effort.

What is the next step if an alternative to restore bison is selected?

FWP could solicit project proposals that include site details and funding opportunities. A site-specific Environmental Assessment would need to be conducted for any particular project. A separate public scoping process would be conducted for any follow up Environmental Assessment.

What is the timeline for the remainder of this process?

Following release of this document on June 11 there will be a 90 day comment period. All comments will be due by close of business, September 11, 2015. Another 60 to 90 days will be needed to process comments and finalize the EIS. A final Record of Decision will be announced in late 2015 or early 2016.