

**Notes from Interagency Bison Management Plan  
Open House  
December 4, 2007, 4:00 – 7:45 PM, Holiday Inn, Bozeman, MT**

**Bison Open House Questions Submitted During Agency Partner Panel**

- On the west side of the Park, many things have changes since the IBMP was signed in 2000 including new research on brucella persistence and viability, no grazing on the Horse Butte Allotment, and new owners of the Munns Ranch who would like to welcome bison on their property. So much has changed that the IBMP partners should re-evaluate management under the Adaptive Management Provisions of the Plan. When will the agencies evaluate the changes and adapt management to reflect the new situation on the ground?
- Does the bison management team have a plan of returning bison that have tested negative back into the Park into a herd or areas that have previous negative tested herds? Putting negative bison into positive herds is non-productive management.
- With the Royal Teton Ranch lease close to completion and no more cattle on Horse Butte, what justification would there be for further bison hazing/slaughter in those areas?
- But if there are no cattle on the Horse Butte Pen., what is the risk of presence of buffalo? If there is no risk, how does DOL justify hazing, capture and slaughter?
- When can bison be left alone on Horse Butte? No cattle in the area etc; is good winter ground and calving, etc. Is it time for a change?
- What is the status of bison in Montana – publication wise? Numbers?
- On bison that come out of the Park and are captured, why don't you tag the bison that test brucellosis free and are released so we can track those bison and learn more about what happens to them in the future? In future years, wouldn't this information be valuable? You could use an RFID Tag (brown) that would not hurt their appearance.
- Why do you all emphasize management the bison – vaccination, quarantine, killing, etc. instead of managing the domestic animals around the Park? Bison are wildlife and should not be handled by man. It is cheaper to manage domestic animals.
- Has there been any definitive answer to the question of how the Bridger cattle herd was infected with brucellosis?
- Livestock originally transmitted brucellosis to native wildlife – what cattle-based risk management practices are there in place to protect wildlife from livestock diseases? How does the IBMP address this?

- If there is an effective cattle vaccination currently available, what is the reasoning behind a focus on the vaccination of wild bison?
- Does anyone believe that brucellosis can be eliminated in the wild?
- Given the mixture of cattle and elk, why doesn't the IBMP change their direction to vaccination of cattle?
- How does the IBMP address the need to protect the distinct genetic lines of the northern and central herds?
- Have there been discussions of transplanting (brucellosis free) from Yellowstone to the C. Russell Range north of Fort Peck Lake?
- Has YNP ever considered managing the bison herd like Custer Park in South Dakota, where they annually gather, test, cull or sell any extra animals, depending upon disease and environmental conditions?
- Hazing is to be done by May 15<sup>th</sup> and yet in 2007 continued until mid-June. The remaining 56 head were shipped back into YNP without tested. Why go against the IBMP?
- What is the agenda on bison in the Taylor Fork and has there been any change of ideas now that the DOL board is under the direction of the Governor?
- Question to RTR – Why are you running cattle? How do you use them? Why don't you simply remove the cattle instead of extorting money from the public?
- With no threat of transmission due to being cattle free, will the Horse Butte Peninsula be buffalo habitat?
- What is FWP doing for bison habitat?
- Why are elk not managed the same as buffalo; isn't it true elk are the only animal to transmit brucellosis to cattle?
- All 50 states have fish and game departments that manage wildlife. Why is it that the Park Service is the only major land controller that does not actively manage their wildlife on NPS land?
- The IBMP was signed in 2000, yet we are still in Step 1 of the multi-step plan. Why has there been so little progress? Why don't the IBMP partners use their adaptive management provisions to allow great tolerance for bison on the west side?

## **Bison Operations on the Ground Discussion Session Notes**

- **Explain why bison are treated as wildlife in the park, but livestock outside the park. Why are elk different?**
  - Bison are diseased wildlife that need management
    - Bison statutorily have dual status in Montana.
    - Bison carry disease at a higher rate
    - Bison migrations are more manageable
  - Elk are wildlife
    - 0-3% prevalence of brucellosis in elk
    - Elk are harvested through hunt
    - Monitored through blood samples after harvest
    - If brucellosis prevalence rises in elk, management tactics would be changed
    - Northern herd numbers have decreased significantly in recent years
    - Elk migrate on all boundaries – difficult to manage
    - No proof that elk infected Bridger herd
  
- **Concerns expressed by public re “inhumane hazing”, date of April 15 for bison to be off public land, and continued need for intervention on former Munns Ranch.**
  - April 15 necessary to provide buffer period before cattle return to area because brucella can live 45 days
  - The Munns Ranch is surrounded by private lands that have cattle and are easily accessed by migrating bison. Bison can swim the Narrows and be on the South Fork in a matter of minutes. Concern that they will move as they have historically done
  - USFS land also has some cattle
  - Hope to facilitate more tolerance on Horse Butte if possible
  
- **What right does DOL have to go on private property (Munns Ranch) to deal with bison?**
  - Some IBMP partners have statutory authority to go on private land
  - DOL can remove exposed animals from private property (Statute 81-2)
  - This is not an option DOL wants to exert unless a last resort. There may be other options. DOL wants discussion with new property owners, but they have so far refused.
  - FWS does not have authority to go on private land
  
- **IBMP**
  - The IBMP is a binding contract – a 10-year work-in-progress
  - Each agency has different mandates, missions, and authorities
  - Goals include:
    - protecting the Montana’s brucellosis-free status

- maintaining a viable, free-ranging wild bison population
    - bringing the topographic/demographic/spatial-temporal risk to zero through various management zones (???)
  - Operating procedures are refined annually to incorporate adaptive changes.
  - The IBMP Record of Decision is available for public review and a good source of information/summary of the plan
  - Theaters of operation (west & north) are very different
  - NPS is lead agency in the park (including Stephens Creek facility)
  - DOL is the lead agency outside the park
- **Operations on west side**
- Mitigation efforts through February 15 while the hunt is in progress
  - Monitoring continues unless migration pushes the trigger points out of Zone 2 to Zone 3
  - If trigger points are pushed, the hunt could be stopped as it was 2 years ago (don't want to drive bison to hunters)
  - Massive migration could close hunt
  - After hunting season, there will be communications between agencies of the IBMP to evaluate and form adaptive management plans for hazing/capture/test/slaughter
  - DOL primarily concerned with potential for disease transmission – Montana's brucellosis-free status in jeopardy
  - May be some strategic hazing from cattle lands to USFS lands
  - More tolerance last year meant there were too many bison on private lands late in the season – into calving season, which created serious problems
  - Depending on numbers, there may be more trapping earlier to avoid calving season
  - Calving season dates do not appear to have changed
  - Can't push the bison if there's nowhere for them to stay
  - Duck Creek trap is not in operation but could be used
  - Airport trap might be used if necessary
  - Could be up to 3 traps in use if needed
  - Highway safety is an issue of concern
  - DOL attempting to do less motorized hazing – more on horseback
  - Days of lethal removal in the field are mostly gone, with the exception of some isolated, lone animals
  - Zone 3 is in line for another management policy
- **Are operations on the ground working?**
- Yes, As a risk-management plan for bison in Montana
  - The IBMP is a risk management plan; not intended to address brucellosis eradication in the entire Greater Yellowstone ecosystem
  - A stable and sustainable baseline has been established to work from
    - Active bison hunt

- Treaty rights hunting
  - Quarantine feasibility study facility
  - Remote vaccine program starting
  - RTR negotiations
  - Long-range effort – not perfect but helping to shift paradigm
- **There is concern from public regarding disposition/testing/moving options. Why can't animals be given to other facilities/organizations?**
- It is illegal to transport exposed animals to other herds
  - Testing is not always accurate; possibility of later sero-conversion of animal initially testing negative.
  - The quarantine feasibility study is examining the process, timeline, and cost that it takes to produce brucellosis free generations of Yellowstone bison. Such animals would be appropriate for use in building herds on other public and tribal lands as appropriate.
- **Other points made by public:**
- Research indicates that bulls are not much of a risk for transmission; should allow more tolerance for them and the Narrows should be a moot point if this is so.
  - Situation at Narrows is being evaluated
  - More research needs to be evaluated dealing with lifetime of brucella bacteria in environment
  - Brucella is a bacteria that can “hide” for years, producing negative blood tests
  - Brucella doesn't always cause abortion in cattle – a cow can be a carrier without aborting, or only aborting once
  - Issue for Montana is brucella in meat, though it is still edible
  - Questioned hunting/consuming bison meat if it might be infected
  - Concern by West Fork landowner that strategic hazing off of Horse Butte has not been working – cattle operation is in jeopardy.
  - Desire expressed to see Zone 2 expanded – Taylor Fork, Tepee Creek & other areas purchased with sportsman fees
  - Concern expressed that operations have extremely negative impact on Montana's image in the nation. After 1988 fires, 569 bison were killed along Hwy 89 (hunted). He's afraid it will happen again and the governor will be blamed.

**Brucellosis in Montana Discussion Session Notes (includes breakout)**  
**Public comments in regular text; agency rep comments in italics**

- Why doesn't FWP take samples from elk in the spring when brucellosis levels are highest?
- *Testing is done annually and from that information, we hope to establish trends; also the expense of testing is significant; taking samples from harvested elk reduces the cost. There may be negative impacts on cow elk if samples were taken in the spring during calving.*
- Brucellosis cannot be eradicated and that should not be the goal of the agencies.
- *The IBMP does not call for eradication but rather reducing risk of brucellosis transmission to livestock based on specific actions. The livestock industry is promoting and using livestock vaccinations and that is a positive step.*
- Why was the entire Bridger herd eradicated when brucellosis was detected? Why were they tested and the negative animals vaccinated?
- *Rumor was that none of the herd would be accepted at the plant once brucellosis detection. The plants did take the eradicated herd because they also routinely take brucellosis-exposed bison. The reason for that action was driven by APHIS policy.*
- Madison elk herd – issues of cross contamination with Yersinia; why aren't the agencies concerned. Yersinia is as much a human health risk as brucellosis. There are other diseases that should be of greater concern than brucellosis.
- *Biggest human health risks are from swine. Brucellosis is a program disease with a line item budget and the goal is to eradicate at the National level.*
- Hazing bison is not the best way to spend money relative to reducing risks of brucellosis; should be spent on vaccinations of livestock. The bison in YNP are a concentrated pool of brucellosis and we should not ignore or take away any focus. Have the effects of vaccination of bison in YNP been studied? What is the legal means of implementation?
- *The Park is doing an EIS to disclose these effects and also cooperating with researchers to complete scientific studies.*
- Brucellosis costs are mostly related to testing. The actual economical effects of abortions have never been disclosed. All animals are tested or regulated for disease status as they are brought into the state.
- In YNP, was there a correlation between ending the vaccination program and the increase in the bison herd?

- *Increase in the herd was related to the end of direct control.*
- Will the new Level 2 lab at MSU be used to test brucellosis in elk and bison?
- *Level 3 lab required for brucellosis.*
- There is a new vaccine, RB51 plus, that is 100% effective for brucellosis. Why isn't this being used on livestock?
- *RB51 plus is not currently through all the testing required for general use.*
- We need to focus on vaccination of livestock – not wildlife. There are more important human health issues than brucellosis. There is not enough emphasis or \$ spent on making existing vaccines more efficient. With elk, Idaho has a lottery program for getting hunter kits back; why doesn't Montana use this?
- *Don't want to risk getting samples from deer etc...we get a good sample from the late hunts.*
- Increasing the land base for bison outside of YNP and increased tolerance for bison outside of YNP is not dealing with the problem. A small # of people in the IBMP group are making rules for the management of wild bison; there should be a sunset time for these rules so some different ideas can be incorporated. Why weren't all of the cows sampled to help trace the source of brucellosis in the Bridger cattle herd? Public perception is that the source of the brucellosis infection was elk.
- *There was nearly 100% trace-back testing conducted on the Bridger herd but no definitive conclusion can be drawn regarding whether the infection source was cattle or elk.*
- Why didn't APHIS pull rank and force more samples? This was not handled well. Someone should lose their job for the way this was handled. What were the results of the U of SC group that got together to talk about the dynamics between elk and bison relative to brucellosis?
- *Proposals were developed and submitted to study these dynamics; we don't fully understand them presently.*
- What causes an animal that tests positive (exposure) to become infected; there were some papers in the 30's and 40's that suggested micronutrient relationships. Are delayed turn-out dates for livestock effective in reducing the risk of brucellosis transmission between wildlife and livestock?
- *Keith Aune's work suggests yes.*
- Bison should be allowed in Taylor Fork based on the turn-out dates for livestock. There would be no more risk than from the elk that calve there.

## Interagency Bison Management Plan Progress to Date Discussion Session Notes

- What measures are being taken by the Forest Service to implement the IBMP?
- Concerns about habitat
  
- When are the fences coming down in the Duck Creek area?
  
- 4700 bison population and 100 have been tested on the West side, when and how would you use testing? Do you plan to evaluate testing and numbers?
  
- The 3,000, are they a management trigger? Or what does it really mean? Is it a management trigger or a management objective and how does it work?
  
- There has been past historic documented bison movement on the border of Yellowstone National Park. Concerns regarding the movement of bison around the upper Gallatin. How or what can be done to move them there?
  
- 5 bulls were hazed in that location concerns about risks to public safety. They were on the highway.
  
- Concerns about the progress of IBMP and bison being out of the Park by April 15 – not realistic. Concerns about overlooking opportunities. Zoning concept not working. Move more to elk management process. Adult vaccination of cattle.
  
- With the Church, what happens if they're not out of there? Why are we still on Step 1 in IBMP process since it was signed in 2000?
  
- Concerns due to the fact that he grazes on public land.
- Bison migration vs. bison implementation
- Huge concerns with bison on Forest Service lands
  
- Buffalo in Fawn Creek and Gallatin Area. If they come down too far can be competing with elk, concerns about that. Concerns regarding forage problems and potential of creating an issue.
  
- Ranches in Big Timber. Concerns about Park bison versus Free Roaming bison. How are they going to get back to the Park? Concerns regarding human safety, management issues, property issues. How do you keep the bison from going wherever?
  
- Vaccination issues with elk. Concerns about vaccinating Park bison and the science going into vaccinations. Long time line for statistical data. 7 years into the plan and it seems like we're not getting from point 1 to point 2.
- Is there a point in the plan where we recognize the plan is **not** working? I don't see an end point. How do you measure success?

- Not successful in managing buffalo for wildlife. Concerns regarding how do we manage habitat for winter range and manage hunts. Concerns regarding social caring capacity and habitat caring capacity. What protects important genetics and hunting as a respectable tool to manage populations? Provision for additional habitat for hunts. We need dialogue regarding all these concerns.
- Concerns of a couple years ago. If there is a large migration resulting in capture and slaughter, how can we gather scientific data on those? Is there a way to ensure we don't lose animal data collection prior to this even now and in future years?
- Wild bison migration concerns. Are bison the only species where YNP has authority to manage? Does YNP need that statutory authority?
- Concerns about hunting as a control measure. Concerns about carnage left on the ground and resulting bear behavior. Are gut piles from the bison hunt creating bear behavior problems?
- Concerns regarding brucellosis. Persistence of brucellosis – does APHIS and DOL take Keith Aune's research seriously? Do you consider Keith Aune's research viable and do you take it seriously