YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

BISON MANAGEMENT PLAN

&

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
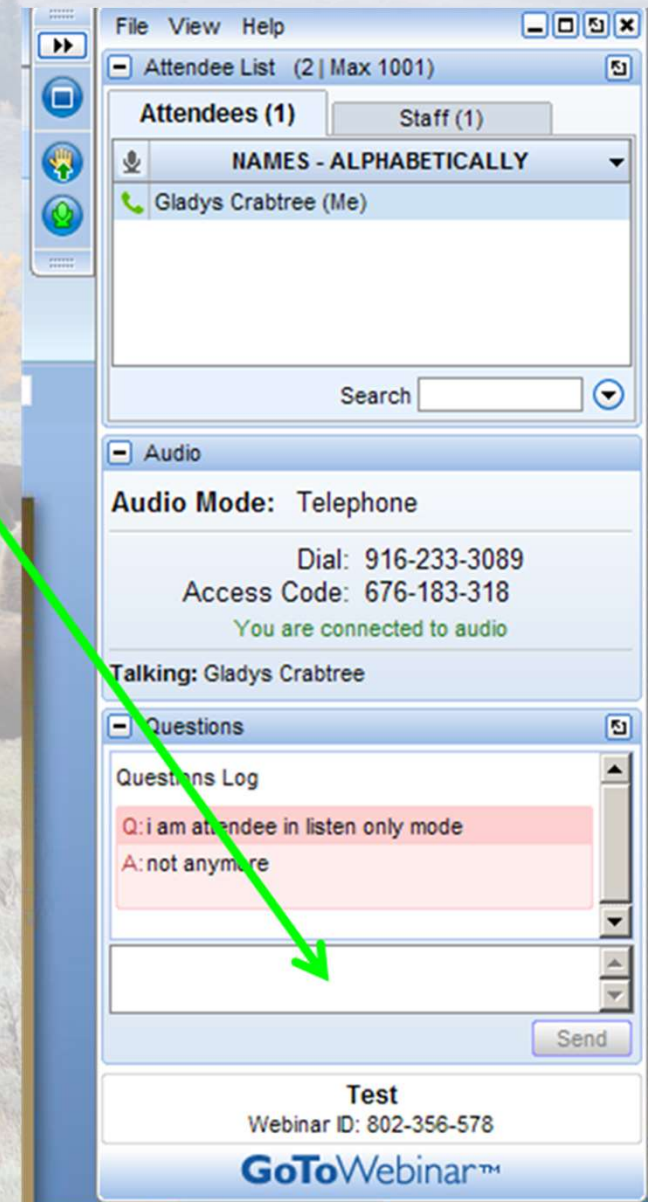
PUBLIC SCOPING

AGENDA

- Webinar Logistics

- Planning context

- Plan purpose and need

- Preliminary Alternatives

- Q&A

GoToWebinar Control Panel

- As an attendee, you will be in listen-only mode.

- Type your questions at any time during the webinar into the Chat/Questions Box in the Control Panel.

- Questions will be answered at the end of the presentation

How To Submit Public Comments

Comments must be received no later than February 28, 2022

Reminder: Questions or comments submitted as part of this webinar will <u>not</u> be considered "formal" comments.

1) Electronically:

Submit comments electronically at the project website link below (preferred method).

https://parkplanning.nps.gov/YellowstonebisonEIS

Follow the link for this project and click 'Open for Comment'

2) In Writing:

Submit written comments to the park's headquarters by mail to:

Superintendent, Attn: Bison Management Plan, PO Box 168, Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190

Overview

- Bison in Yellowstone are managed pursuant to the 2000 Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) / Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), as adjusted.

  - The goal of the IBMP is "to maintain a wild, free ranging population of bison and address the risk of brucellosis transmission to protect the economic interest and viability of the livestock industry in Montana."

- Adaptive Management is an element of the plan.

- IBMP is accomplishing the original goals set in 2000, with several adjustments over the past two decades.

CHANGES SINCE 2000

- Since 2006, tribes with treaty hunting rights have hunted bison on national forest lands adjacent to the park

- Bison tolerance zones established in MT.

- Establishment of Bison Conservation Transfer Program for relocating some bison

- Fewer cattle near the park

- Updated science on disease transmission

- With adaptive management and in consultation with IBMP partners, there have been gradual increases in bison population size.

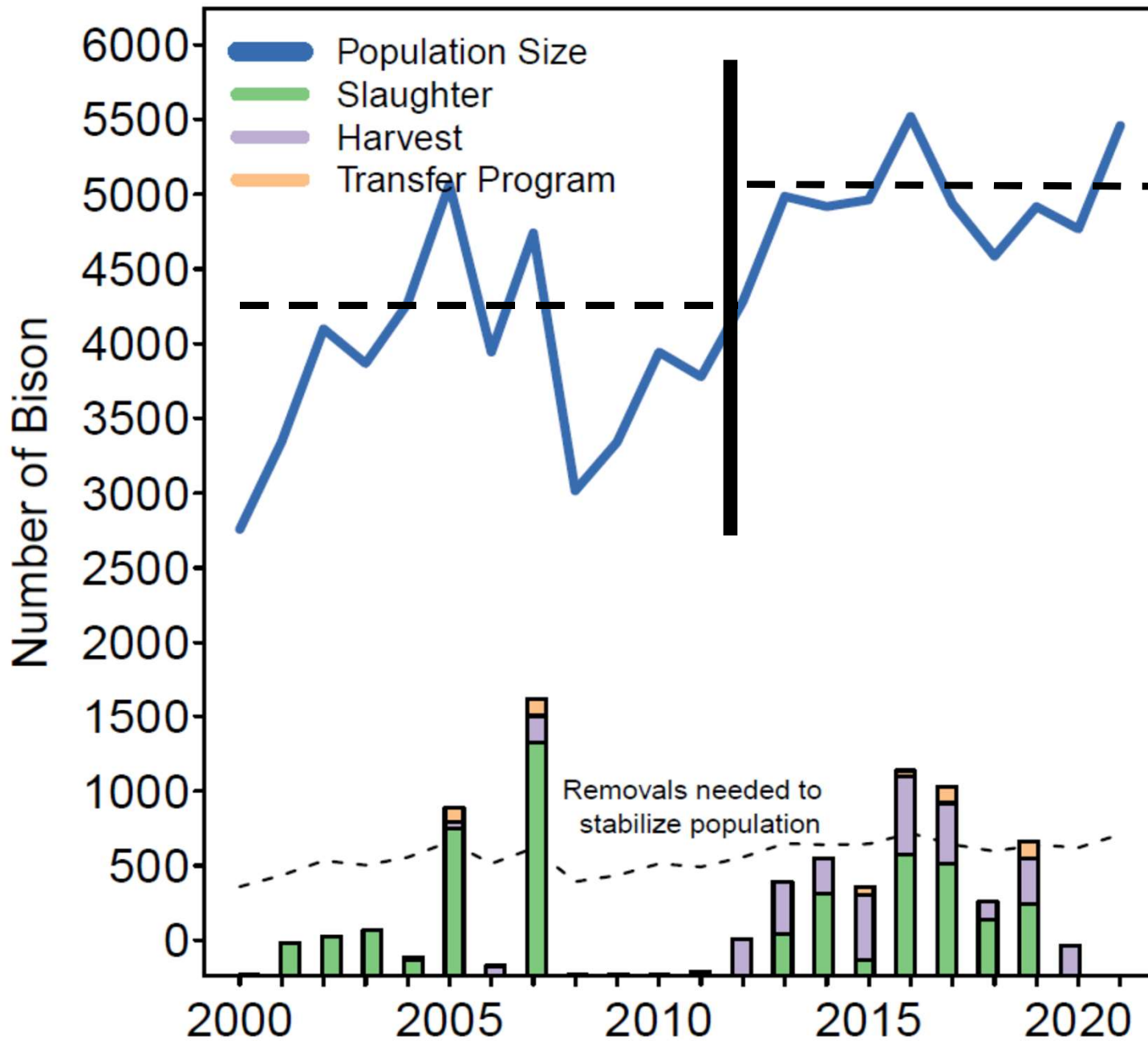Planning and compliance since 2000:

- Two Environmental Assessments

- One Environmental Impact Statement

- Eight categorical exclusions

- Annual operations plan

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Overview (con't)

- Three tools for population management: 1) tribal and statehunting outside the park, 2) trapping and shipment to slaughter; 3) Bison Conservation Transfer Program

- Bison population reduction targets are recommended by YellowstoneNational Park (YNP) each year andagreed upon after feedback from theIBMP partners (300-900 range).

- Historically, reductions are mostly accomplished through shipments to slaughter and tribal hunting, withsome animals placed in the BCTP.

- Shipments to slaughter -- meat andhides go to tribal members
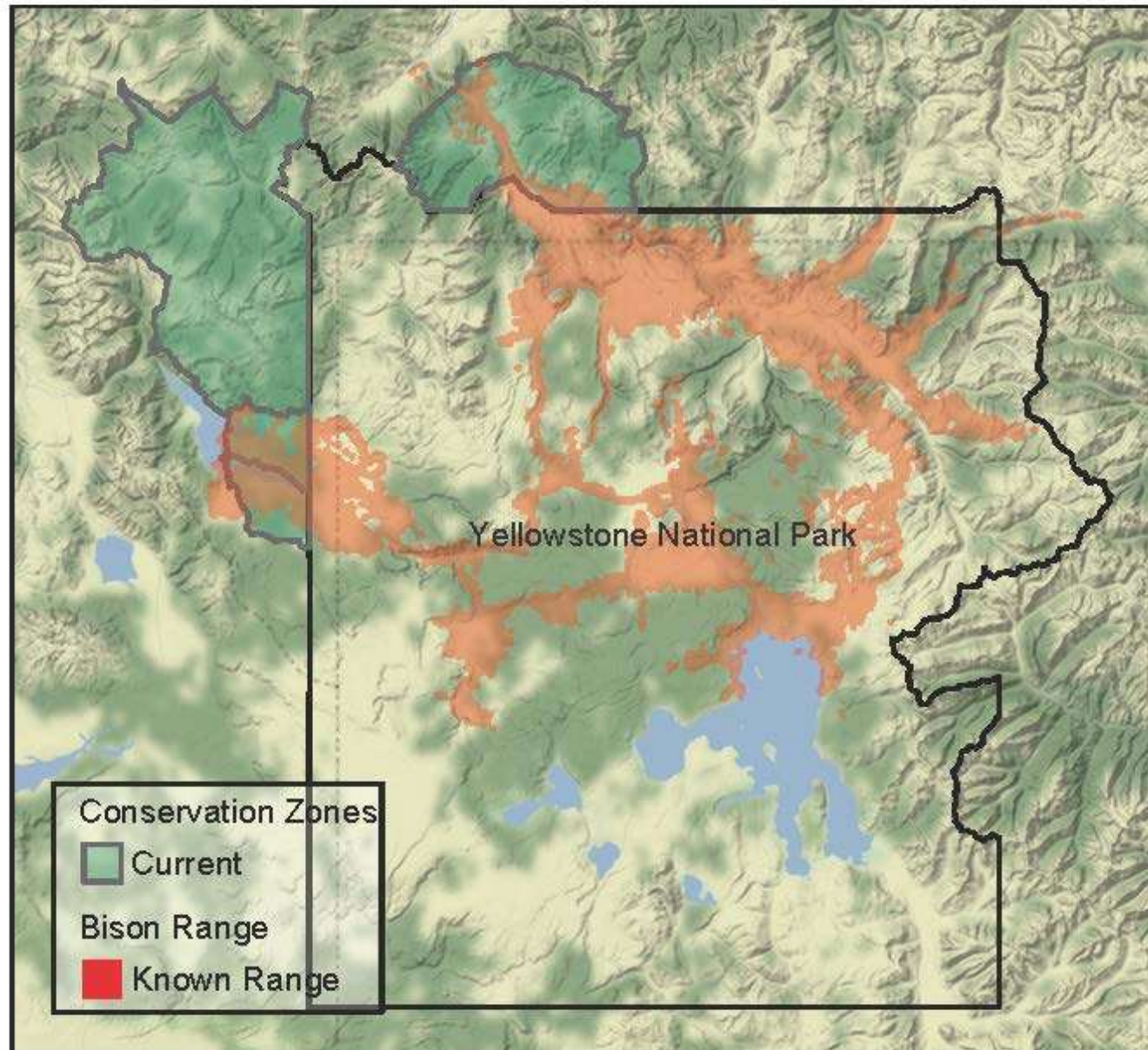
6326 bison shipped to slaughter

2901 harvested by hunters

182 bison transferred to tribes

0 transmissions of brucellosis to cattle

Yellowstone Bison Population Conservation Area and Known Range

What is NEPA?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to analyze the environmental impacts of federal actions and engage the public in the decision-making process

New Bison Management Plan / EIS
Scope, Purpose and Need

Scope: The plan will focus on actions the NPS may take to manage bison within YNP and consolidate various actions and environmental compliance analyses conducted over the past two decades into a contemporary plan.

Purpose: The purpose of the plan is to preserve an ecologically sustainable population of wild, migratory bison while continuing to work with partners to address brucellosis transmission, human safety, property damage and to support tribal hunting outside YNP.

Need: To address changed circumstances and new information obtained since the approval of the Interagency Bison Management Plan.

PROCESS

- Publish NOI in Federal Register Winter 2022
  - Meeting with affiliated tribal nations
  - 30-day public comment period
  - Two virtual public meetings
- Review and analyze public comments received during public comment/scoping period
- Draft EIS / public comment – Fall 2022
- Final EIS – Fall 2023
- Record of Decision (ROD) – At least 30 days after the Final EIS is available, the ROD will be completed in accordance with applicable timeframes

ACTIONS COMMON TO ALL ALTERNATIVES

- Continue engaging Buffalo Nations associated with Yellowstone bison to explore ways to increase the efficacy of treaty hunting outside the park for population regulation and increase the restoration of brucellosis-free bison to tribal lands. Federal and state IBMP partners would inform this vision.

- Continue research by park scientists and collaborators to ensure there is sufficient forage in the park to sustain the numbers of bison described in the preliminary alternatives.

- Continue to meet with the other federal, state, and tribal agencies to coordinate bison management using the existing framework and partnership protocols for the IBMP.

- Continue to explore other activities outside YNP with partners to advance the purpose of this plan, such as construction of additional quarantine facilities, use of temporary trapping facilities near the edge of management (tolerance) areas and streamlining brucellosis testing protocols and quarantine periods for the BCTP.

Preliminary Alternative 1

Continue Current Management

Park managers would:

- Maintain the same range of bison already experienced under the IBMP (~3500-5,000).

- Continue using culling to provide bison to tribes.

- Support tribal and state hunting opportunities outside the park.

- Increase the number of brucellosis-free bison relocated to tribal lands via the BCTP.

Under Alternative 1, bison would continue to migrate outside the park where state agencies and national forest supervisors would:

- Work with private landowners (as applicable) to determine levels of tolerance, hazing, and captures.

- Work with tribes with treaty hunting rights to determine the location and extent of hunting.

Preliminary Alternative 2

Enhance Restoration and Tribal Engagement

Park managers would allow the bison population range to increase to 4,500-6,000.

- Larger numbers could support bison movements into new areas of the park.
- Expansion of bison into new areas could enhance nutrient cycling and grassland health and biodiversity across a larger extent of the park.

Emphasis on tribal hunting outside the park as well as transfers via the BCTP.

- The NPS may use proactive measures such as low-stress hazing of bison toward the park boundary to increase tribal hunting opportunities outside the park.

The park would decrease shipment to slaughter based on the needs and requests of tribes. Hunt-trap coordination would continue as in Alternative 1.

Preliminary Alternative 3

Food-Limited Carrying Capacity

Park managers would:

- Allow bison population to expand towards park carrying capacity (~8,000).

- Immediately cease trapping for shipments to slaughter. Continue captures for the BCTP and release ineligible bison.

- Rely on natural selection and hunting outside the park to regulate bison numbers.

- If population approaches food-limited carrying capacity (>8,000 bison), reinstitute captures for shipments to slaughter.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF PROCESS

- Interagency partnerships continue.

- The EIS reflects new information, changed circumstances, and incorporates two decades of lessons learned.

- The ecological role of bison is enhanced.

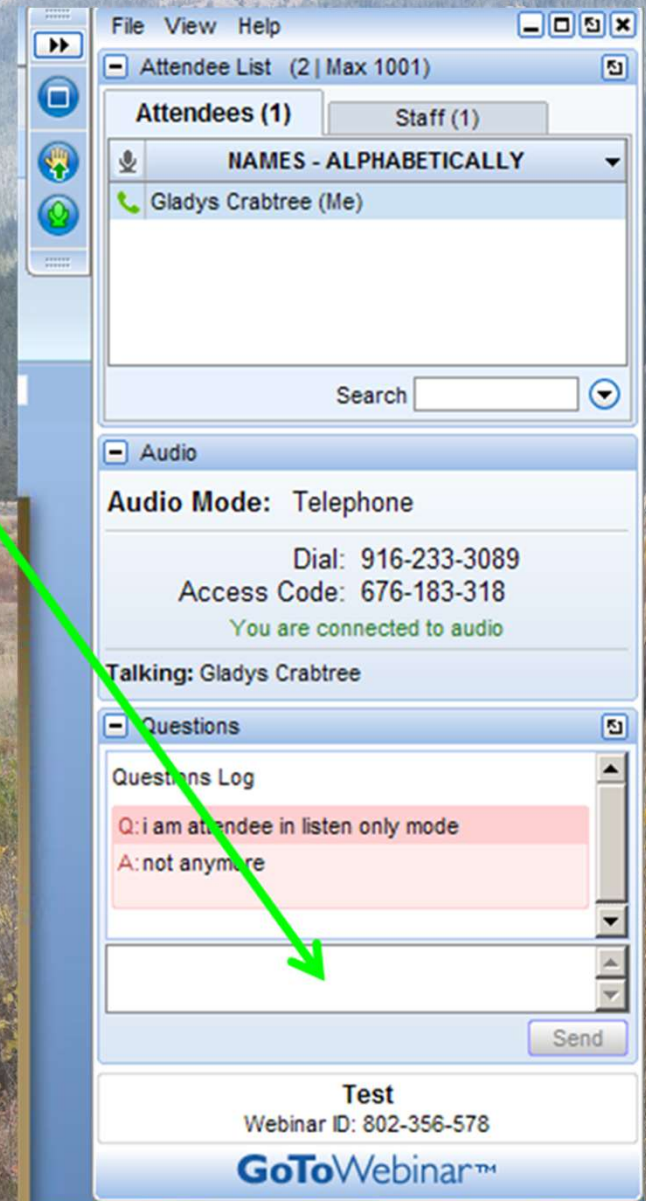- Tribal and public hunting opportunities outside the park.

Questions?

GOTOWEBINAR CONTROL PANEL

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