

A scenic landscape of Yellowstone National Park. In the foreground, a herd of bison is grazing in a field of tall, dry grass. A single evergreen tree stands prominently on the left. The background features rolling hills and mountains under a hazy, golden sky, suggesting a sunrise or sunset.

Yellowstone National Park

Bison Management Plan / Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Virtual Public Meeting



Presenters and Panelists

- **Cam Sholly, Superintendent, Yellowstone National Park**
- **Jennifer Carpenter, Yellowstone National Park**
- **PJ White, Yellowstone National Park**
- **Chris Geremia, Yellowstone National Park**
- **Tim Reid, Yellowstone National Park**
- **Tobin Roop, Yellowstone National Park**
- **Christine Gabriel, Yellowstone National Park**
- **Kelly Daigle, National Park Service**



Welcome!

- **Presentation**
 - **Project Background**
 - **Interagency Bison Management Plan**
 - **Draft EIS**
 - **Alternatives**
 - **Next Steps**
 - **How to Provide Public Comments**
- **Question and Answer Session**

Background

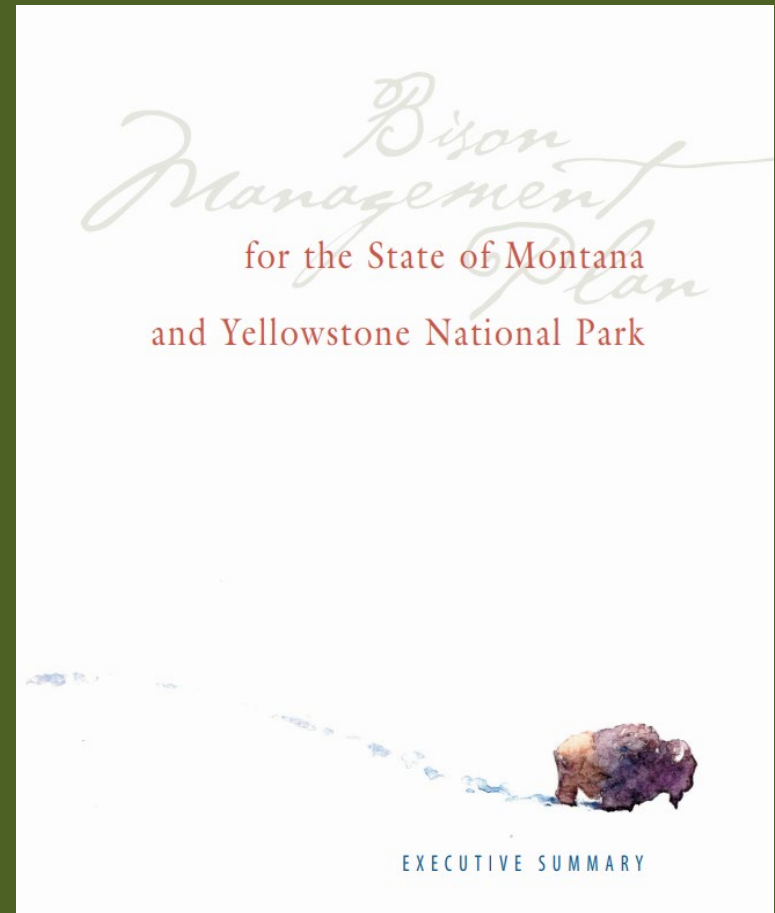
- **Yellowstone bison are special to many Tribes because they are descendants from ancestral populations that supported them.**
- **Cattle infected Yellowstone bison and elk with brucellosis before 1917. Brucellosis induces abortions and about 10% of female bison are infectious.**
- **Montana sued the NPS in 1995 due to concerns bison leaving Yellowstone would transmit brucellosis to cattle and affect trade.**
- **The parties negotiated a plan to maintain a wild bison population with a negligible risk of brucellosis transmission to cattle.**





Interagency Bison Management Plan

- The IBMP was signed in December 2000 by the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior and the State of Montana.
- Bison could migrate into small areas adjacent to the park during winter, and management included capture, test-and-slaughter, vaccination, and hazing.
- The IBMP anticipated adaptive management adjustments when knowledge or circumstances changed.
- Two Tribes and a Tribal organization (ITBC) were added as partners in 2009.



Success Under the IBMP

- There has been no brucellosis transmission from bison to cattle.
- The population has averaged about 5,050 bison using a larger area since 2012 with fewer conflicts with people.
- There have been fewer bison shipped to slaughter to reduce numbers as the partners prioritized tribal hunting outside the park and the transfer of live, brucellosis-free bison to Tribes.
- Tribes are more involved in the co-stewardship of bison, including the development of adaptive management and annual operating plans.





New Information / Changed Circumstances

- The primary threat of brucellosis to cattle is from free-ranging elk, not bison.
- In 2006, Tribes began harvesting bison on unoccupied lands in Montana pursuant to federal treaties.
- In 2010, APHIS changed its regulations to reduce the risk of Montana losing its brucellosis-free status for cattle.
- In 2015, tolerance for bison in Montana was expanded because of fewer cattle, in part, due to conservation easements.
- In 2019, a Bison Conservation Transfer Program began providing live brucellosis-free bison to Tribes.



Issues and Concerns

- Abundance and Distribution
- Brucellosis
- Shipments to slaughter
- Hunting
- Tribal involvement
- Capacity of Tolerance Zones



New Bison Management Plan / EIS

- Purpose: preserve a sustainable population of free-ranging bison while continuing work to address brucellosis, human safety, and property damage, and support tribal hunting outside the park.
- Need: consolidate new knowledge and changed conditions over two decades into a contemporary plan.
- Focus: on actions the NPS may take to manage bison within Yellowstone National Park.



Expected Outcomes

- Contemporary plan based on more comprehensive knowledge, changed conditions, and two decades of lessons learned.
- Viable bison population with increased ecological role and benefits.
- Continue to meet IBMP objectives; take more aggressive management actions if necessary.
- Enhanced co-stewardship of bison with Tribes through increased hunting opportunities and restoration of live bison to Tribal lands.



Impact Topics Analyzed

- **Yellowstone bison**
- **Other wildlife**
- **Threatened animals and plants**
- **American Indian tribes and ethnographic resources**
- **Health and human safety**
- **Socioeconomics**
- **Visitor use and experience**
- **Vegetation**



Actions Common to All Alternatives

- Continue to meet IBMP objectives.
- Continue supporting Tribal treaty rights.
- Increase output from the Bison Conservation Transfer Program and work with partners to expand capacity.
- Continue using adaptive management.
- Conduct forage and grazing research.
- Maintain genetic diversity.
- Continue to work with USDA on brucellosis testing protocols.
- Work with Tribes on coordination and collaborative management.
- State of Montana would determine management actions outside the park and work with Tribes to determine the location and extent of hunting.



Alternative 1: Current Management

- 3,500-5,000 bison after calving.
- Primarily use capture and slaughter to reduce bison numbers.
- Increase bison transfer to Tribal lands.
- Support Tribal hunting by allowing bison migration into Montana.



Alternative 2

- **Maintain 3,500-6,000 bison.**
- **Reduce shipments to slaughter.**
- **Increase bison transfer to Tribal lands by expanding quarantine capacity.**
- **Support Tribal hunting with larger population facilitating larger migrations into Montana and fewer captures.**



Alternative 3

- **Maintain 3,500-7,000 bison.**
- **Cease shipments to slaughter.**
- **Regulate population numbers through hunting and bison transfer to Tribal lands.**
- **Support Tribal hunting with larger numbers facilitating larger migrations into Montana with fewer captures.**
- **Reinstate shipments to slaughter if hunting is not effective at regulating bison numbers.**



Cooperating Agencies

- Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)
- Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Nation
- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- Custer Gallatin National Forest
- InterTribal Buffalo Council
- Nez Perce Tribe
- State of Montana
- Yakama Nation



Next Steps

- Continue to engage Cooperating Agencies.
- Review public comments on DEIS.
- Prepare Final EIS and select a Preferred Alternative.
- Publish Final EIS and issue Notice of Availability in *Federal Register* in summer 2024.
- Prepare and publish Record of Decision in summer 2024 (30-day waiting period after publication of FEIS).





How to Comment

1. Submit comments electronically at:
<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/YellowstoneBisonEIS> (preferred method)
2. Mail or hand-deliver written comments to Park headquarters:
 - Superintendent, Attn: Bison Management Plan,
PO Box 168,
Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190

Comments must be
submitted by
September 25, 2023

Thank You!

- We will now do our best to answer your questions on the Draft EIS.
- Please submit your questions via the Q&A Box.

