



Bison in the Lamar Valley.
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A Changing Landscape

Management adaptations under the IBMP have been driven by advancements in science, gained management experience, and changes in the legal framework, social setting, and the landscape. Key changes since 2000 have included:

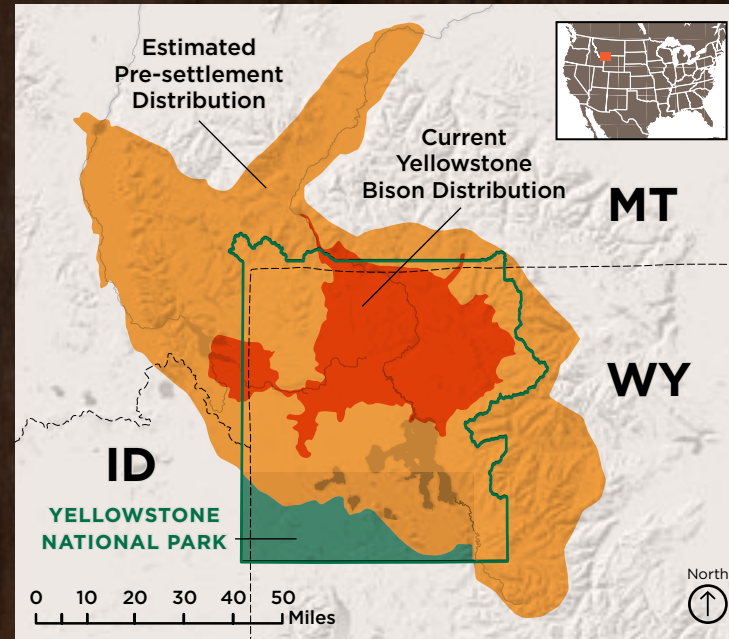
Brucellosis

- The risk of brucellosis transmission from bison to cattle is not as great as once thought, yet it drives current management requirements. This understanding can enable targeted situational separation of the two species rather than broad separation.
- Scientific advancements have created opportunities to quarantine and relocate some Yellowstone bison to new appropriate locations and reduce the need to ship animals to slaughter.
- The economic implications of brucellosis infection in cattle have dramatically changed since the adoption of the IBMP and should substantially alter how we evaluate alternative bison management approaches.
- Bison are not the only species that can carry brucellosis. Recently rates were reported at just over 50% in elk in the Paradise Valley north of

Yellowstone. While bison have been aggressively managed, Montana elk have been more appropriately managed through tactics such as situational spatial and temporal separation of elk and cattle.

New Bison Habitat

- Shipping bison to slaughter triggers sharp criticism. Public hunting is the traditional approach for managing the distribution and population of wild game in North America. By providing bison more habitat outside of Yellowstone, this model could be used to effectively manage the size and distribution of the population.
- The retirement of key grazing allotments over the last 15 years has substantially reduced the risk of brucellosis transmission from bison to cattle adjacent to Yellowstone.



Many advancements have been made by the state, federal, and tribal interests that have been driving decision making through the IBMP specific to Yellowstone bison. It is time to adjust our approach and fully replace the outdated IBMP. Scientifically, we know much more today than in 2000, providing an ideal opportunity for significant changes in how we manage Yellowstone bison.

The development of the new Yellowstone-area bison conservation plan creates an opportunity to set bison management in and adjacent to Yellowstone in Montana on a better informed path that will ensure the long-term survival of the Yellowstone herd, while limiting the risk of disease transmission to domestic livestock in Montana.



Find a full report, highlighting the history, science, and policy recommendations for common sense changes to existing bison management practices at Yellowstone National Park and on adjacent habitat in Montana at:

npca.org/bison

The Future of Yellowstone Bison Management



Yellowstone National Park bison comprise the nation's only continuously wild population—a remnant of the 30–60 million that roamed North America before western expansion nearly eradicated the species. Only 23 remained in Yellowstone by the late 1800s. Today, thanks to conservation efforts of generations of individuals, roughly 4,800 bison make their home in Yellowstone and portions of Montana, during part of the winter.



The Challenge

While the park provides abundant seasonal habitat, bison often migrate into Montana in the winter to find forage. Along Yellowstone's north and west boundary with Montana, migrating bison are intensively managed under the requirements of the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP), including hazing (driving bison from areas where they are not currently allowed) and shipment to slaughter (600 bison in 2015). This approach to management costs taxpayers millions and creates consistent controversy.

The Conflict

Fear over the transmission of the disease brucellosis from bison to cattle has served as justification for ongoing intensive management efforts under the IBMP. Brucellosis exists within some Yellowstone bison; likely from exposure to infected cattle, or from feeding infected cow's milk to bison calves in the early 1900's.

Progress

Advancements have been made, despite the ongoing management conflicts. Notably, there have been no known transmissions of brucellosis from Yellowstone bison to cattle. Additionally, increased winter tolerance for bison beyond park borders in Montana has opened new conflict-free winter habitat. The National Park Service and State of Montana, along with their federal and tribal partners, are replacing the IBMP with a new Yellowstone-area bison conservation plan.

Recommendations for a New Yellowstone–Area Bison Conservation Plan

The following is a brief summary of policy recommendations for the new Yellowstone-area bison conservation plan. For the full set of detailed recommendations visit: npca.org/bison

Plan Development

- Evaluate different models for stakeholder involvement to better incorporate stakeholder interests.
- Create an independent science panel to provide review and recommendations.
- Analysis of new alternatives should explicitly assess risk and factor the probability and magnitude of environmental and economic impacts.

Goals and Provisions

- Manage a wild bison population in Yellowstone and on adjacent lands in Montana.
- Manage bison to limit the risk of the spread of brucellosis from wild bison to cattle.
- Manage bison outside of Yellowstone under the principles of the North American Model for wildlife management.
- Provide adequate conservation measures to prevent listing bison under the Endangered Species Act.

- Manage the risk of brucellosis infection rather than targeting brucellosis eradication. Eradication in wildlife is not a realistic goal given current brucellosis management tools.
- Maintain adaptive management and enable adjustments over time given changes in relevant science, land management, the ecological environment, and the socio-political landscape.

Bison Management

- We expect there will continue to be a need to establish bison management units where different types of management techniques are appropriate or required.
- Tailor management objectives and techniques to different locations based on environmental conditions, biological needs, and social tolerance.
- Inside Yellowstone, bison should continue to be managed largely by natural regulation.
- The management unit definition must reflect the goals of the new plan as outlined here, and ensure that bison are welcome on year round habitat in Montana.

Bison Population

- Manage bison to preserve the ecological integrity of the population and maintain or improve genetic diversity, while reducing the risk of brucellosis transmission.
- Develop population objectives for different habitats that reflect the unique human needs and ecological characteristics associated with the current or potential bison habitat in that location.
- Use the Northern Wildlife Range Working Group to annually review bison harvest levels and habitat management needs.

Management Tools

- Risk of brucellosis infection should be primarily addressed through situational use of spatial and temporal separation of bison and cattle and should prevent co-mingling during high-risk periods.
- Manage the abundance and distribution of bison as much as possible through state and tribal hunting outside of Yellowstone.
- Pursue an ongoing quarantine program that would create the opportunity for Yellowstone bison to be transferred to

other potential habitat that meets predefined standards.

- In extreme circumstances when bison numbers have far exceeded acceptable population ranges it may be appropriate to use the Stephens Creek capture facility. However *all other* management tools and approaches should be attempted before use is considered.
- Livestock vaccination should continue as prescribed under current regulations. Vaccinating bison is not an effective tool for managing risk of brucellosis infection and should not be pursued.
- Develop a publicly funded compensation program for landowners that incur bison caused damage to personal property, or economic loss due to brucellosis infection.

Research and Education

- Assess research and monitoring priorities and identify key management questions to advance the plan's adaptive framework.
- Include a communications strategy with clear targets, strategies, and channels for communicating with the public about bison management.

