

Draft Joint Environmental Assessment
Year-round Habitat for Yellowstone Bison
Population Range and Operational Activities
Pilot Project for Annual Tolerance

The Operational Population Range (OPR) in this decision is between 3,000 and 4,000. At population levels above 4,000, no additional tolerance will be given above what is outlined in the 2000 IBMP ROD and subsequent adaptive management changes. At 3,000 and below, tolerance will be given as outlined in Alternative B of the Draft Joint Environmental Assessment.

Within the OPR, several population factors and management actions will be taken within the tolerance area. Those are outlined below.

The Draft Joint Environmental Assessment is viewed as an active management adaptive change. Adjustments in tolerance area and management activities may be made annually based on annual population surveys.

This pilot project will be reevaluated after five years of annual tolerance within any one of the areas described in the Draft Joint Environmental Assessment. Evaluation for the success of this project will include but not be limited to: migrations outside of the tolerance area, effectiveness in hunting to manage population numbers and distribution, conflicts related to property damage or human safety, comingling events with cattle, cost of management of new tolerance areas, impacts to Montana's Designated Surveillance Area, impacts to Montana's Brucellosis Class Free Status.

Population Count

An operational count of all bison within the IBMP management areas and Yellowstone National Park (YNP) will take place each year after the close of hunting and before calving season; on or about April 1. This will be an aerial count conducted by the state of Montana. The purpose of the count is to inform the partners of management actions for the coming operational and hunting seasons.

It is recognized that the operational count may have an undercount error rate of up to 10%.

Above 4,000

At counts above 4,000 head, no additional tolerance will be given above what is stated in the 2000 ROD and subsequent adaptive management changes. Seasonal hazing and/or trapping will continue as necessary, as planned by the IBMP partners.

Count between 3,500 and 4,000

Annual tolerance will be given to bison in Alternative E landscape of the EA commonly known as Horse Butte. Trapping removals will continue on the North and as practical on the West sides of the park. Hunting seasons for the following fall will be set taking into consideration the number of bison removed through agency actions at YNP boundary, with a management goal of 3,000. Bison outside of the

alternative E landscape will be captured and/or hazed back into the Park as necessary by the deadline stated in the ROD and subsequent adapted changes as of May 2014.

It is recognized that the Horse Butte peninsula has an upper capacity limit of bison. However, this limit does vary from year to year depending on factors such as vegetation and snow cover. After the haze back deadline, when bison on Horse Butte leave Alternative E landscape and multiple hazings back to Horse Butte occur, any bison outside Alternative E landscape will be returned to YNP, lethally removed or captured and hauled to slaughter as necessary.

Count between 3,000 and 3,500

Annual tolerance will be given to bison in Alternative C landscape of the EA. Hunting seasons for the following fall will be set taking into consideration the number of bison removed by trapping, with a management goal of 3,000. If the hunting season does not meet the objective set the previous spring, agency removals at the boundary will continue on the North and as practical on the West side of the park. Bison outside of Alternative C landscape will be captured and/or hazed back as necessary by the deadline stated in the ROD as adapted.

Count at less than 3000

Annual tolerance will be given to bison in Alternative B landscape. Hunting seasons for the following fall will be set taking into consideration the number of bison removed by trapping, with a management goal of 3,000. If the hunting season does not meet the objective set the previous spring, agency removals at the boundary will continue on the North and as practical on the West side of the park. Bison moving outside of Alternative B will be lethally removed by agents of the MDOL, MFWP or hunters.

Minimum Population

Removals through capture, slaughter, vaccination, and hunting will be managed as needed to maintain a minimum overall seasonal population of 2,500 within the boundaries of Yellowstone Park.

Taylor Fork

As a result of this decision, once bison are resident in the Taylor Fork area north of Taylor Creek and south of Buck Creek, that population will continue to be counted as part of the overall population. However, should the total population increase above 3,000, this group will not be subject to hazing or trapping. It is initially expected that the capacity of this area is approximately 100 bison. MFWP will manage the hunt to reflect this objective.

Capture, Slaughter, Vaccination

Capture and slaughter will remain a tool for reducing population to the level outlined in the original EIS, and for maintaining that population, should hunting fail to reach the yearly objective. Vaccination of captured animals that test negative will take place in accordance with subsequent vaccination environmental review.

Lethal Removal

When bison migrate outside any of the tolerance areas described above, removals may be made by agents of MDOL, MWFP or private hunters. When agents of MDOL or MWFP make a lethal removal,

carcasses will be handled in accordance with 81-2-120 (2) MCA. The final decision for lethal removal will be made by the state veterinarian.

Increases in Population

When a population and management threshold is met, and the population increases to a higher level the following year, tolerance will be reduced to the level commensurate with that population level. If the total population ever exceeds 4,000, management will revert back to that described in the 2000 ROD and subsequent adapted changes as of May 2014.

Costs of Implementation

It is anticipated that implementation of year-round tolerance will reduce operational costs for MDOL. Annual hazing efforts will not be necessary. Response to disease threats can be made with current staff with smaller, less intensive operations.

It is anticipated that implementation of year-round tolerance will increase operational costs for MFWP. More bison on a greater landscape will have more human contact than seasonal tolerance. MFWP will likely see an increase in reports of private property damage and threats to human safety.

Management Paramaters

Count	Action
> 4,000	No change in tolerance from year 2000 ROD and subsequent adaptive management changes
3,500 – 4,000	12 month tolerance on Horse butte, Alternative E landscape.
3,000 – 3,500	12 month tolerance, Alternative C landscape.
3,000	12 month tolerance, Alternative B landscape.

Bison Management Area Alternatives

