

Summary of the Modified Preferred Alternative for Interagency Bison Management Plan December, 1999

Put forth by the Department of the Interior National Park Service, Department of Agriculture United States Forest Service and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, as the preferred alternative in the "final Environmental Impact Statement for the Interagency Bison Management Plan" the long-term management plan for Yellowstone's wild buffalo herd.

Buffalo population limits Cap buffalo population at 3,000 based on "carrying capacity" inside Yellowstone Park.

Haze, Capture, Test and Slaughter Hazing, capture, test, and slaughter of Yellowstone buffalo are the primary management tools. Tolerance limits are set for buffalo who go through the management regime above: 100 buffalo each on the north and west boundaries. If "agreed up seronegative tolerance levels" for buffalo on public lands north and west of the Park are exceeded during winter migration, the following regime kicks in:

North Boundary a) Haze buffalo between Madison Junction and Mammoth to prevent migration outside the Park. b) Shoot buffalo at the Park boundary of Reese Creek "that cannot be hazed, evade capture or are deemed unsafe to handle (usually large adult males)." c) Captured buffalo would be held for the duration of the winter or early spring. d) If the capture facility capacity (125 buffalo) is reached, seronegative buffalo could be "selectively" sent to slaughter.

West Boundary a) If a quarantine facility is not available, seropositive and seronegative would be buffalo sent to slaughter. If available, seronegative buffalo would be sent to quarantine. b) Untested bison on public lands will be hazed back in the spring. c) Once the tolerance level for seronegatives is reached, untested buffalo would be captured and shipped to slaughter. d) Shoot buffalo outside the Park "that cannot be hazed, evade capture or are deemed unsafe to handle (usually large adult males)."

Stringent Management of Buffalo Migrations "Bison would not be allowed to move beyond certain areas outside the Park." As buffalo migrate further from the Park boundaries, "increasingly stringent zones of risk management" will be used to prevent further migration to areas the buffalo will be excluded from. Buffalo would be hazed, intercepted and killed beyond Yankee Jim Canyon or east of the Yellowstone River north of Maiden Basin/Little Trail Creek. The federal government may set up another capture facility at Yankee Jim Canyon. On the west boundary, buffalo are confined to Madison canyon and Horse Butte. Beyond that they can be hazed, intercepted and killed.

Spatial/Temporal Management of Buffalo and Cattle Buffalo "tolerated" on public lands will be hazed back into the Park in the spring to ensure a 45-day separation between cows and buffalo. The only cattle grazing allotment affected by this preferred alternative is the Royal Teton Ranch allotment which expires in April 2002. A management plan for these lands has not been developed. The preferred alternative does not mention any modifications to cattle grazing allotments on the Gallatin Forest which overlap with buffalo range on the north and west boundaries of Yellowstone Park.

RB 51 Vaccination of Buffalo/Vaginal Telemetry of Pregnant Females RB 51 vaccination of buffalo calves and yearlings "outside the Park could commence prior to the completion of studies regarding the efficacy of the vaccine." The plan does not address how the vaccine may effect "non-target species" including bald eagles, grizzly bears and wolves.

Initiation of NEPA and ESA consultation may be required to implement RB 51 vaccination of buffalo inside the Park. The federal government will expand RB 51 vaccination of buffalo once GYIBC criteria are met, to include remote vaccination, park-wide vaccination, and vaccination for all ages and classes of buffalo.

The federal government will provide new funding to implant seronegative pregnant females captured and "tolerated on public lands" with a vaginal radio telemetry device "that would be expelled and activated upon abortion or birth."

Vaccination of Cattle By the fall of 2000 if 100% voluntary vaccination of "test-eligible cattle" outside the Park is not achieved, the State of Montana "will make such vaccination mandatory. The federal government will reimburse the direct cost of vaccination." APHIS will work to prevent state sanctions including consultation and will pursue legal remedies if consultation fails. APHIS and Montana will regularly test cattle in proximity to the Park. APHIS will fund certification of cattle herds "for livestock operations who graze cattle in areas bison may occupy during the winter." If buffalo and cattle commingle, the federal government would cover direct costs of additional testing of cattle.

Buffalo Quarantine Facility The federal government with APHIS as the lead agency will initiate "NEPA analysis to determine the location, design and operation" of a buffalo quarantine facility. Buffalo that "pass through the quarantine protocol may be transferred to Indian reservations or other appropriate public lands."

The quarantine facility would handle seronegative buffalo: 1) when buffalo tolerance levels are exceeded, 2) the overall buffalo population is greater than 3,000 or 3) when capture and testing of buffalo is used to enforce the 45-day separation of buffalo and cattle on public lands outside the north and west boundaries of the Park.