

SCOPING NOTICE

Proposal to Allow for Bison to Occupy Suitable Habitat Year-Round in Montana

On Lands Near the Border of Yellowstone National Park

(July 23, 2012)

With this notice Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) and the Montana Department of Livestock (DoL) announce their intent to conduct an environmental review of allowing some bison to inhabit lands year-round adjacent to or near the border of Yellowstone National Park. The purpose of this scoping notice is to solicit interests, issues, and concerns regarding this proposal in order to guide our subsequent environmental review.

The management of bison in YNP and adjacent lands in Montana is guided by the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) that was adopted in the year 2000 by the State of Montana, Yellowstone National Park (YNP), Gallatin National Forest and the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. That plan provides direction on how and where to manage for bison in and around Yellowstone National Park. The IBMP was designed as an adaptive management tool that can be adjusted over time based on changing conditions, new research, altered legal framework, etc. Since the IBMP was adopted in 2000 there have been multiple adaptive changes adopted by the IBMP managers that recognized changing conditions.

The proposed action is an adaptive change to the IBMP that would allow for year-round bison use in the following portions of the Gallatin National Forest - 1) the Hebgen Basin; 2) the Cabin Creek Recreation and Wildlife Management Unit; 3) the Monument Mountain Unit of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness Area; 4) the Upper Gallatin River corridor, and for year-round use by bull bison in the Gardiner Basin. See the attached maps for the locations of the areas under consideration.

This change is being considered because several factors that have changed since the adoption of the IBMP, including: 1) Cattle are no longer found on Horse Butte in the Hebgen Basin given a change in ownership and associated change in land use that followed; 2) USDA Forest Service grazing allotment on Horse Butte has also been retired; 3) there are no longer cattle grazing on the previous allotments in the Taylor Fork; 4) in 2010 changes were made in the federal rules that govern the response to brucellosis infection of cattle and; 5) agreement among the IBMP Partners that research suggests little risk of brucellosis transmission from bull bison to domestic cattle.

SCOPING ISSUES

FWP, DoL, and other IBMP partners have worked extensively in the implementation of the IBMP since its inception in 2000 and its subsequent adaptive management adjustments in 2005 and 2008. Based on the scientific data generated by the IBMP and comments generated by recent bison-related projects, FWP and DoL determined that the following issues are pertinent to the environmental analysis and pending decision:

1. How would the year-round presence of bison affect public safety?
2. What are the effects to private landowners in the vicinity of the year-round bison habitats?
3. Would the year-round presence of bison provide for additional bison hunting opportunities?
4. Would the bison move back into YNP over time without hazing activities?

5. Would there be a measureable change in seasonal bison movements if there was year-round habitat available?
6. How would the year-round presence of bison affect local livestock operations?
7. How would the year-round presence of bison affect other wildlife and habitat?
8. What is the likelihood that bison will move beyond the proposed boundaries, what are consequences of these movements, and how will they be mitigated?

FWP and DoL invite public comment for the purpose of clarifying these issues and indentifying additional pertinent issues. Responses to the following would be especially helpful:

1. Perspectives regarding the overall scope of the project.
2. Additional issues that are not included in the above list.
3. Specific information sources that you think would strengthen the analysis of issues.

ANALYSIS PROCESS AND SCHEDULE

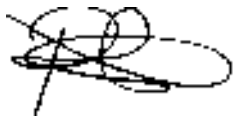
The environmental assessment and decision notice will be developed according to the following tentative schedule:

- July 23, 2012 - Project announcement and initiation of public scoping period
 - Public Meetings:
 - West Yellowstone: August 20, 6-8 p.m. at the Holiday Inn
 - Gardiner: August 21, 6-8 p.m. at the Gardiner High School Theatre
- August 24, 2012 - Close of public scoping period
- Late October 2012 – Release draft EA
- Late November 2012 – Close of comment period on draft environmental assessment (EA)
- Mid December 2012 – Final decision on the EA

SUBMITTING COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

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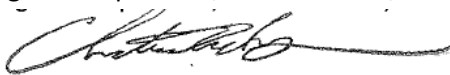
Bison EA
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Patrick Flowers
 Regional Supervisor, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

July 23, 2012

Date

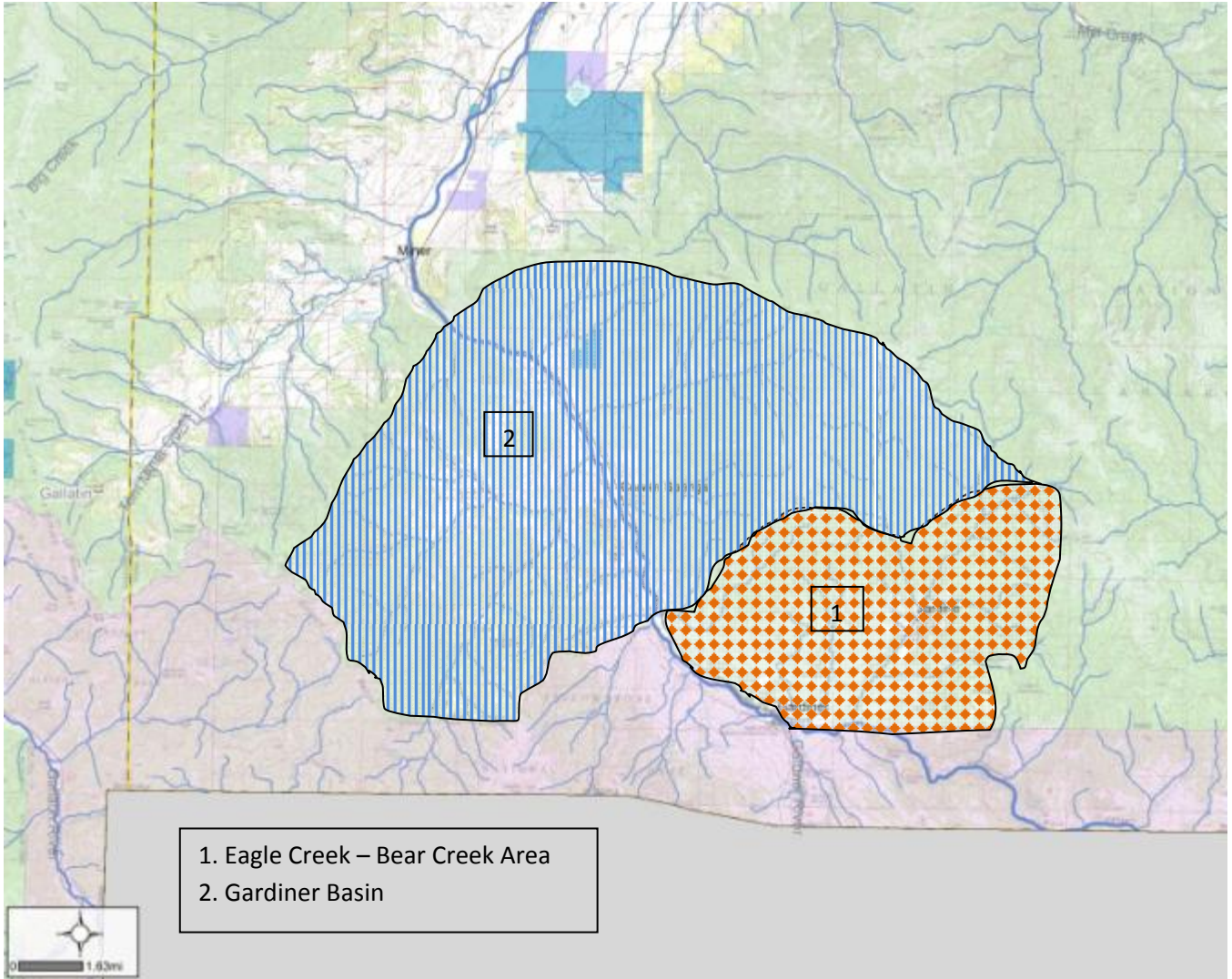


Christian Mackay
 Executive Officer, Montana Department of Livestock

July 23, 2012

Date

Map of the Existing Gardiner Basin Seasonal Bison Tolerance Areas



Map of the Potential Year-round Bison Habitat near West Yellowstone

