

## Bison Management over the Last 136 Years

The following is from the Montana Department of Livestock<sup>2</sup>:

**1872:** YNP established. Wide spread commercial and unregulated sport hunting continued until 1883.

**1902:** Congress appropriated funds to save YNP bison from extinction. Fewer than 50 wild bison remained in the park. The park herd was augmented with 21 untested bison from semi-domesticated herds in Montana and Texas.

**1917:** Serologic tests on aborting bison indicated brucellosis infection at the Lamar Buffalo Ranch. The source of the initial infection is unknown.

**1925-1968:** Bison management emphasized reestablishing bison to historic ranges in the park and population control.

**1967:** YNP began a policy of natural regulation for bison, last herd reduction.

**1971:** Concerns about risks from emigrating bison results in the first Park-State-Federal joint meeting; Boundary control policies are adopted. This program included killing bison (that appeared to be leaving the park) within the park boundaries.

**1978:** Secretary of the Interior rescinded YNP's authority to kill bison.

**1985:** Montana's livestock industry is certified brucellosis-free.

**1986:** YNP completed Environmental Assessment (EA) to evaluate experimental methods to control bison. Montana urged herd reductions; the Park selected a program of barriers and

**1989:** Publication in the Wildlife Society Bulletin, authored by an NPS employed wildlife biologist, documents the ineffectiveness of the boundary

control program. YNP and MFWP meet to begin development of a long-term management plan.

**1991:** In response to a strong national public outcry Montana's legislature rescinds the authority for a bison hunting season.

**1995:** Montana filed a complaint in the U.S. District Court against the federal government; related to Department of Interior policies that cause diseased and disease-exposed bison to enter Montana, and Department of Agriculture policies that might revoke Montana's brucellosis-free certification based on the presence of diseased wild bison in the state. The U.S. District Court accepted the settlement agreement submitted by Montana, the federal government and the Royal Teton Ranch (RTR, owned by Church Universal and Triumphant).

**1996:** YNP and Montana issue a decision to implement the revised IBMP. The Montana Department of Livestock serves as the lead agency operating under the Plan; signed by the Department of Livestock (DOL) and MFWP in cooperation with YNP, the U.S. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Services, and the U.S. Forest Service. As long as the bison remain in Yellowstone National Park they are under the management of the National Park Service. If the bison leave the park, the DOL is mandated to take action.

### More Recent History

**1998:** Agencies spent **\$13 million** on conservation easements on more than 7,000 acres to allow wildlife, including bison, to access RTR lands. The deal was never finalized.<sup>3</sup>

**2000:** IBMP reviewed and resigned. In step 1 of the IBMP, cattle graze RTR lands under a private grazing lease and the NPS monitors bison from within YNP. The report determined that the agencies are not yet ready to move to Step 2 (which was expected by winter 2002/2003). Step 2 includes a bison management plan developed by the agencies in cooperation with RTR and includes no cattle on

private lands outside the north boundary of YNP on portions of the RTR in zone 2 during the winter.<sup>2</sup>

**2008:** The Government Accountability Office released a report last month criticizing state and federal agencies for failing to resolve the issue despite almost **\$16 million spent over the last five years.**<sup>3</sup>

**“Why are we paying so much for something that we already own [the public right-of-way along the county road], and framing it in a temporary deal that still requires bison be needlessly and relentlessly hazed, captured and slaughtered?”**  
- Glen Hockett (GWA)<sup>4</sup>

**April 2008:** Recently Montana and YNP have agreed to a deal with the RTR that will cost **over \$3 million dollars.** The National Park Service secured \$1.5 million in federal funding and will write a check once there is assurance that the state's \$1 million fundraising effort is underway under the guidance of the MFWP and its non-profit partners: the National Wildlife Federation, National Parks Conservation Association, Greater Yellowstone Coalition and the Montana Wildlife Federation. According to those familiar with the draft, the lease is slated to allow 25 seronegative bison to migrate north (into zone 2) in the first year of the deal, allowing for up to 100 in subsequent years. They will then be fitted with telemetric collars and females will be fitted with vaginally-implanted transceivers to monitor any possible brucellosis-induced abortions. Seropositive bison will have to be captured, tested and **slaughtered** or vaccinated.<sup>4</sup>

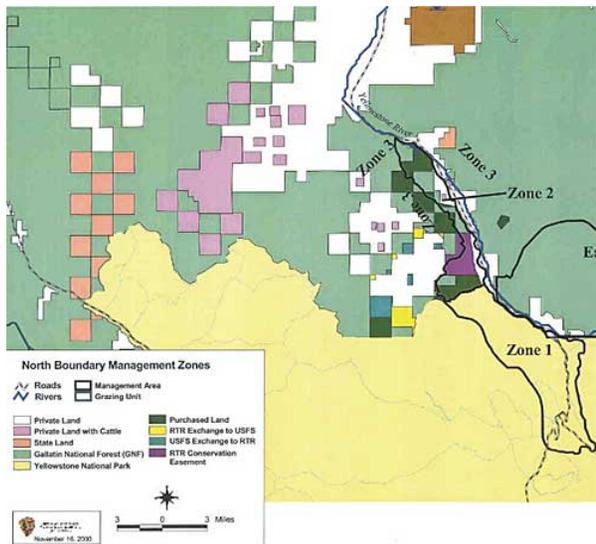


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The purpose of the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) is to<sup>2</sup>:

- Preserve a viable, wild population of Yellowstone bison (**we're not sure they're doing this**).
- Address the management of bison when they leave Yellowstone National Park (see map below).
- Reduce the risk of transmission of brucellosis from bison to cattle.
- Maintain Montana's brucellosis-free status.
- Protect private property.

### The North Boundary Management Zones



The Gallatin Wildlife Association (GWA) has a offered “management recommendations to emphasize private property rights, better protect our brucellosis-free status, and embrace wild bison as valued native wildlife and an incredible asset to Montana.” Check it out at [www.gallatinwildlifeassociation.org](http://www.gallatinwildlifeassociation.org)!

### References

1. [www.buffalofieldcampaign.org](http://www.buffalofieldcampaign.org).
2. Montana Dept. of Livestock. 2006. Greater Yellowstone Area Bison Brucellosis Information. [www.mt.gov/liv](http://www.mt.gov/liv).
3. Brown, Matthew. 2008. Bison Deal Expected as Church Sells Cattle. Associated Press. [www.newwest.net](http://www.newwest.net).
4. Nolt, David. 2008. Yellowstone Bison and the Fate of the Royal Teton Ranch Lease. [www.newwest.net](http://www.newwest.net).

### History of Buffalo Mismanagement North of the Yellowstone Park Boundary

At present, the agencies are wasting **2.8 million tax-dollars each year to harass, capture, and slaughter** Yellowstone's buffalo to protect approximately 200 domestic cattle.<sup>1</sup>



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### Current Management<sup>2</sup>:

The National park service (NPS) uses hazing within Yellowstone National Park (YNP) to prevent bison movement north onto private and public lands. If hazing is unsuccessful, the NPS captures all bison attempting to exit the Park. Agencies test all captured bison, **seropositives go to slaughter**, and they temporarily hold up to 125 seronegative bison at the facility. Vaccination eligible bison are vaccinated. The seronegative bison held at the facility are released to the Park in the spring. If the capacity of the capture facility is reached, all additional bison attempting to exit YNP are removed to the facility (seronegative bison may be sent to a quarantine facility, if available, and, if not available, may be sent to **slaughter** or removed for jointly approved research). When the late winter/early spring bison count exceeds 3,000, bison may be captured and sent to **slaughter or lethally** removed without being tested for brucellosis. The Yellowstone bison population has exceeded 3,000 since November 2001. Bison outside the Park that cannot be hazed back into the Park and evade capture are subject to **lethal removal**.