

C-2: SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT FROM THE SPRING 2005 WOOD BISON NEWS

A total of 20 response forms, letters and e-mails were received, including responses to the Spring 2005 *Wood Bison News* and written comments submitted at the Wood Bison Restoration Advisory Group Meetings. Comments that responded to the questions on the *Wood Bison News* response form are numerically tabulated below. All the narrative comments received were categorized as closely as possible to the response form questions and are included below.

1. Do you support the Alaska Department of Fish and Game continuing to pursue restoring wood bison in Interior Alaska?

Yes 11 No 3

Comments:

- ✓ Maybe, it depends on many things but the first is “what’s is going to cost and can you afford it”? With the current financial situation we need to know a projected cost and source of funding. If we are to sacrifice other ADF&G programs to make this restoration happen, will we the public get a chance to evaluate these options?
- ✓ I think that they might give disease to our moose, it’s not our traditional food and the meat does not taste good and you can put it in your own backyard.
- ✓ Disrupt ecosystem. Like to see current ecosystem evolve on its own without adding anything new. Thinks bison will disrupt caribou and moose (*phone call to Craig G. call disrupted before comment form was completed 6-1-05*)
- ✓ I feel wood bison are natural and much better suited for Alaskan conditions. I think they could provide an expanded resource for multiple uses- recreation, viewing, consumption, hunting, etc.
- ✓ What a great conservation project to reintroduce these animals.
- ✓ They were indigent to Alaska before being over harvested to elimination. The modern (future) generations should be able to enjoy the viewing, harvesting and managing of the wood bison, as it was a natural part of the landscape in recent history.
- ✓ Restoration of an indigenous species. Fill a blank space in the ecosystem.
- ✓ I think it is a good deal transplanting wood bison where planned. Another resource of subsistence food since the moose population is going down.
- ✓ Restoration of wood bison would be a positive contribution to Alaskan ecosystems, to people’s opportunities for uses and appreciation of Alaska’s outdoors, and a significant conservation accomplishment by helping to perpetuate a species population that was formerly viable in Alaska, but was probably diminished through human activity. A real parallel with muskox.
- ✓ These animals are not a native species having been naturally extirpated from the area 500 or more years ago. Alaska already has the best hunting opportunities in the world; further introduction of non-native game species simply for hunting purposes is unnecessary and environmentally irresponsible. Even a small risk of disease transmittal to native species is too great a risk to our crucial subsistence resources.
- ✓ It may help balance our ecosystem in our arctic global warming conditions and would provide better subsistence opportunities in our declining moose habitat in the future.

- ✓ Most important, North American wood bison need to be separated into enough large groups to insure their survival should something happen to the “base” herd in Alberta. Next, they are “resistant” to most Alaskan four legged predators and won’t need to have their hooves held to survive.
- ✓ Wood Bison roamed the reintroduction site only a few decades ago. The Canadian Wood Bison program is a great success. Evidence shows that they were here and belongs here.
- ✓ Improve Alaska big game experience.
- ✓ It is important to grow a population of species that was once more common to the state.

2. Of the three main areas of suitable wood bison habitat shown on the map in the Wood Bison News (Yukon Flats, Minto Flats, the lower Innoko River), do you have any comments or suggestions about a particular site or recommendations for which site(s) should be considered first? Please explain why.

- ✓ Minto Flats: This is the obvious first choice. It’s closer to Fairbanks, which makes it less expensive and easier to monitor the condition of the herd. But perhaps more importantly this area is comprised of mostly State Land with the least amount of private land. We don’t need to expend huge sums of public money establishing a herd of bison on private land (and don’t use the Delta herd as an example of cooperation between private and state interests – there’s a world of difference between the cooperation of Delta Farmers and that of the Alaskan Natives – just look at the Chitina Dip netting fiasco).
- ✓ The lower Innoko River because it is far away from our area.
- ✓ I guess personally I would like to see bison (wood) started at Minto Flats because the greatest number of residents would be able to see them the easiest.
- ✓ Minto Flats because they would be on state land. I think this project should stay as far as possible from the feds. Feds would just gum it up.
- ✓ 1st: Yukon Flats, 2nd, Minto Flats. Just don’t ever let them be classified for “traditional” subsistence use. Traditional “subsistence” hunters wiped them out in the first place! Make them accessible for viewing and hunting to everyone, with no special opportunities for any group of the population.
- ✓ To do a proper restoration it would be necessary to start groups in several (all) of the areas mentioned.
- ✓ I think they should stay where they are marked on the map. Look like a good habitat for bison.
- ✓ My impression is that more habitat may be available on the Yukon Flats, and that that area may have been the most recent area that supported wood bison. However, the seemingly incomprehensible, irrational position of the USFWS with regard to Yukon Flats Refuge purposes may argue for Minto Flats as the initial site. But, I don’t think FWS should be let “off the hook” given the history of wood bison in the area.
- ✓ All three sites are unsuitable. The potential effects of wood bison on Alaskan ecology are unknown and potentially mildly damaging to our local ecosystem and the native species that depend on it. I believe in the precautionary principle which to my mind is similar to a doctor’s hypocrite oath – First do no harm! If you don’t know what the effects will be you cannot assume they will only be positive.

- ✓ Yukon Flats seems to be the best habitat for woods bison combined with the fact of its most recent extinction in that area. However, I believe they would do well in many places in Alaska.
- ✓ Transplant them to Minto, then Yukon Flats, then to Innoko. Three Alaskan “herds” would help their survival. Minto is the most accessible are for seeing, and hopefully, eventually hunting them.
- ✓ Yukon Flats has endless prime wood bison habitat. Native elders remember wood bison stories passed on by their parents. We should restore wood bison for the native community.
- ✓ Whatever area looks best for science-based replant should be picked first. I favor two area planning and development.
- ✓ Whatever site suits them best and is the best to monitor them from.

3. If restored to the wild, wood bison would be a public resource. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game would like to develop strategies to ensure that the benefits of wood bison restoration are shared by all users, including local and non-local hunters and wildlife viewers. Please provide any comments or suggestions you may have about how wood bison should be managed to ensure the benefits can be shared by all users.

- ✓ I couldn't help but notice that the benefits are to be shared by all users (but no mention of equally)! Immediately, get a signed statement from the Natives that these animals will not be determined a subsistence species. That's the only way there will ever be any chance for wood bison becoming a true public resource which all can utilize. If the Natives can determine that this will become a subsistence animal **STOP WITH THE RESTORATION PROGRAM RIGHT THERE!** It then becomes a private venture and the Native Corporations currently have the funding available to complete this without using public money.
- ✓ No comment.
- ✓ I agree, that all users should be able to share these animals. If feasible, I would also like to see wood bison on the Kenai Peninsula.
- ✓ No group should have exclusive use. This is why I do not want to see them on federal land.
- ✓ Never, ever allow a separate use (consumptive or non-consumptive) of the restored population to any group of people. All citizens must have equal opportunity to view, enjoy, harvest and manage the re-introduced bison. Do not ever list them for subsistence use – last time they were exterminated in their habitat!
- ✓ I also would like to see use of their resources by all – ADF&G has present mechanisms to work this out by enforcement invading the local people, etc.
- ✓ I don't think anyone should be allowed to process the animals now, but for the future until they build for 5 years or so. Make them grow in their population. They will have a good look or the years pass by to see how they populate. Also build a fence if possible.
- ✓ A binding agreement among all parties that a rural subsistence priority under federal law would not be sought or claimed would be good, but probably unattainable. Therefore, a federal law mending ANILCA, or just in addition to it, explicitly stating that wood bison in Alaska are not subject to terms of ANILCA, Title VIII would be essential. Otherwise, wood bison use will surely go the way of muskox use – hunting shut off to “non-rural”

people, even though local folks might not push that, outfits like NARF and AFN, etc., surely would. The amendment could also make wood bison conservation/use a Refuge purpose!

- ✓ This entire project is ill advised.
- ✓ I think at least in the beginning bison should be for subsistence use only when the population allows, and only by those people in the area where they exist. Whatever that would be. That would create a stewardship for the bison and help protect them from outside poaching and predation.
- ✓ Make then “non-subsistence” resources (both State and Federal) as a condition of acquisition and transplant. Manage for maximum population growth until the ability to live in Alaska is certain, and then adopt a harvest strategy.
- ✓ The resource should be used by all; like the rest of the animals in this state.
- ✓ I urge Fish & Game to manage restored herds for maximum yield.
- ✓ Once a healthy population is established, utilizing hunting and other game management strategies will be essential – they will also be wonderful to view ☺

4. Please provide comments on any other topic that you feel the ADF&G needs to take into consideration regarding the potential for wood bison restoration in Alaska.

- ✓ There are three places that they are looking at right now; 1- Yukon Flats; 2 – Holy Cross, 3 – Minto Flats. All three have different land managers or management of these areas and also state management of state land. The big problems are land (private and corporation and federal). They should be put on state lands. With private land the owners have a right to charge to hunt, corporation land could also charge or restrict access if US Fish and Wildlife made the statement that they could be put on private land and fenced in???? The State of Alaska says no way they are to be free roaming and available to all residents of Alaska. If they do stray to private lands or corporation land then they should be available to all residents. I spoke for myself and stated when there is a surplus they should be available to all residents of Alaska by drawing permit ??? And if they stray or are put on private land or corporation land that access would not be denied to the general public of the state and if a fee was legal it would be reasonable???? I mentioned the access problem that is going on right now at O’Brien Creek and that we do not want something like that to happen again. And not be consider a subsistence animal the State thinks in order to get them back there may have to be some subsistence needs but they would be very restricted and be in black and white and sign of by all and that the state would have complete control of the wood land bison. In a meeting of Fish and Game people after the regular meeting they believe that the Minto Flats area would be the best and less area for problems and could most likely come to a good agreement with the Minto people. I also stated that if they stray or are put on federal land the State of Alaska would have complete control of them and the feds could not set any seasons or say that so many had to go for subsistence. The only thing we need the US Fish & Wildlife for is to okay getting woodland bison back into Alaska by giving the State a permit to do so. Or do we need them if we put them on State land.
- ✓ DEMAND THAT ALL REINTRODUCED BISON BE DISEASE FREE – don’t lower this standard! DEVELOP AN AGREED UPON LONG-RANGE PLAN FOR THIS RESTORATION. ADF&G’s track record with the Delta Bison Range Management has

been anything but consistent with the original agreements (verbal and implied). DEVELOP AN EQUITABLE SYSTEM FOR A USER'S FEE, not one that places the majority of the cost on hunters while the subsistence and non-consumptive users reap most of the benefits. Some examples already in use are Application Fees for any use that is limited, Consumptive Fees for all consumptive uses of these bison, Non-Consumptive Fees for all other uses. If Wood Bison becomes a public resource, their cost should be borne by all those that utilize the resource. Thanks for the opportunity to comment. I hope you will consider them carefully.

- ✓ Bob S. don't put wood bison in our Yukon Flats. Thanks Bob. My question is why are you putting wood bison in our area? Can you put the herd somewhere else? What is the difference between bison and buffalo? Thank you.
- ✓ Hello, we would like to be included in the Wood Bison Restoration and Advisory Group and/or any of the committee findings and decisions. Please view our website at www.bisonandelk.com to see some photos of our operation here in Delta Junction. We have a good history and knowledge of bison, their needs and particular handling specialties. Thank you for considering us for participation in the wood bison restoration project should it go ahead.
- ✓ I was just wondering if the State of Alaska has started to reintroduce wood bison and if not, what is holding them back? I think that the bison of Wyoming/Montana are the backbone of the West. They are definitely awesome creatures. I came upon the information about wood bison as I had read about them in Alberta before. I was in Alberta in January 2005, but did not get a chance to see them. Anyway, being that I'm from Pennsylvania, I really miss seeing bison. Hopefully, I will get to Alaska this spring to work with wildlife. Thanks for your time.
- ✓ The best place to introduce wood bison would be the Minto area...no federal land to deal with and close to Fairbanks to keep track of the critters. Thanks.
- ✓ I wish we could have kept the two wood bison that naturally crossed the Alaskan border near Tok some six or eight years ago. I encourage you to re-introduce this species as soon as possible. I would also like to see them planted on the Kenai Peninsula.
- ✓ Just be sure to cover importation, quarantine – for disease control, various government permit requirements, stocking area/habitat requirements, etc., before moving bison in. I've personally seen (and been part of) failed transplant efforts because all of the ducks were not in a row with BLM, USFWS, DNR, ADF&G and the "greenies" who want to do nothing and let it happen naturally!
- ✓ This project has genuine benefits for all of Alaska and the people of Alaska. This project should be pursued with great vigor. Please do not study this important project to death! Have a proper service of urgency pilot program now!
- ✓ Make sure when they are planted on the Yukon Flats to have low enforcement check on them once a week so that's the way people will know they are protected at all times so the numbers could increase in the future years to come. Plus I'm concerned about the spring break up if the Yukon Flats gets flooded out, what's happen then that is any consideration.
- ✓ Successful reintroduction – and even the substantial ADF&G efforts demonstrates, or would demonstrate, the difference between the do nothing policy of the federal agencies versus the initiative of ADF&G in making a solid conservation contribution or at least attempting to do so. It seems apparent that once again a federal agency is mired in its own

politics and policy, and needs to receive new direction from the public via legislative action. ADF&G should encourage that. P.S. I assume P-R funds are used in the wood bison effort – that means hunters have a big stake!

- ✓ Since in all likelihood the state will not listen to reason in its frantic bloodlust and search for greater hunting related revenues, I would only like to add that it is imperative that the state ensure that the bison that are unfortunately imported be fed a diet of strictly native-Alaskan grasses so that exotic weed species do not become introduced to the Alaskan landscape.
- ✓ I feel that introduction should start with calves in an area with an armed caretaker with feed, medicine, etc., for a year or two until the calves grow and become independent and habituated to the area. They then could take care of themselves and could be monitored. Feel free to contact me; I would like to help with this project.
- ✓ If it's going to take congressional action to circumvent the "endangered species act", get on with it. With both our senators in influential positions and our congressman's leadership abilities, don't negotiate away the chance to import wood bison to appease federal bureaucratic strategies and whims.
- ✓ I totally support the Wood Bison reintroduction and would push the government to move quickly on this and quit dragging their feet. Great idea for many benefits. Good luck on the project.
- ✓ If the roadblock is the opinion of the USF&W and they will not change then the state should arbitrate. If the science shows that wood bison should roam as they did in Alaska and do in Canada, how can the FWS stop the majority?
- ✓ Perhaps the effects of this species on other species in the affected areas – how will the reintroduction of the wood bison affect the areas where they are reintroduced?