

**Alaska Department of Fish and Game  
State Wildlife Grant**

**Grant Number:** T-7 **Segment Number: 1**  
**Project Number:** 1.0  
**Project Title:** Planning for and implementing wood bison restoration in interior Alaska  
**Project Duration:** 26 February 2008 – 30 June 2014  
**Report Period:** 26 February, 2013–25 February 2014  
**Report Due Date to HQ:** June 29, 2014

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**Project Objectives**

OBJECTIVE 1: Continue public information and education efforts, initiate collaborative planning to evaluate wood bison restoration in one or more specific locations and develop cooperative management plans.

JOB/ACTIVITY 1A: Establish one or more citizens' stakeholder planning teams to work with ADF&G, land owners, management agencies and local residents to seek consensus on wood bison restoration and management in specific locations. If consensus is reached on reestablishing wood bison in a specific location, initiate development of cooperative implementation and management plans.

JOB/ACTIVITY 1B: Develop cooperative management and implementation plans for one or more of the three sites being considered for wood bison restoration and provide them for public and agency review and to state and federal regulatory boards for review and endorsement. The target date for completing the first site-specific planning effort for Minto Flats is November 30, 2008.

JOB/ACTIVITY 1C: Continue producing the Wood Bison News and other informational materials to keep the public informed about wood bison restoration and provide additional opportunities for public input.

JOB/ACTIVITY 1D: Develop cooperative management agreements with local residents, landowners and others and establish programs to involve the public in the wood bison restoration project.

OBJECTIVE 2: Purchase and import up to 70 young wood bison from EINP in early 2008 or at the earliest opportunity, and transport them to the temporary holding facility at AWCC.

JOB/ACTIVITY 2A: Cooperate with staff at EINP to identify wood bison stock that can be made available for restoration in Alaska and to complete the necessary disease testing procedures to obtain the health certification required for import

into Alaska. The target date for completing this task is January 30, 2008, if all the required permits and approvals are issued in a timely manner.

JOB/ACTIVITY 2B: Accomplish the necessary permitting and logistical arrangements to transport wood bison stock from EINP to AWCC in early 2008.

OBJECTIVE 3: Provide support for maintaining wood bison at the temporary holding facility at AWCC and health monitoring required prior to release.

JOB/ACTIVITY 3A: Support AWCC wood bison handling and husbandry efforts and purchase feed and other supplies needed to support bison in captivity.

JOB/ACTIVITY 3B: Support disease testing and health monitoring at AWCC so the bison receive the necessary health certification to be approved for release to the wild.

JOB/ACTIVITY 3C: Work with the Alaska State Veterinarian, AWCC and others to develop protocols to be used in the event that any wood bison are found to have disease problems that might prevent their release into the wild and to ensure proper disposition of the animals.

OBJECTIVE 4: Prepare temporary facilities and transport wood bison from AWCC to Lower Innoko/Yukon area or other approved locations for release into the wild.

JOB/ACTIVITY 4A: Construct a temporary enclosure and obtain hay and other supplies needed to implement restoration on Lower Innoko/Yukon or other approved restoration locations. Purchase fencing, tools and supplies for an enclosure, arrange for local assistance in constructing that enclosure and purchase and transport a supply of hay to release site.

JOB/ACTIVITY 4B: Transport bison from AWCC to Lower Innoko/Yukon by trailer and cargo plane. Stock will be held for two to four weeks, and then released before breakup.

OBJECTIVE 5: Prepare for and initiate baseline biological monitoring and post-release biological and population monitoring.

JOB/ACTIVITY 5A: Prior to implementing wood bison restoration, develop plans for biological monitoring programs individually tailored for Lower Innoko/Yukon or other restoration locations.

JOB/ACTIVITY 5B: Implement the baseline biological monitoring identified in biological monitoring plans in cooperation with other agencies and the University of Alaska (some biological monitoring may be funded through other SWG projects or sources).

JOB/ACTIVITY 5C: Purchase radio collars and other equipment needed to monitor wood bison so they can be attached prior to transport from AWCC.

JOB/ACTIVITY 5D: Monitor bison movements after release using aerial telemetry and surveys.

### **Summary of Project Accomplishments:**

#### **OBJECTIVE 1:**

JOB/ACTIVITY 1A: Cooperative management planning for wood bison restoration has been delayed pending completion of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Endangered Species Act (ESA) requirements. Because it was not until May 7, 2014 that the final regulations to designate wood bison in Alaska as a nonessential experimental population under section 10(j) of the ESA was published in the Federal Register, and the project could not proceed without these regulations, cooperative planning was delayed. In May 2012 the status of wood bison was downlisted from endangered to threatened throughout its range. This has little effect on the political issues related to ESA status or the ability to proceed with the project.

JOB/ACTIVITY 1B: As noted above, the task of developing cooperative management plans and distributing them for public review and comment has been delayed. Furthermore, Lower Yukon/Innoko area is now considered the first release site.

JOB/ACTIVITY 1C: Our bison biologist, Tom Seaton, met with people from Shageluk to discuss wood bison release.

JOB/ACTIVITY 1D: Development of cooperative agreements with local landowners and others will occur as part of the cooperative planning process and has been delayed until planning efforts are underway.

**OBJECTIVE 2:** As previously reported, this objective was completed when 53 young wood bison were purchased from EINP in Canada and transported to the AWCC in June 2008. All job activities were completed in 2008.

**OBJECTIVE 3:** There is extensive and on-going work to fulfill Objective 3. Costs of maintaining wood bison in captivity and conducting the disease testing and health certification have increased significantly above the amount originally envisioned. The delay in moving toward releasing wood bison to the wild is largely due to the delay in promulgating the necessary ESA regulations.

JOB/ACTIVITY 3A: Hay, grain and mineral supplements have been provided as needed. We have upgraded the quality of food given to the bison, and improved the de-worming program. The majority of feed has been haylage obtained from the University of Alaska farm in Palmer and oatlage from the Wasilla area and trucked to AWCC by Carlile Transportation. This activity will be on-going as long as the wood bison are held in captivity.

We cooperated with AWCC and Chugach National Forest to obtain a permit to use an additional 138 acres of US Forest Service land adjacent to AWCC. This permit was in place in April 2013. AWCC fenced the periphery of most of the 138 acres which are being used for more efficient pasture rotation for the bison.

JOB/ACTIVITY 3B: We conducted handling operations during this reporting period. We handled approximately 100 bison, some of them more than once. In the process of handling, we moved all the non breeding bulls for 2014 to the new US Forest Service property. We administered parasite control medication—selenium supplements, antibiotics when needed, and vitamin B supplements—microchipped selected animals, ear tagged each animal, and observed tooth wear for age estimation. Weather proof, free choice mineral feeders were installed.

JOB/ACTIVITY 3C: Between Feb 26, 2013–Feb 25, 2014 12 calves were born. Six calves and four yearlings died of natural causes during that time. Veterinarian necropsies indicated that no deaths were from diseases that would prevent release. We also culled 16 bulls. The herd numbers approximately 112 animals of mixed age classes.

OBJECTIVE 4: This grant is currently approved for Objectives 1–3 only. We are working with the USFWS to complete the necessary ESA and NEPA requirements as soon as possible; and when the work is completed we will request an amendment to the project approval to allow work on Objectives 4 and 5.

OBJECTIVE 5: See narrative under objective 4

### **Significant Deviations:**

#### **ESA AND NEPA COMPLIANCE:**

During this reporting period a major portion of the work on the project has involved cooperating with the USFWS to finalize regulations under sections 10(j) and 4(d) of the ESA to designate wood bison in Alaska as a nonessential experimental population (NEP) and specify provisions for future conservation and management. Work accomplished includes:

- Working with USFWS to update and refine the draft final ESA regulations and Environmental Assessment submitted to the USFWS in September 2013.
- Participating in numerous meetings to seek agreement on the final version of ESA regulations to be published in the Federal Register.
- Finalizing regulations. Regulations went through final review. The final Environmental Impact Statement was published Nov 18, 2013, and the final regulation classifying wood bison as a non-essential experimental population was published in the Federal Register on May 7, 2014.

#### Health Monitoring Program

As stated in our last report, we retained Dr. Gerald Parsons (DVM), a bison specialist at Stratford Animal Hospital in Stratford, Oklahoma. Based on his advice, a few husbandry practices were changed which quickly improved the health and nutritional status of the bison.

T-7-1 Wood Bison Restoration  
FY14 Interim Performance Report

Overcrowding and funding limitations became apparent in 2011 for the herd at AWCC. Natural mortality, restricted breeding, and culling have been employed since 2012 to maintain the herd size near a goal of 135 bison. In 2012 breeding was restricted at AWCC. In 2013, 12 calves were born, and mortalities were adjusted to compensate. Full breeding was resumed in 2013 to gain a yearling cohort of bison for release in 2015. Overall, the herd is quite healthy and productive.

**Prepared By:** Tom Seaton

**Date:** Aug 13, 2014