

# Wood Bison Management Plan For Lower Innoko-Yukon River in Westcentral Alaska, 2020-2023

Alaska Wood Bison Management Planning Team



Photo by Doug Lindstrand.





## Wood Bison Management Plan For Lower Innoko-Yukon River in Westcentral Alaska, 2020–2023

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To see a full list of contributors, visit the supporters page at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=woodbisonrestoration.supporters>.

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Wildlife Management Plans set out specific plans for management of wildlife and habitat in certain areas. They review available data and other information, legal requirements, wildlife population and habitat needs, public comment, and other information and set out a course of action for a specified period of time.

This Wildlife Management Plan was reviewed and approved for publication by Darren Bruning, Regional Supervisor, Region III, for the Division of Wildlife Conservation.

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Please contact the authors or the Division of Wildlife Conservation at (907) 465-4190 if you have questions about the content of this plan.

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**Cover Photo:** Wood bison adult female at the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center, Girdwood, Alaska, 2020. Photo by Doug Lindstrand.

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This Alaska wood bison management plan is the result of a collaborative effort of an eclectic group of Alaskans with a broad range of interests. Below is a list of the interest groups invited to be a part of the Alaska Wood Bison Management Planning Team and their representative(s). Organizations are in alphabetical order.

Organization	Representative
Alaska Outdoor Council	Theresa Woldstad
Anchorage Advisory Committee	Joel Doner
Anvik Tribal Council	Carl Jerue
Big Game Commercial Services Board	No representative available
Bureau of Land Management Alaska Office	Bruce Seppi
Board of Game	Al Barrette
Calista Corporation	Mary Martinez (phone)
Central Kuskokwim Advisory Committee	Lisa Feyereisen
Defenders of Wildlife	Jen Christopherson
Deloy Ges, Inc. – Anvik	Ken Chase
Deloycheet, Inc. – Holy Cross	Alfred Demientieff Jr
Alaska Department of Natural Resources	Casey Dinkel
Doyon Ltd.	Jamie Marunde / Laraina Szmyd
Fairbanks Advisory Committee	Jeff Lucas / Mark Richards
Federal Subsistence Board	No representative available
Grayling, Anvik, Shageluk, Holy Cross Advisory Committee	Ken Chase
Grayling Tribal Council	No representative available
Hee-Yea Lingde Corporation – Grayling	No representative available
Holy Cross Tribal Council	Alfred Demientieff Jr
Innoko National Wildlife Refuge Manager	Jeremy Havener
Northern Alaska Environmental Center	Stepped down from team
Office of Subsistence Management, USFWS	No representative available
Safari Club International Kenai Chapter	No representative available
Safari Club International Alaska Chapter	Jeff Garness (phone)
Shageluk Tribal Council	Keith Workman
The Kuskokwim Corporation	No representative available
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Doug Cooper
Western Interior Regional Advisory Council	Jack Reakoff (phone)
Yukon Delta Regional Advisory Council	No representative available
Zho-Tse, Inc. – Shageluk	Kelly Workman

Additionally, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) staff from the divisions of Wildlife Conservation and Subsistence were present to provide assistance and information. Those (in alphabetical order) were Laurie Boeck, Caroline Brown, Darren Bruning, Josh Peirce, and Tom Seaton.

Dr. Alistair Bath, Memorial University, Newfoundland, expertly facilitated the meetings for both the 2015–2020 and the 2020–2023 wood bison management plans for Lower Innoko-Yukon River area.



**Alaska Wood Bison Management Planning Team at the February 2020 meeting. Photo by ADF&G.**

## **Dedication**

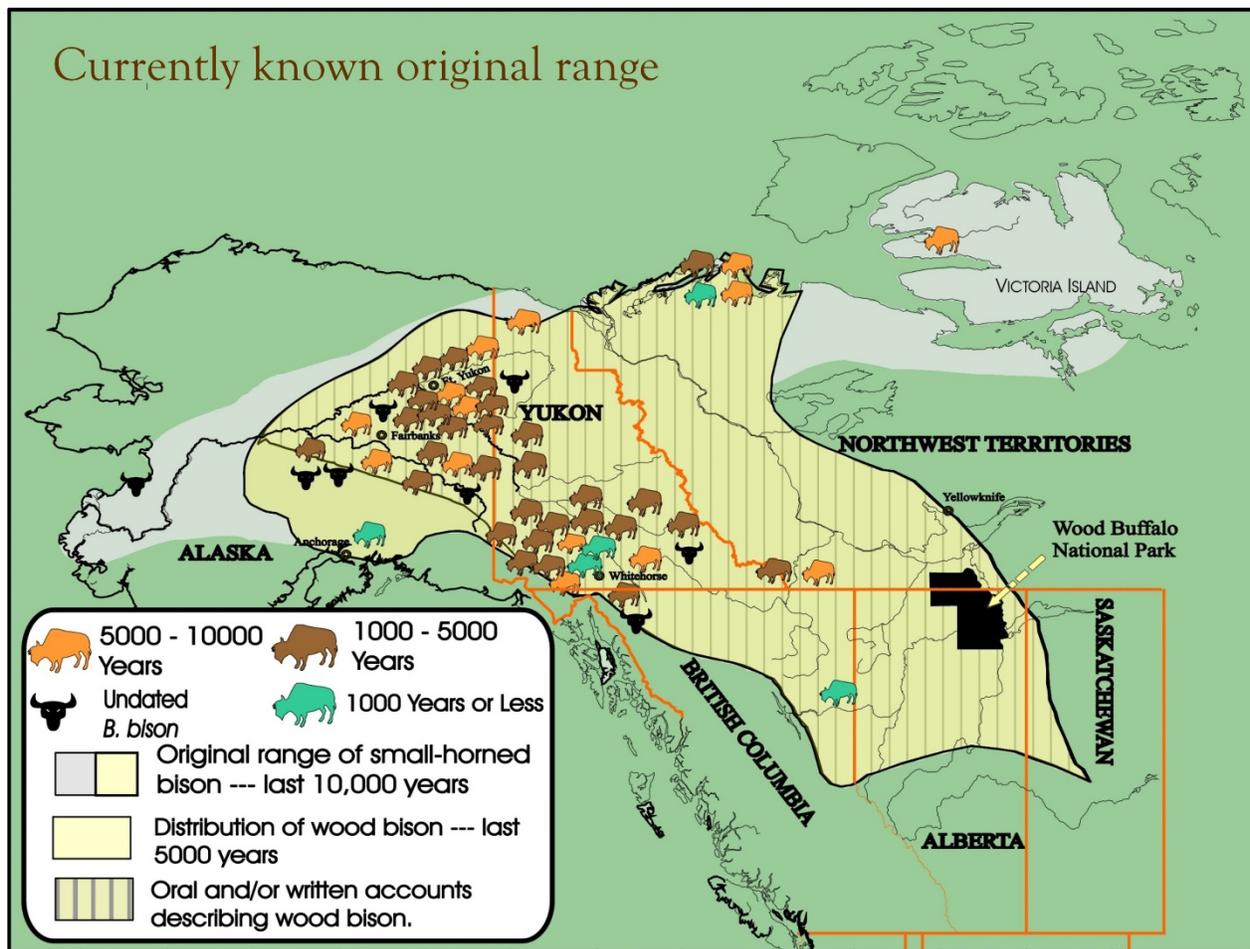
This wood bison management plan is respectfully dedicated to Arnold Hamilton, Shageluk Fish and Game Advisory Committee member; Gabe Nicholi Sr, former Chief of Grayling; Greg Roczicka, former Yukon Delta Regional Advisory Council representative; David James, retired ADF&G Regional Supervisor; Rita St. Louis, retired ADF&G Wildlife Planner; and many others who gave endless hours and enthusiasm to the project. They have all contributed to the wood bison restoration success story.

## **Vision Statement**

Through the collaboration of many, manage a sustainable wood bison herd while ensuring a healthy landscape, benefiting all people for future generations.

## Background

Wood bison (*Bison bison athabasca*) roamed Alaska for approximately 10,000 years, gradually diminishing in numbers from west to east, and disappearing from Alaska altogether about 200 years ago (Fig. 1). In 1991, ADF&G Wildlife Biologist Bob Stephenson proposed reintroducing wood bison to the Yukon Flats to provide an additional source of red meat for residents of the area (ADF&G 1994). This would simultaneously address the broader conservation goal of restoring free ranging, disease free wood bison in portions of their original range.



Produced by ADF&G, 2001 using ArcGIS™ software (Esri, Redlands, California); base map sources: ADF&G, ESRI, and USGS.

**Figure 1. Original range of wood bison in Alaska and Canada based on archeological records, and oral and written history. Adapted from Stephenson et al. (2001).**

In 1969 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) listed wood bison as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The status was changed to threatened in 2012. ESA requires a range of protections for listed species and their habitats. Concerns about these protections and management requirements resulted in opposition to restoring wood bison in Alaska. ADF&G worked with USFWS to develop a federal rule which was published in 2014 (Federal Register 2014). This rule designated wood bison in Alaska as a nonessential experimental population

(NEP) under section 10(j) of ESA. Sections 10(j) and 4(d) of ESA allow certain kinds of take, including hunting, to provide for the conservation of the species. The federal rule also gives ADF&G primary management responsibility for leading and implementing the restoration effort.

Continued concerns about potential management requirements under the 10(j) NEP classification compelled ADF&G to identify the lower Innoko-Yukon River area as the most appropriate of 3 potential release sites to initiate the restoration project. The Innoko-Yukon area had local communities that strongly supported the project for at least a decade, and the area had not been identified for any large-scale economic development projects.

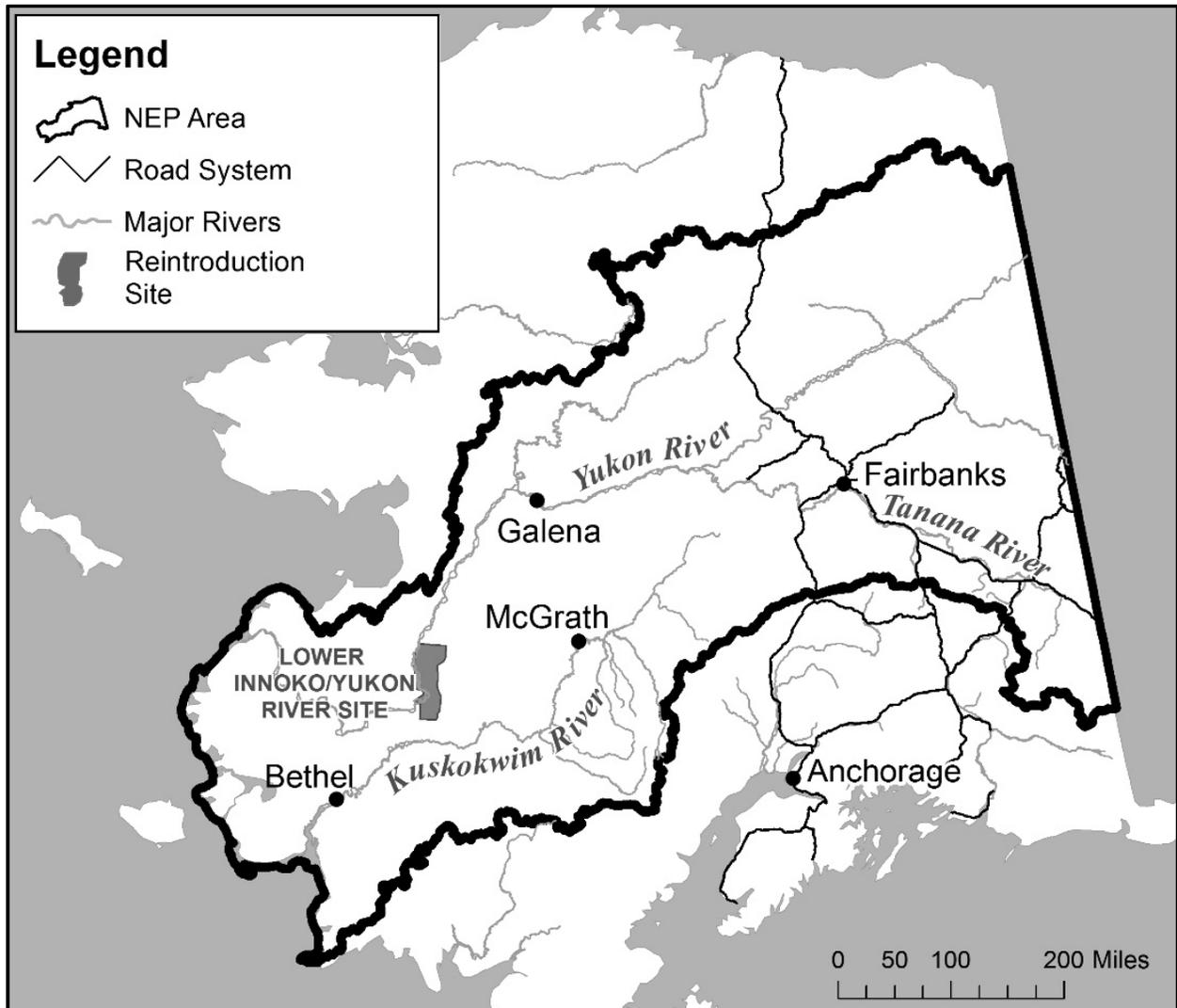
The final rule for the 10(j) NEP under ESA was published 7 May 2014 by USFWS titled Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants: Establishment of a Nonessential Experimental Population of Wood Bison in Alaska (Federal Register 2014). The full text of the final rule can be viewed at <http://www.fws.gov/policy/library/2014/2014-10506.pdf>.

Under the rule

- Regulated hunting under sustained yield principles is allowed.
- Activities such as resource development, hunting, trapping, and recreation are allowed.
- Designation of “critical habitat” under ESA is not allowed (this provides additional assurance that other land uses will not be affected).
- If a reintroduction effort fails, or in the unlikely event that litigation changes their legal status, the animals may be removed from the landscape.
- ADF&G will be the lead agency in reintroductions, and using scientific knowledge and experience, will have primary responsibility for bison management.
- Management of wood bison in the NEP area will be guided by provisions in
  1. The federal final rule <http://www.fws.gov/policy/library/2014/2014-10506.pdf> (Federal Register 2014).
  2. The associated final environmental assessment [http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/species/speciesinfo/woodbison/pdfs/environmental\\_assessment\\_designation\\_experimental\\_population\\_wood\\_bison\\_interior\\_alaska\\_2013.pdf](http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/species/speciesinfo/woodbison/pdfs/environmental_assessment_designation_experimental_population_wood_bison_interior_alaska_2013.pdf) (ADF&G 2013).
  3. The ADF&G environmental review [http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/species/speciesinfo/woodbison/pdfs/er\\_no\\_appendices.pdf](http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/species/speciesinfo/woodbison/pdfs/er_no_appendices.pdf) (ADF&G 2007).
  4. A site-specific management plan (i.e., this document).

In late March and early April of 2015 ADF&G transported and released 100 bison, both adult cows and young bison, along the Innoko River near Shageluk, Alaska (Fig. 2). In May and June

of 2015 an additional 30 adult bull bison were also released near the adult cows and young bison. These individuals and their subsequent offspring comprise what is now the lower Innoko-Yukon River Wood Bison Herd.



Produced by ADF&G, 2012, using ArcGIS™ software (Esri, Redlands, California); base map sources: ADF&G, AKDOT, ESRI, and USGS.

**Figure 2. The Alaska wood bison nonessential experimental population (NEP) area and the lower Innoko/Yukon River release site.**

In addition to other provisions, the federal final rule (Federal Register 2014) states:

“ADF&G will use public planning processes to develop implementation and management plans for wood bison restoration. Planning groups will include representatives from local communities, regional population centers, landowners, Alaska Native interests, wildlife conservation interests, industry, and State and Federal agencies, as appropriate for each area. Draft management plans will be circulated for public review, and final plans will be presented to the Alaska Board of Game and Federal Subsistence Board for review and approval.”

## Planning Process

To update the 2015 site-specific management plan (Alaska Wood Bison Management Planning Team 2015), ADF&G invited several interest groups and agencies representing a broad range of interests to select representatives and participate as part of the Alaska Wood Bison Management Planning Team (hereafter referred to as the Team) to update the management plan for wood bison in the lower Innoko-Yukon River area. Most groups sent participants. This included all of the invitees from 2014, and more as described below. Not all interest groups could attend, and a representative was not available from the Big Game Commercial Services Board, Federal Subsistence Board, Office of Subsistence Management (USFWS), Grayling Tribal Council, Hee-Yea Lingde Corporation, Yukon-Delta Regional Advisory Council, Kenai Chapter of Safari Club International, or The Kuskokwim Corporation. The Northern Alaska Environmental Center stepped down from the team because of a stated change in their organization from a species-specific to a habitat-related focus. To maintain a presence of environmental NGO interest on the Team, ADF&G invited Defenders of Wildlife in their place. Most Team members came for the duration of the meeting, but in some cases, organizations were represented by different delegates on different days. At the beginning of the first day, the Team realized that in addition to the current interest groups present, the Calista Corporation and The Kuskokwim Corporation should also be a part of the Team. A representative from Calista Corporation was then added by speakerphone. All told, 30 groups were invited, and 21 groups were represented.

The Team met for 3 full days and was facilitated by Dr. Alistair Bath of Memorial University, Newfoundland, Canada. It was tasked with updating the management plan for wood bison along the lower Innoko and Yukon Rivers. Although ADF&G provided historical, biological, and regulatory expertise, the plan reflects the desires of the Team.

During the 2014 planning team meeting, the Team explored, identified, and addressed key issues facing bison and their management. To do that, it agreed to several tenets. The Team agreed to listen respectfully to each participant's point of view and to mutually identify compromises or new solutions to resolve a wide range of issues. The Team also agreed to share the concerns of their respective constituents with each other, and then advocate the Team's decisions back to their constituents. Furthermore, Team members agreed to not leave the group if the solutions developed by consensus were not to their liking, and they would not say "yes" if they really were thinking "no." The Team agreed that because compromise was paramount to the success of a plan, all Team decisions should be by consensus. The Team discussed core values and fleshed out many of these values in detail. Respect for private property and mutual respect for diverse cultural values were deemed important and discussed at length. Likewise, the importance of fairness was discussed at length. The Team rejected the term "equal opportunity" because it implied that all individuals should be treated exactly the same, which the Team agreed simply was not practical. Instead, the Team agreed on the concept of "equitable or balanced opportunity" because it better represented the reality and complexity of landownership, differences in proximity of users to wood bison, and other differences as well. In conclusion, the Team agreed that even if individuals were not treated equally, they could still be treated fairly.

During the 2020 meeting, the Team highlighted the need to reaffirm the ideas in the wood bison management plan and revisit certain sections to ensure everything was still relevant. Some members stated how they had been part of the process since the beginning and were looking

forward to exploring what happens next. There was concern that the wood bison might be ranging into new areas and there was a need to discuss the implications of bison showing up in areas where residents may not be expecting to see the animal.

ADF&G gathered a substantial amount of information about the Lower Innoko-Yukon River wood bison during the 5 years since release. This meeting provided another opportunity to inform the Team of ADF&G's findings. A series of presentations were given throughout the meeting by ADF&G Wood Bison Biologist Tom Seaton which outlined the monitoring of the herd. Biological information included the bison release story; movements and grouping since release; bison diet; mortality; productivity; the influence of snow conditions and flooding events; current population numbers including cow-to-calf ratios, bull-to-cow ratios, and yearling recruitment; a forage assessment with a video and discussion; and disease testing. All participants found the information very useful and informative. Publications outlining this biological information are in progress and will be available along with this publication on the ADF&G Wood Bison management and research page (<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildliferesearch.woodbison>).

Moving forward, the Team agreed on ways in which they will operate into the future. The Team emphasized the necessity of holding meetings to maintain group trust. They also agreed to continue working cooperatively in addressing future challenges. It was decided that the time period of 2020–2023 in the updated management plan is somewhat tentative and will depend on the size and health of the herd, if the herd range expands into new areas, the desire of any new communities that result from range expansion, and any harvest considerations that arise. The Team agreed through consensus that this plan will be in effect for a minimum of 3 years, 2020–2023, but if public support remained beyond 2023, and conditions ecologically and socially remained positive, then an extension could be considered from 2023 to 2025, effectively changing the years that this plan covers to 5 years, 2020–2025. It was decided that annual updates should occur virtually, with no need to meet physically.

*Note: A draft of this plan was available to all interest groups for review between 24 February and 15 April 2022. Many interest groups provided comments. Some of these comments did not apply to the management plan drafted during the February 2020 planning team meeting but were new topics that will be discussed at the next planning team meeting. It is noted in Goals 4 and 5 below that some comments from the 2022 review period conflict with the current plan. These goals and comments will be revisited by all interest groups at the next planning team meeting, scheduled for 11–13 October 2022 in Fairbanks, and may be incorporated into the next plan by the planning team.*

## Goals, Objectives, and Actions

**Goal 1:** Increase or grow the wood bison herd in the lower Innoko-Yukon River area and manage it for long-term viability.

The Team recognizes that restoring wood bison in Alaska would be a conservation opportunity of state, national, and international importance, providing a broad range of benefits to hunting and nonhunting uses alike. The Team also emphasized the importance of hunting as an important management tool.

Objective 1: Add animals whenever feasible and move animals where appropriate to grow this population.

Objective 2: Continue to closely monitor and conservatively manage these wood bison to better understand how the herd adapts to its surroundings including occasional deep snow and flooding.

Objective 3: Conduct ongoing field surveys to monitor the status of the herd.

*Action 1* — Conduct field surveys to collect biological data on population size, cow-to-calf ratios, bull-to-cow ratios, productivity, survivorship, age structure, body condition, seasonal movements, and dispersal.

*Action 2* — Encourage local residents to share information about known locations of bison with one another and ADF&G for management purposes.

Objective 4: Conduct forage-assessment surveys to monitor the impact of the herd on its habitat.

Objective 5: Continue to ensure that future harvesting of the herd is maintained at a level that does not prevent growth and expansion of wood bison into adjacent areas where suitable habitat exists.

Objective 6: Maintain separation between wood bison and plains bison to prevent interbreeding.

Objective 7: Conduct routine disease testing to monitor the health of wood bison and associated wildlife.

**Goal 2:** Ensure adequate staffing and funding for all phases of wood bison management.

Objective 1: Continue to support a dedicated ADF&G biologist to intensively monitor wood bison while the herd becomes established in the wild and to ensure well-informed management decisions after the herd has been established.

Objective 2: Ensure that revenue from drawing permit application fees is used to support the wood bison management program.

Objective 3: To the extent possible, ensure available funding is maximized for wood bison.

**Goal 3:** Minimize conflicts between humans and wood bison.

Much has been learned about conflicts between people and wood bison in Canada. Wood bison rarely attack people and are less likely to do so than moose. Like moose, bison want to move away or avoid people but, if cornered, could become aggressive. Unlike moose, old bison bulls are generally more aggressive than cows with calves.

Lethal removal or harassment of problem wood bison will be guided by state regulations (5 AAC 92.410 “Taking of game in defense of life or property”; 5 AAC 92.033 “Permit for scientific, educational, propagative, or public safety purposes”) and also by federal regulations (50 CFR 17.84 (x)(5)(iv) “What take of wood bison is allowed in the NEP area?”).

Objective 1: Continue to educate all user groups about wood bison and their interactions with people.

Objective 2: Continue to employ established procedures to accurately identify and resolve problem-bison situations.

*Action 1* — Lethal removal of wood bison will be allowed only in the defense of human life.

*Action 2* — Nonharmful harassment of wood bison, in coordination with ADF&G, will be allowed in defense of property.

Objective 3: Maintain the cooperative effort between ADF&G and local communities to develop procedures and train personnel to deal with problem wood bison.

Objective 4: Exempt lethal removal of problem wood bison from harvest quotas.

**Goal 4:** Encourage cooperation among land managers to ensure reasonable, standardized land use to access wood bison.

*Note: Goal 4 predominantly applies to a future time when hunting is instituted. Hunting will not be instituted during the life of this plan (2020–2023, potentially 2020–2025); therefore, this goal is considered a work in progress. Goal 4 was written by the 2014 planning team. The Team (2020–2023 planning team) asked to keep Goal 4 in this 2020–2023 plan and a subcommittee has been assigned to work on it. Due to the COVID pandemic, that subcommittee never met. During the 2022 review of the 2020–2023 draft plan, some of the comments received from interest groups within the Team conflicted with the objectives and actions of Goal 4. This goal, and the conflicting comments, will be revisited with all available planning team members present at the next planning team meeting, scheduled for 11–13 October 2022 in Fairbanks. This will provide an opportunity for all interest groups to discuss the language of this goal and make changes, if necessary, to once again reach consensus.*

The land around the lower Innoko-Yukon River release site is a checkerboard of Bureau of Land Management and Native corporation lands. Native corporate lands are private lands and use by nonshareholders is often prohibited. A land-use policy is necessary to provide opportunity for nonshareholders to use the wood bison resource. The Team agreed that respecting private property rights is an important aspect of allowing reasonable, standardized land use for all user groups including local residents, nonlocal residents, and nonresidents. Representatives of 5 Native corporation landowners developed a unified policy including fees to allow reasonable land use.

*Note: During the 2022 review period, Doyon Ltd, Calista Corporation, and Deloycheet Corporation commented that any access to their respective lands requires permission directly from their respective corporations. Land access permission directly from landowners is not contrary to Goal 4, but the details shall be revisited in the scheduled October 2022 planning team meeting. This will provide an opportunity for all interest groups to discuss the language of this goal and make changes if necessary to once again reach consensus.*

**Objective 1:** Provide reasonable land use for all users of wood bison on private corporate lands.

*Action 1* — Ensure a common fee, paid regardless of success, for land use to access bison as follows:

- 1) No fee for shareholders of the 4 Lower Yukon Subregion (Grayling, Anvik, Shageluk, and Holy Cross; GASH) village corporations.
- 2) Fee of \$300 for all Alaska resident hunters that are nonshareholders.
- 3) Fee of up to \$300 for all Alaskans that are nonhunting nonshareholders.
- 4) Fee of \$500–\$1,500 for nonresidents of Alaska.

*Action 2* — Develop a subcommittee to ensure that each village has a clear understanding of the land use access fees.

**Objective 2:** Provide proper orientation materials to nonlocal wood bison hunters and viewers to ensure compliance with private landowner access requirements and restrictions.

*Action 1* — Provide detailed maps of landownership boundaries to hunters and viewers of wood bison.

*Action 2* — Require all nonresidents to be accompanied by a local person.

*Action 3* — Strongly encourage all nonlocal Alaskans to be accompanied by a local person.

*Action 4* — Provide land use requirements and restrictions and other orientation materials to ensure compliance with landowner desires.

*Action 5* — Provide a single location to receive fees and to issue necessary paperwork for land use.

*Action 6* — Minimize conflict between local and nonlocal users by notifying appropriate villages when a user is arriving.

*Action 7* — Develop a subcommittee to ensure that each village has qualified transporters and guides for wildlife hunting and viewing opportunities.

**Objective 3:** Put all monies received for land use fees into a trust fund that is agreed upon by and administered by GASH villages, to be used for student scholarships.

*Action 1* — Utilize the subcommittee from Goal 4, Objectives 1 and 2, to discuss the administration of this fund.

**Goal 5:** Manage harvest allocation to equitably benefit local resident, nonlocal resident, and nonresident hunters.

*Note: Goal 5 applies to a future time when hunting is instituted. Hunting will not be instituted during the life of this plan (2020–2023, potentially 2020–2025); therefore, this goal is considered a work in progress. Goal 5 was written by the 2014 planning team. The Team (2020–2023 planning team) asked to keep Goal 5 in this 2020–2023 plan. During the 2022 review of the draft plan, some of the comments received from interest groups within the Team conflicted with the objectives and actions of Goal 5. This goal and the conflicting comments will be revisited with all available planning team members present at the next planning team meeting, scheduled for 11–13 October 2022 in Fairbanks. This will provide an opportunity for all interest groups to discuss the language of this goal and make changes, if necessary, to once again reach consensus.*

Restricting hunting on federal land to only federally qualified subsistence hunters, or restricting hunting to only those who win a state drawing (lottery) permit will not satisfy the interests of all Alaskans. A hunting allocation system that ensures equitable and reasonable hunting opportunity to local communities as well as to a broader segment of the hunting public including nonlocal residents and nonresidents is preferred and will be addressed through proposals to the Board of Game by the team.

Monetary contributions from federal, state, and private sources over the past 2 decades for wood bison restoration have been substantial. The willingness of local landowners to allow bison on their lands, as well as the future use of their lands by bison hunters, are substantial commitments. Local residents support the project and must have some assurance of realizing benefits from the wood bison population. There is strong local interest in bison as a source of red meat to augment moose harvests. Additionally, other Alaskans and people outside of Alaska have also made

substantial commitments and they too wish to realize benefits from wood bison. It is important to respect cultural differences and diverse interests represented by the Team while recognizing that these deeply held values stem from a shared appreciation of hunting traditions. Therefore, finding a middle ground between the state and federal harvest allocation systems is in the best interests of all participants.

Also, the Team emphasized the philosophical importance of striving for a positive “total hunting experience” which includes enjoying the trip, enjoying the hunt, and sharing the experience.

Objective 1: Enforce regulations and encourage voluntary actions that result in no wasting of meat.

*Action 1* — Provide hunters, especially nonlocal hunters, with orientation materials to help them deal with the logistics of removing harvested wood bison from the field.

Objective 2: Allocate 20 percent of the harvest under a state limited registration permit to be issued in Grayling, Anvik, Shageluk, and Holy Cross; and allocate 80 percent of the harvest under a state drawing permit hunt of which at least 90 percent is reserved for residents of Alaska.

Objective 3: Open the first hunting season when the size and productivity of the herd allows for a minimum harvest of 20 wood bison. This would allow the 4 GASH villages to be eligible for at least 1 permit each.

Objective 4: Encourage all hunters, especially nonlocal hunters, to share clean, well-cared-for meat with local communities.

Objective 5: Establish hunting regulations to avoid simultaneous hunting of wood bison and moose.

Objective 6: Conservatively issue wood bison harvest permits as needed under regulation 5 AAC 92.033 Permit for scientific, educational, propagative, or public safety purposes.

Objective 7: Delay state and federal customary and traditional use determination processes until a hunt history has been established and data are available regarding harvest and use patterns.

Objective 8: Support and encourage the establishment of local infrastructure and support services related to viewing and harvesting activities.

**Goal 6:** Minimize wood bison impact on other wildlife species and the ecosystem on which they depend.

Much information exists on interactions between wood bison and other wildlife species in the boreal forest environment in Canada. Many of the studies that contain this information are described or cited in the May 2014 federal rule (Federal Register 2014) that provides for the establishment of nonessential experimental populations of wood bison in Alaska, the November 2013 environmental assessment (ADF&G 2013), and the 2007 ADF&G environmental review of wood bison restoration in Alaska (ADF&G 2007). Wood bison are an indigenous species that evolved along with other animal and plant species in the boreal forest. No significant negative impacts of wood bison on species in this environment have been documented to date.

We can learn about interactions between wood bison and other species in the Alaska ecosystem from observing the plains bison in Alaska. As a result of a plains bison introduction effort in Alaska that began in 1928, there are 4 different populations of plains bison in Alaska totaling over 1,000 bison. There have been no significant negative effects documented from plains bison in Alaska during those 94 years. This further supports that wood bison are unlikely to have negative effects on the environment and other species, because the 2 subspecies of bison interact with their environment in essentially the same way.

Objective 1: Ensure that only certified weed-free feed is used for feeding of bison at soft release sites as part of the release process.

Objective 2: Conduct field inspections for noxious weed species at release sites where bison were fed prior to release.

Objective 3: Reassess and monitor wood bison interactions with their habitat and other species.

**Goal 7:** Ensure continuing communication among all user groups.

Communication is critical to the success of the wood bison restoration project. In addition to biological parameters, social and political considerations also must continue to be explored.

Objective 1: Maintain positive working relationships among the diverse user groups to help resolve future concerns and issues.

*Action 1* — Conduct Team meetings at least once a year as funding allows.

*Action 2* — Share updates and reports on the status of the wood bison herd and management program with the Team.

Objective 2: Incorporate local knowledge by listening to all user groups about their views toward wood bison and how wood bison interact with people and their habitat.

Objective 3: Involve new communities and interest groups near areas where wood bison might expand.

Objective 4: Recognize that this plan is adaptive and shall be amended to reflect what has been learned since the release. This plan should not be substantively changed for at least 3 years (through 2023) to allow adequate evaluation of its effectiveness.

Objective 5: Continue and encourage additional efforts devoted to helping the public learn about wood bison, the role they play in the northern ecosystem, and the restoration program.

*Action 1* — Disseminate existing educational programs such as those developed by ADF&G for grades K-12, and by the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center and Bear Trust International for grades 7–8.

*Action 2* — Make skeleton kits available to school-aged children to learn about bison anatomy and function.

*Action 3* — Continue to develop and disseminate new materials as appropriate to educate the public about wood bison.



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