



ALASKA WOOD BISON REINTRODUCTION FACT SHEET



February 2015

Scott Michaelis, AWCC
(952) 836-7719; scott@alaskawildlife.org

Cathie Harms, ADF&G
(907) 459-7231; cathie.harms@alaska.gov

1. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) plans to restore wood bison to Alaska's landscape in March/April 2015. The wood bison to be released are descendants of 66 animals obtained from Canada in 2003 and 2008 and have been held at the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center (AWCC) in Portage.
2. Bison will be released in the lower Innoko and Yukon River area. (This is not the Innoko National Wildlife Refuge.) No other releases are currently planned. Although ADF&G previously proposed reintroduction in the Yukon Flats and Minto Flats, the Innoko region was chosen due to quantity/quality of habitat, support from local people, and lack of landowner concerns about conflicts with development.
3. ADF&G plans to release 100 female and young bison near Shageluk, about 300 miles west of Anchorage, in spring 2015. Six loads of 14-30 bison (depending on age and sex of the animals) will be placed in specially designed containers, trucked from AWCC to Anchorage International Airport and flown in C-130 Hercules cargo aircraft to Shageluk. The bison will be held in temporary pens outside of Shageluk and will be released after they have acclimated to the area. After release, they will be closely monitored for at least the first year. Depending on funding, additional bulls may be transported at a later time.
4. Starting with 100 animals provides sufficient genetic diversity of the founder population and adequate reproductive potential to allow an excellent chance of success of the restoration effort.
5. Very generous donations from Safari Club International and Bass Pro matched by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Wildlife Restoration Program, and support from Lynden Transport and Steelfab contributed to the transportation phase of the restoration project. Hundreds of other companies, organizations and individuals have supported the project since bison arrived at AWCC.
6. Wood bison were downlisted from "endangered" to "threatened" status in 2012. A special regulation was adopted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in May 2014 declaring them an experimental nonessential population under the 10(j) section of the Endangered Species Act. Among other things, the rule stipulates

that critical habitat cannot be designated for wood bison, and allows hunting based on sustained yield principles, as established by ADF&G.

7. The Wood Bison Management Plan was developed by a diverse group of 28 Alaskans representing local communities, regional population centers, landowners, Alaska Native interests, wildlife conservation interests, industry, and State and Federal agencies. An unprecedented spirit of sharing and finding common solutions guided plan development.
8. Wood bison are the northern variety of bison, and North America's largest land mammal. Skeletal remains and Athabaskan oral histories indicate that they were present in much of Alaska for thousands of years but disappeared during the last 200 years, probably from a combination of habitat change and unregulated hunting.
9. Wood bison nearly disappeared from North America in the early 1900s, but a small herd was discovered in Canada in 1957. Canada now has about 5,000 disease-free animals and has supported Alaska's restoration program.
10. The wood bison to be released have been regularly tested for wildlife disease and are certified as healthy.
11. Moose and bison evolved together in North America and have lived in the same drainages for millennia. Bison are grazers, which is an empty niche in the Innoko ecosystem at this time. Because of this, there will be very little competition with existing wildlife in the area. No detrimental interactions have been observed between moose and bison populations after many decades of coexistence in parts of Alaska and Canada.
12. Wood bison aren't more dangerous than other wildlife species, and probably present less danger than moose. Injuries to humans from Alaska plains bison herds, and wood bison herds in northwestern Canada are extremely rare.
13. The effort to restore wood bison in Alaska was conceived more than 20 years ago, and is a significant effort in conservation and management of wildlife in the U.S. The boreal forest ecosystem in Alaska has lacked a large, lowland grazing animal for at least a hundred years, and this is a chance to restore a missing part of the ecosystem.
14. Questions about the wood bison restoration program should be directed to ADF&G. Questions about wood bison in captivity at AWCC should be directed to AWCC staff.
15. An educational program about bison suitable for the school curriculum has been developed by the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center (AWCC).