



# Wood Bison News



Drawing courtesy of Wes Olson

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## Comment Period Open on Proposed Wood Bison Reintroduction

On January 17, 2013 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) announced the draft regulation to enable the reintroduction of wood bison in Alaska. The draft regulation is known as the “10(j) rule.” There is a 60-day public comment period that ends on March 18, 2013. It may take six months to one year for the USFWS to consider all comments and then publish a final decision. If the final decision is accepted by the State, wood bison may be released the following spring.

The regulation proposes to designate wood bison in Alaska as a “nonessential experimental population.” Because large numbers of wood bison live in Canada, Alaska animals are not considered “essential” to survival of the species. However, reintroducing wood bison to Alaska will enhance their genetic diversity and create disease free populations in their native range, isolated from the Canadian herds.

The intent of the 10(j) Rule is to allow oil and gas development, mining, recreation, hunting, and trapping to coexist with wood bison herds without legal conflicts. Without the

### Key Points of the 10(j) Rule:

- ◆ ADF&G to be the lead agency in reintroduction and management responsibility.
- ◆ Regulated hunting allowed
- ◆ Disturbance from resource development, hunting, trapping and recreation allowed
- ◆ No “critical habitat” designation
- ◆ If the reintroduction effort fails, remove animals from the landscape

final regulation, conflicts could arise because wood bison are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

If the final regulation is approved by the state, management plans for each release site would be developed by ADF&G with involvement of landowners and other stakeholders. Management plans would include regulated hunting based on sustained yield principles.

The 135 wood bison at the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center near Portage Alaska came from Canadian stock and are disease free. They will serve as the seed stock when a release occurs.

The first release of at least 40 bison is planned for the lower Yukon/Innoko area. Bison will be transported by plane and held in an enclosure in early spring. A release later in spring will allow them enough time to become familiar with their new habitat so that they can successfully calve and gain weight before the coming winter. Other potential future release areas with suitable habitat are Yukon Flats and Minto Flats, and other areas as well.



Photo by Doug Lindstrand

Now is the time to offer comments. The deadline is March 18, 2013. **The USFWS welcomes any comments regarding wood bison reintroduction and this proposed rule.**

You can send comments by mail or electronically:

**Mail:** Attn: FWS-R7-ES-2012-0033; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.

**Electronically:** <http://www.regulations.gov> . Search for Docket FWS-R7-ES-22012-0033 and then follow the instructions for submitting comments

The complete text of the proposed rule can be found at <http://www.fws.gov/policy/library/2013/2013-00692.pdf>

An environmental assessment is a necessary part of the wood bison release. The draft environmental assessment can be found at <http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=FWS-R7-ES-2012-0033-0003>

The USFWS particularly seeks comments concerning (1) biological or ecological requirements of wood bison, (2) current or planned activities in the Nonessential Experimental Population (NEP) area, (3) current or planned management of the NEP population, and (4) any information concerning the boundaries of the NEP area.



Photo by Mike Miller

“The Department looks forward to the establishment of a final rule incorporating the 10(j) nonessential experimental population provision and the special rule delegating primary management of this nonessential population to the State. I believe the proposed rule represents a necessary step towards the potential reintroduction of wood bison to the Alaskan landscape.”

*Acting Director,  
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