

Briefing Statement

Bureau: National Park Service
Issue: Quarantine of Yellowstone Bison
Park Site: Yellowstone National Park
Date: December 13, 2019

Key Points

- Yellowstone bison have ecological, genetic, and cultural value that would enhance conservation efforts for the species. Indian tribes and conservation entities are interested in obtaining live Yellowstone bison. However, the population is infected with the bacterial disease brucellosis, which could be transmitted to cattle.
- In December 2017, the NPS, APHIS, and Montana Department of Livestock agreed to implement a quarantine program to identify brucellosis-free Yellowstone bison and transfer them to the Fort Peck Indian Reservation.
- During 2018, sixty male bison completed quarantine and were sent to the Assiniboine and Sioux tribes at Fort Peck. This event was highly acclaimed by the tribes and the public as a major conservation advancement.
- About 91 Yellowstone bison are undergoing quarantine in facilities operated by the NPS (Stephens Creek in YELL) and APHIS (Corwin Springs, Montana). When these brucellosis-free bison complete quarantine, they will be transferred to the Fort Peck tribes for one year of assurance testing before release on the Reservation.
- During 2019, the Fort Peck Tribes agreed to transfer about 70% of Yellowstone bison that complete assurance testing to the InterTribal Buffalo Council for restoration on Indian lands elsewhere.

Background

- The public dislikes shipments of bison to slaughter to reduce numbers. Quarantine is an alternative for bison not infected with brucellosis, but the required isolation and testing protocol is lengthy and expensive.
- In May 2018, the Intermountain Regional Director issued a decision (FONSI) to conduct quarantine with Yellowstone bison at Stephens Creek in YELL and on the Fort Peck Reservation.
- Conducting quarantine in and near YELL and assurance testing on the Fort Peck Reservation should not increase disease risk to livestock because facilities and testing protocols meet APHIS-developed specifications and have been demonstrated to effectively contain and identify brucellosis-free bison.
- Quarantine testing phases: 1) a group of bison is tested repeatedly for brucellosis exposure until all positive animals are removed and the remainder test negative for two consecutive months; 2) bison undergo additional testing based on their age and sex following protocols outlined in APHIS' 2003 *Uniform Methods and Rules*; and 3) brucellosis-free bison are tested at 6 and 12 months for assurance, after which they can be released.

Current Status

- Thirty-three bison (14 females, 14 calves, and 5 males) at Stephens Creek in YELL have completed phase II and will be transported to the Fort Peck Reservation in the next few weeks for assurance testing and release.
- Twelve bulls are undergoing phase II at Corwin Springs in Montana through June 2020, after which they will be sent to Fort Peck for assurance testing.
- Eighteen pregnant females and three males at Corwin Springs are undergoing phase II through December 2020, after which they will be sent to Fort Peck for assurance testing.
- Thirteen pregnant females and three males at Corwin Springs are undergoing phase II through December 2020, after which they will be sent to Fort Peck for assurance testing.
- Four females and five males are undergoing phase II at Corwin Springs through December 2021, after which they will be sent to Fort Peck for assurance testing.
- YELL biologists have recommended capturing and placing another 110 juvenile and young adult bison into quarantine at NPS and APHIS facilities this winter.

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