

NPS Briefing Statement FY 2023

Unit: Natural Resource Stewardship and Science

Members: General Interest

Issue: Bison Conservation Initiative

Key Points

- The Department's 2020 Bison Conservation Initiative (BCI) outlines a framework for coordinated conservation and specific commitments to conservation actions.
- The NPS chairs the DOI Bison Working Group (BWG), established in 2008, which coordinates bison conservation and management among the DOI bureaus.
- As outlined in the BCI and supported by the BWG, DOI bureaus collaborate with federal, tribal, state, and conservation partners to restore large, wild bison herds on appropriate large landscapes to manage bison as native wildlife, and to strengthen cultural connections of Native American peoples and the American public to our national mammal.

Background

- DOI manages approximately 11,000 bison in 19 herds across 12 states. DOI herds comprise more than 1/3 of all wild bison in North America.
- Since many DOI herds are limited in size and are constrained by fences, a peer-reviewed bison population viability analysis was conducted to identify genetic management priorities and best management practices for conservation and restoration of this species.

Current Status

- The NPS has donated approximately 94 percent of all annual federal surplus bison to tribes.
- Yellowstone National Park engages in cooperative bison management under the Interagency Bison Management Plan. One hundred eighty-two bison have been transferred from the NPS-USDA Bison Quarantine Program to Fort Peck Tribes in Montana.
- Grand Canyon National Park has completed three years of herd reduction efforts under a 2017 Environmental Assessment. Through partnership with the InterTribal Buffalo Council, 124 live bison have been distributed to six tribes. Three additional tribes received bison parts for traditional and ceremonial use from the lethal removal program.
- Bison herds managed within Badlands, Theodore Roosevelt, and Wind Cave National Parks; and Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve have provided nearly 10,000 live bison to tribes over the last 30 years and have been central to the establishment of multiple conservation herds now managed by tribes, states, and non-governmental organizations.
- The BWG is presently developing two strategies to promote genetic diversity and actively promote shared stewardship of new, large, wild bison herds.

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