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Governor Bullock Issues Decision on Year-round Habitat for Yellowstone Bison

HELENA – Governor Steve Bullock today issued a decision to make an adaptive management adjustment to the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) to allow for the presence of bison year-round in Montana on the perimeter of Yellowstone National Park.

“An adaptive approach to bison management means we are able to look at how we are doing things, assess our effectiveness, and adapt accordingly,” said Gov. Bullock. “This decision represents a very modest expansion of tolerance in response to changing science and changing circumstances on the ground. While at the same time I am confident our livestock industry is protected.”

Governor Bullock’s decision allows bison to be managed around Yellowstone Park more like wildlife and the state to manage its resources more efficiently, which may save taxpayer dollars. The plan allows bison to use suitable habitat in Montana outside of the park within manageable confines and subject to seasonal limits on numbers.

Future management will be focused on resolving actual conflicts on the ground rather than meeting generic requirements that bear little relationship to actual circumstances. The plan could also increase hunting opportunities for licensed Montana hunters and tribes as the state manages the bison population.

Montana will continue to use the management tools used today to manage bison, applying them on the landscape where bison will be tolerated year-round. Bison will be managed to enforce tolerance zones and address situational conflicts as appropriate.

The IBMP was established in 2000 in order to coordinate bison management among five agencies: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), Montana Department of Livestock (DoL), National Park Service (NPS), United States Forest Service – Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF), and United States Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, InterTribal Buffalo Council, and Nez Perce Tribe became IBMP cooperating agencies in 2009; as such they also participate in any adaptive management adjustment decisions. In keeping with the adaptive management framework set up by the IBMP, the IBMP partner agencies meet several times a year to assess the effectiveness and outcomes of the IBMP management activities and incorporate short and long-term adaptive management adjustments to the IBMP based on prevailing conditions, experience, and new data.

Before the decision is implemented under IBMP procedures, it must be adopted by the IBMP partner agencies under their standard process for adaptive changes to the IBMP.

The full decision is available online here.

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