

Briefing Statement

Bureau: National Park Service
Issue: Park-wide Remote Delivery of Brucellosis Vaccine for Bison
Park Site: Yellowstone National Park
Date: January 25, 2006

Background: The purpose of this environmental impact study is to evaluate the feasibility of implementing a program to remotely deliver brucellosis vaccine to free-roaming bison throughout Yellowstone National Park to lower the percentage of bison susceptible to brucellosis infection. Remote delivery is distinguished from hand delivery that occurs in capture pens at or near the park boundary when bison leave the park. Remote delivery would not involve capture and handling of individual animals. The decision to remotely vaccinate bison throughout Yellowstone National Park was made in a 2000 Record of Decision **contingent on subsequent NEPA evaluation of the safety and effectiveness of delivery systems.**

The Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP) defined the in-park vaccination program as the responsibility of the National Park Service. Subsequent research and development on remote delivery systems and vaccine safety and effectiveness now makes such a program appear feasible. Development of a remote delivery strategy is one of the next steps in implementing the adaptive management program described in the IBMP and leads to greater tolerance for bison on low elevation winter ranges managed by the Gallatin National Forest, private land owners and the State of Montana.

While vaccination is legal and likely both feasible and useful in wildlife disease management, some people and interest groups are opposed to the idea. Primarily because of the perceived disturbance to individual groups of bison, intrusion to the bodies of wildlife, and belief that it is an inappropriate management tool in a national park and contrary to their personal values. While public interest in boundary management of bison at Yellowstone National Park remains very high, we would expect a moderate level of public interest in remote vaccination, both favorable and in opposition.

Current Status: The planning process is currently underway. The first three chapters of the EIS have been drafted in collaboration with an independent consulting firm. The first chapter has been peer reviewed by the interdisciplinary planning team (IDPT) and is posted on PEPC. The subsequent two chapters are being reviewed by the project leader and should be released to the IDPT soon. The park received 137 comment documents that included more than 800 specific comments during public scoping. Twelve key issues were identified to address in the EIS. Public opinion was bipolar as expected and numerous comments were submitted requesting the National Park Service to select a no action alternative. Consultation with affiliated American Indian tribes has been initiated and a biological assessment of the preferred alternative has been drafted and will be submitted to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service soon. The planning team is beginning the analysis of the non-quantitative features of the environmental consequences chapter and are working with peer reviewers to assess the credibility of the quantitative model to assess environmental effects of the alternatives relative to the purpose and need for this proposed action.

The park anticipates a public review period later this year and a release of the final EIS by the end of 2006.

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