

Meeting Minutes
CM Russell Natl Wildlife Refuge Community Working Group
Wednesday, April 18, 2012
VFW Hall, Jordan, MT

61 Attendees (from sign-in list)

Daniel	Belk	Melissa	Hornbein	Tony	Phipps
Bill	Berg	William	Innes	Curtis	Phipps
Monte	Billing	Mary	Jones	Tom	Pick
Jack	Billingsley	Dennis	Jorgensen	Jody	Pierson
Jesse	Blunt	Diana	Kirby	Kelly	Pierson
John	Chase	J.T.	Korkow	David	Pippin
Karla	Christensen	Kevin	Koss	Rick	Potts
Karl	Christians	Elbert	Loomis	Glenda	Reynolds
Jerry	Coldwell	Marvin	Loomis	Laurie	Riley
Brett	Dailey	Connie	Loomis	Clyde	Robinson
Arnie	Dood	Bob	Mahoey	Dean	Rogge
Heidi	Finke	Marko	Manoukian	Nate	Schweber
Kit	Fischer	Curtis	McCann	Carl	Seilstad
Ron	Garwood	Dennis	Mellville	Terry	Selph
Pete	Geddes	Bill	Milton	Dycrk	Van Hyning
Sean	Gerrity	Ron	Moody	Sylvan	Walden
Mark	Good	Virginia	Murnion	Doug	Weeding
Bill	Greiman	Stephen	Negaard	Don	Woerner
Janet	Guptill	Vicki	Olsen	Sandy	Youngbauer
Nathan	Hawkalak	Cal	Phipps	Penny	Zimmerman
Jason	Holt				

10:00 - Welcome and Announcements (Bill Milton)

Bill Milton, the meeting facilitator, asked everyone to please come and take a seat in the big circle of chairs. He asked that everyone be sure to sign in. He introduced himself as a rancher northeast of Roundup. The CMR Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) is not yet released to the public, so we can't have our original speaker today. Instead we have some speakers to talk in general terms about bison and their status in MT. He gave a brief background on the group that started in Jul 2010. The group's purpose is to enhance vitality of the CMR and surrounding 6-county region. We always start our meetings with introductions and a "grounding question."

In 7 words or less, what does vitality look like in the CMR 6-county region?

Answers included (summarized):

Healthy rangelands and healthy relationships between people; healthy landscape & healthy populations; economic diversity & diversity of uses that fit together; lots of boats & snowmobiles; satisfied look on everyone's faces;

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management of resources responsibility & of actions; healthy wildlife & economic environment; cooperation between everyone; healthy communities, cows, & ecosystems; stable farm & ranch community; healthy rangeland & stimulated economy; let public use land more; pay share of taxes on land & put water on it so it can be used; better roads & access; get rid of predators; predator control on refuge; 1960s & 1970s rules/ regulations; diversity of opportunity; functioning landscapes with diversity; more cooperation; openness to discussion and change to land that sustains calves; economy & stable population; seeing all these people here, enjoying statements; less government; something to do with life - sustains life; progress & improved economy; equality among all, no particular interest has priority; trust; sustainable opportunity for youth; environment for agriculture, sportsmen, communities; coordination; viable, workable conditions; healthy agricultural community; people & working landscape; basic food needs, US & world population; lush grass with lots of cows, good relationship with neighbors; sustainable natural resources with monitoring & maintenance; cooperation between landowners & agencies; happy survival of local people; balanced production for people; communities survived and improved rangelands, carry on tradition; continued productivity of land; life force for people, wildlife, land maintained across time thru rapid change.

Bill summarized by saying bring in all the people and all the wisdom, tread a path that impacts all people. This group is talking about a lot of issues. Speakers are going to speak about where they are (their organizations) at this point in time. We can ask questions during the presentation. Presentations will be followed by Q & A period. We'll have lunch and then break in to small groups. We'll be provided with some questions which will provide an opportunity for more intimate discussion. The results will be captured in the minutes, so we can share w/ people who aren't here.

Speaker Panel

Dave Risley—Administrator, Fish & Wildlife Division, MT Dept FWP.

- FWP reorganized 3 yrs ago. Director, Deputy Director & some divisions. Dave is not an appointee. He will be here after January. He will not try to convince us that having bison in our backyard is good. He recognizes the

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problem. He has a background in an area that was 95% private land and the Supervisor wanted elk, but it never happened. There is no conspiracy to introduce wild bison; in govt nothing is a secret. He was at a meeting last week about wolves where everyone stated that FWP was lying. Dave thinks FWP is an open and honest agency with a transparent process. Bison is a problem solving dilemma. They pour out of Gardiner and the state has to deal with them. The state has some problem dealing with Yellowstone Natl Park. Lots of different things have been attempted to address the problem. The shooting line is just a slaughter; no one wants that. Rounding them up, putting them in pens, and sending to slaughter, even donating the meat is not a good solution. Finding places for them is a problem, the population grows. We have no good solution.

- Previous administration decided to capture and hold for 5 years and test for brucellosis. Tribe in WY didn't want them. Signed a deal with Turner Enterprises...got sued.
- Next batch of bison in quarantine. Not in public area. Left only option for Ft Peck Tribe.
- Don't know what will do with bison at Turners, bison at Ft Peck, and future bison.
- FWP developed a background document. They want to have public meetings to see what the public wants. They won't force an agenda on State of MT, especially on ranching community. He was talking to rancher who is scared and angry. FWP recognizes that. FWP won't force bison on ranching community - it would be irresponsible.
- There is no conspiracy between agencies and organizations. Dave met Rick Potts today for the first time. Lots of people want bison on CMR. FWP is charged with managing wildlife. FWP has differences of opinion with CMR and differences with YNP.
- Take away message for today...no decision has been made. They will do what is best for the community.

Questions -

The decisions will be made higher up. During the scoping process no one said they wanted bison, but they got moved anyway. Need to coordinate and keep people in loop.

Need to re-think public process. Example, no public interest on current

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transfer.

What is not happening - education. This group could do more with education. Don't know what damage there could be with bison, etc. Public needs info on what's going on. To do anything correctly we need education CMR, FWP & public.

GAO reports \$16.7 billion backlog on maintenance obligations, budget is only for 12 billion. NPS does not accept responsibility. Dave agrees. However, there is no one here from NPS to address these points. Unfunded Federal mandate.

Bison will migrate to where they came from. Elk tear down fences and bison follow.

One woman in attendance raises bison and she knows they will migrate; fences won't hold them in these Breaks.

FWP is acknowledging the problem. They will reproduce. Why just transfer problems to CMR. Don't make them our problem. CMR becomes non-producing lands.

Dave - feels disease issue is off the problem list with the quarantined bison. Critical to have a program in place to compensate, mitigate damage. Leave them in YNP is a viable option.

12:00 - 1:00 Lunch (no-host lunch served on site, approximately \$6)

Questions continued -

Curt McCann - Rancher on lands that border Ft Belknap. In recent translocation (of bison to Ft. Peck Reservation) 5 bison died. Tissue samples should have been sent to Bozeman for investigation (in accordance with Plan) and no samples were sent. Agriculture is the #1 industry in the State. Trust factor. No fence will hold them (bison). CMR (having bison on the CMR) would be impossible.

Dennis - At public meetings we heard from ranchers that they did not want to keep bison from tribes. Wild bison get hurt in transfer, different from cattle.

The difference is wild vs livestock.

What is classification of Ft Peck bison. If "owned" = livestock. Coming out

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of YNP=wild. FWP does not own wildlife. So they have dual, conflicting status. Not determined.

What happens if they escape - are they then wild bison? Dave said after 72 hours if not recaptured they are killed. Plan stays in effect for 5 years.

Kit Fischer—Sportsmen’s Outreach Coordinator, N. Rockies Regional Center, Natl Wildlife Federation.

PowerPoint Presentation - *Restoration of a wild and huntable population of bison on the Northern Great Plains*

- NWF largest conservation organization in US. Has been around for 75 years
- Interested in thinking of bison as wildlife - they want to re-establish bison. They helped restore Elk and sheep. Their biggest failure is inability to restore bison.
- Maybe it is a dead end - but want to have the conversation. We need to have thoughtful conversations with each other.
- At turn of century YNP bison were only remaining bison. A lot of people want bison on the landscape. A lot of people go to YNP to see bison. Should we look at other opportunities for bison in MT?
- This is an enormous landscape. Can drive on CMR for 6 hours and only see 2 cars. Think we can have both bison and cattle. This is a unique and healthy ecosystem. If there is an opportunity - this is it. No one is left out of the loop. Now we are having pre-scoping conversation. Can talk about opportunities and challenges. Someone pointed out that the slide that says < 50 people will be affected is wrong and NEF needs to fix that.
- Strong national interest for bison.
- NWF Wildlife Conflict Resolution Program. Change grazing patterns. Retired 600,000 USFS lands outside YNP. Have agreements w/ 5 CMR permittees retiring allotments.

Dean Rogge read a statement from Conservation Districts.

- Kit showed results of statewide poll showing sportsmen and MT citizens support for huntable bison population.
- Kit showed a video (on the NWF website).
- No one wants CMR to be national park. Not an either/or situation.

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- Livelihood does not have to be in jeopardy. Example - Henry Mtns Utah. In 1950-52 a wildlife federation worked with local ranchers and rec'd 20-30 bison from YNP. Herd managed at about 250 animals. Livestock ranching occurs in same area. BLM and private lands. Proves as model that situation can exist. What are the steps to make it happen? Henry Mtns has a bison working group; they compiled a list of 15 concerns. #1 resolve bison/livestock conflicts.

Questions

Conservation Districts are the largest conservation group not NWF.

Map on slide...reason bison so thick is 2 rivers with water. Now more wildlife than when Lewis & Clark came through. Ranchers create water sources. Bison could only be on CMR because of water. CDs are people of the land.

FWP partner in retiring allotments. Is NWF buying land in Valley County from rancher w/ permits on CMR? Discussion followed regarding definition of "retiring" grazing permits. NWF is not buying and retiring permits on the CMR.

Marko - talked about hungry children in MT and in US. We are in a global world. Our beef is being bought by Canada & Russia. Smallest herds since 1951. Take 4-6 years to bring numbers back up. Marko read statement on trade and food.

Heidi Finke read a statement - see attached

Curt McCann , Rancher, Northern Blaine County

- Dealt w/ bison - domestic bison, diff from wild bison;
- Bison come off (escape from) Ft Belknap;
- Need to manage resources properly;
- Used to be Chair of MRCDC - came to CMR when Barron Crawford was manager. This issue won't go away. Financial responsibility. NPS has not taken responsibility for hungry bison out of YNP. So now becomes responsibility of the state. Public meetings comments all very negative. The tribes must manage their resource. FWP will only deal with income side of equation. 65% of fence problems are from wildlife. Ranchers don't

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get compensated. Competition for grass. Bison will be on roads in winter. Then they will travel long distances. Agencies need to take management and financial responsibility. Wildlife (bison) eat hay, destroy fences. In winter people leave gates open for wildlife. Bison destroy the fences when they are rounded up and herded back after they have escaped. Domestic bison are tolerable. Wild bison are not. Can be fined if shoot wildlife. Brucellosis is still a threat. Don't agree with moving the animals (to Fort Peck) at night. Feel bad for the ones that were killed.

Questions

- What if financial burden was eliminated?
Answer - No solution. Govt won't pay.
- Question - What about brucellosis in elk?
Answer - Hard to get rid of it in YNP without getting rid of all the bison & elk. Congress probably won't allow hunting in YNP. 10 years ago brucellosis in elk was not an issue (Ron). Don says it was an issue. An elk study group meeting next week in Bozeman re: YNP.
- Brief discussion of transferring elk from YNP around MT (Phillips County)

Break-Out Groups to Address Questions Posed by Facilitator

- 1) What are your worst fears about wild bison management?
- 2) What would you recommend as next steps for wild bison management?

WORST FEARS

Lose grazing; herd population management; who is accountable/responsible; who will pay for damages; fractured community; disease issue, address & control; added stress on agriculture tax base; political & not resolved locally; loss of wild bison as a species in MT; economic & social loss of communities; bison not manageable, won't stay on CMR; tribes may fail in managing bison; State loses ability to manage and program goes to federal govt; bison escape and harm people; bison brought in without full agreement from local residents; brucellosis across the state; lack of communication agencies & local govt; higher authority could make a large-scale land & bison decision for the area without local input; divisive issue turns people against each other; management plan and law suit - manage by courts; time spent on plan everyone can live with and then it doesn't work; lack of trust; collapse in cattle industry; competition for natural resources;

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mistakes made in beginning could derail whole project; insecurity of funding for bison management; local extinction of species; increased workload; impact on property values; negative impacts to ecosystem (weeds, overgrazing); inability to manage population sizes effectively; hinder cooperation on other issues; displacement of local families; free-roaming bison with no management plan in place.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

Define process to move forward; how to make them profitable; more education; define final objective (too many); define wildlife / livestock; Yellowstone experience (for rancher); improve communication; take a step back; confine the issue to borders of YNP; more and broader discussions; birth control possibilities; federal issue-there are more important issues; FWP get plan out for discussion; livestock or wild-define; look at other programs-make discussion on solid info; hold meetings first - develop trust; zero tolerance on CMR; wild bison not state-wide; include 6 surrounding CDs and counties in plan making; FWP develop state management plan before further movement; form bison work committee that includes CDs; address common reoccurring issues that keep coming up with facts; needs to start as local initiative; distill top level concerns and develop acceptable conditions that all stakeholders agree to; educate public on importance of ranching to this ecosystem; work on trust issues; select an initial location to begin site specific conditions; more informed public poll (esp in MTO about impact of reintroduction; in-depth exploration of issues surrounding bison reintroduction; more transparency in public communication between state, federal government and public; stop the bison / no free-roaming bison; bison only in YNP; too much discussion has been piece-meal; diverse citizen's group in E.MT to discuss issues; complete EA; info on who would be responsible & liable for bison; FWP & NWF working for different goals (FWP working to repair riparian areas that bison would destroy); discuss how to sustain local farmers & ranchers and make sure they don't bear the cost of bison; have organizations be honest about their goals.

Announcements from Group

Compact Commission in negotiation, 2nd negotiation May 9 at Yogo in Lewistown, Negotiates on behalf of State of MT and water users

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Rick Potts - Regarding Water Rights Compact Commission, we have made significant alterations to proposal based on comments. Please come to 2nd negotiation.

Next steps - Next Meeting Topic

- focus on what we can do to improve situation on CMR.
- Not focus on bison. Bison group is good idea, but it should not be this group.
- address "and surrounding areas."
- CCP - Rick Potts.
- Jason wants an hour for a presentation/discussion on land management philosophy.
- Focus on something that is doable - something we can agree on.
- Remember that we have things agreed to on grant application.
- Focus on grants and projects.

June 23 celebration in Glasgow for 25th anniversary of Ft Peck Dam

What worked and didn't work

- Everyone very civil
- Did we solve anything/gain anything
- Most civil bison meeting ever attended
- Long way to go on trust
- Good visiting with people at lunch
- Impressed that we attacked issues / tough issues, may not find consensus
- Don't need to worry about bison, we need to focus on feeding people
- Continue building trust
- Great turn-out, everybody bring project idea to next meeting
- Bring people from Ft Peck and Grasslands Natl Park to learn more about bison
- Learn more about bison behavior
- Should include YNP - in crosshairs today and not here
- Speakers were great
- Follow up, otherwise pointless

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- Invite legislators and Governor to meetings
- weed issue is huge, CMR needs to manage better - would build trust
- value in convening diverse group and talking about difficult issues
- views at local level gets lost at legislative and national level
- bison not central to CCP - don't need to focus on bison
- FWP can use this meeting as a model
- no authority to make decisions, can take message(s) back to others

Next meeting Jun 20 in Winnett.

3:00 - Adjourn

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Statement Read by Heidi Finke, Garfield County District Administrator

Personal conversation with Paul Pace: FSA County Executive Director for Richfield, UT and Wayne County, also runs cattle near the Henry Mountains where Bison have been roaming.

December 6th, 2011

Bison were placed originally quite a ways north of where they reside today. They have crossed a major river that experts said they would not cross and continued to run with domestic cattle on private property.

In the 60s the population of the bison started to plateau due to an epidemic of "Bangs Disease" aka Brucellosis..the domestic cattle also came down with the disease. The domestic cattle were treated and the Bison after much debate on which animal actually spread the disease, were treated and many of them were killed. The ranchers were NOT compensated for any damages to their stock.

The herd will summer up in the Henry Mountains and winter elsewhere, regardless of fencing, they will travel. The herd tends to migrate away from the human race. The bison tend to winter on BLM land where the ranchers have grazing permits to graze their cattle. Therefore the cattle are deprived the resources that they need and cattle ranchers are forced to find forage for their cows elsewhere.

A management plan was put in place about 5-6 years ago and the DWR State of Utah decided that 500 bison was the "magic" number for a genetically pure bison herd. So there is a constant push to reach the numbers of 500, however the land surrounding the Henry mountains where Bison are wintering does not have the resources to handle that many "in the winter". DWR wants to increase numbers of bison but aren't doing anything to repair the resources.

An annual count is done every year. Paul Pace takes part in a count made and he came up with just under 400, however he does not count calves, DWR does not consider calves under a year and a half old to their count so their numbers are usually lower than the reality of real numbers considering they are only 85% accurate with their counts.

Sportsman for Wildlife was created for conservation purposes and has a contract in place with the State of Utah, and of the money made on the "once in a lifetime hunt" tags for bison population control, Sportsman for wildlife gets the money for 1 tag sold/year/season out of the roughly 38 sold. Only about 40 cents on the dollar is actually used for Conservation efforts.

According to Paul, the ranchers are not compensated for damages that bison have created to their personal property and stock.

The Henry Mountain Grazers Association was formed by ranchers in the neighboring areas in order to have more political pull among the DWR State of Utah's decisions. Currently about 48 different outfits are represented...paid annual dues from the association is how the association is able to pay for the

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group to do what they do. The group's main goal now is to get DWR State of Utah to acknowledge the impact of the bison on winter range, that 500 head is not sustainable, and that they need to be honest with the head counts during their annual count. One of the major concerns is that if population gets too big, that rather than use hunting as a means of control, that they are going to bring in a natural predator...which means the wolf and a huge problem for livestock and ranchers.

Paul Pace 435-836-2711 or 435-896-5489