

Bison Recommendations – RAC Members and Public

Background:

During the 2009 summer bison survey on the Henry Mountains, DWR estimated 35 more bison than expected. We immediately met with the Henry Mountain Bison Committee to explore possible strategies which would allow us to reach the population objective of 275 adult bison post-season. The committee came up with two options:

Option 1 - Translocate 40 bison to the Book Cliffs in January 2010. This option was unanimously approved by the committee and is DWR's preferred strategy. BLM personnel in Hanksville also have expressed their support for translocating bison.

If option 1 cannot occur, we would recommend option 2.

Option 2 – Increase bison permits by 39 on the Henry Mountains. We would issue 9 additional cow permits and 30 additional hunter's choice permits. This would require 2 changes to the current season structure. All 9 additional cow permits would be added to those issued for the existing hunt # 6 (Dec 23- Dec 31). This would place a total of 28 cow hunters on the unit at the same time. Because of the additional hunters, we recommend extending that hunt from Dec 23 to Jan 6 to minimize hunter crowding. Secondly, we would implement a new hunter's choice hunt from Jan 7 to Jan 24, 2010. We would issue 30 permits for this new hunt (# 7).

Justification for option 1:

DWR estimates that there are 452 adult bison currently on the Henry Mountains. We have already issued 154 permits for this unit for the 2009 season. If we adopt option 2, there will be a total of 193 bison hunters on the Henry Mountains this season. Last year, we issued 166 permits and received complaints from hunters, the public-at-large, and the BLM because of crowding, safety, and/or resource damage issues. We will almost certainly receive these same complaints if we add more tags this year. In addition, we are concerned that general hunter satisfaction and harvest success may decrease if more tags are issued.

Furthermore, once-in-a-lifetime hunts often require additional hunter preparation. If option 2 is selected, hunters who are notified of their opportunity to harvest a bison may not have adequate time to prepare, and not all hunters notified will be able to take advantage of this opportunity. Female bison harvested in January may also have large fetuses at the time they are harvested which may surprise or upset some hunters and the public. DWR will notify hunters to expect cows harvested during the extended and added hunts to be carrying large fetuses, however, the public perception issue will still remain. Finally, the population objective on the Book Cliffs is 450 adult bison. Currently, that population numbers less than 50 animals. Translocating 40 bison to the Book Cliffs would place that population at only 20% of its population objective.

In summary, we believe Option 1 to be the best strategy for the Henry Mountains and Book Cliffs bison herds, because it moves both populations closer to their management objectives and eliminates the deleterious effects of increasing permits on the Henry Mountains.