



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Elk Refuge

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NATIONAL ELK REFUGE BISON HUNT TO BE EXTENDED

National Elk Refuge Manager Steve Kallin announced today the bison hunt on the National Elk Refuge will be extended this season, in conjunction with a Wyoming Game and Fish Department decision to continue hunting of the Jackson bison herd through January 4, 2009. The hunt had been scheduled to conclude on December 15, 2008. The National Elk Refuge will provide access to hunters in possession of a valid refuge permit.

Bison hunt management is designed to reduce the bison population and achieve herd objectives set in a cooperative effort by the Wyoming Game & Fish Department, National Elk Refuge, and Grand Teton National Park. A Federal Bison and Elk Management Plan, signed in April 2007, states that the refuge will work collaboratively with the Wyoming Game & Fish Department to reduce and maintain a healthy population of 500 bison on the refuge. "With this year's calf crop, we had a summer population of around 1,200 bison," said Doug Brimeyer, Jackson Wildlife Biologist for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.


Last year, 266 total bison were harvested from the herd, with 224 of those taken from the National Elk Refuge. This season's bison hunt total is substantially lower, with only 140 total animals harvested to date, or approximately 53% of last year's final number. The low number of cows removed from the herd is also of concern, since recruitment rates, or the number of calves born per year compared to the overall herd population, can outpace harvest numbers. Only 40 of the 140 animals harvested this season have been females.

The lower harvest numbers this year are attributed to the increased availability of forage in surrounding areas. "Many of the bison that would likely be on the refuge by now have remained just north of the refuge boundary in Grand Teton National Park," Kallin explained. "They haven't had a reason to push further south." The additional three weeks of hunting will extend the season into a time of the year when more snow accumulation is likely, a factor that could move the animals south and increase hunter success.

The growing number of animals on the National Elk Refuge is a concern to wildlife managers because of increased risks of disease transmission, competition with elk and other wildlife, and habitat damage including erosion and overgrazing. "The spread of disease and habitat damage are key issues for the refuge," said Refuge Manager Steve Kallin.

Even with the season extension, bison hunting will conclude well before supplemental feeding on the National Elk Refuge is expected to begin for the year, a program which starts on average around the third week of January.

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If snow is not excessive, refuge maintenance staff plans to plow the main road to designated hunter parking areas. However, retrieval roads will not be plowed. Successful hunters will not be allowed to use snowmobiles or ATVs to retrieve their animals and will instead be limited to vehicles, horseback, or foot. Commercial retrieval services will also be available for a fee. Hunters are encouraged to make arrangements with carcass retrieval and meat processing services as necessary.

Permits to access the National Elk Refuge will be available on a first-come, first-served basis at the Jackson Game and Fish Department Regional Office, located at 420 North Cache Street. The permits, available in person, may be obtained during regular business hours of 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM Monday through Friday. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department will be contacting all licensed bison hunters who have not reported a harvest for the 2008 season with more specific information pertaining to the season extension.

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