



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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News

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USFWS Announces Decision on Petition to Delist Wood Bison

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will publish in the *Federal Register* tomorrow a 90-day finding on a petition to delist the wood bison and remove it from protection under the Endangered Species Act. Based on our review, we find that the petition does not present substantial information indicating that delisting the wood bison subspecies may be warranted. Therefore, we are not initiating a status review in response to this petition. However, we ask the public to submit to us any new information that becomes available concerning the status of, or threats to, the wood bison or its habitat at any time.

Although the historical range of the wood bison encompassed a large area of Alaska, free-ranging wood bison now occur only in Canada. Wood bison were previously listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). A proposed rule was published in the *Federal Register* in February 2011, to reclassify the species as threatened. The May 12, 2012 publication of a Final Rule completed that reclassification process.

There are two closely related subspecies of bison; the wood bison and plains bison. Physical and genetic differences distinguish the two subspecies. The wood bison is the largest surviving native terrestrial mammal in North America. The average weight of mature males is approximately one ton (2,000 pounds). A wood bison has a large triangular head, a thin beard and rudimentary throat mane, and a poorly-demarcated cape. The highest point of the hump of these animals is forward of their front legs; they have reduced chaps on their front legs, and their horns usually extend above the hair on their head. In contrast, the plains bison, the wood bison's closest relative, has a thick beard and full throat mane and well-developed chaps. The highest point of the hump is over the front legs and horns rarely extend above their bonnet of dense, curly hair. Plains bison are smaller and lighter in color than wood bison. Historically, the range of the wood bison was generally north of that occupied by the plains bison, and included most boreal regions of northern Alberta; northeastern British Columbia; a small portion of northwestern Saskatchewan; the western Northwest Territories south and west of Great Slave Lake; the Mackenzie River Valley; most of The Yukon Territory; and much of interior Alaska. Currently, there are no wild free-ranging populations in Alaska.

Canada has their own version of an endangered species act called Species at Risk Act (SARA). Although wood bison were originally classified as endangered, Canada reclassified the animals from endangered to threatened in 1988. Recovery actions have greatly increased the number of herds and animals in Canada, to the point that wood bison are no longer considered endangered there. However, because threats still remain, primarily from disease, loss of habitat, and hybridization with plains bison, the subspecies remains listed as threatened in Canada.

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) requires the Service to list species as endangered or threatened regardless of which country the species lives in. Benefits to the species include prohibitions on certain activities including import, export, take, commercial activity, interstate commerce, and foreign commerce. By regulating activities, the United States ensures that people under the jurisdiction of the United States do not contribute to the further decline of listed species. Although the ESA's prohibitions regarding listed species apply only to people subject to the jurisdiction of the United States, the ESA can generate conservation benefits such as increased awareness of listed species, research efforts to address conservation needs, or funding for in-situ conservation of the species in its range countries. The ESA also provides for limited financial assistance to develop and manage programs to conserve listed species in foreign countries, encourages conservation programs for such species, and allows for assistance for programs, such as personnel and training.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.

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