



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
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NEWS

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Approves Rule for Reintroduction of Wood Bison in Alaska

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, on May 7, 2014, published a final rule which authorizes the reintroduction of a nonessential experimental population of wood bison in Alaska, establishes provisions under which wood bison in Alaska will be managed, and allows for legal incidental taking of wood bison within the defined nonessential experimental population area. The rule clears the way for plans by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to reintroduce wood bison into one or more of three areas within its historical range in Alaska (Yukon Flats, Minto Flats, and the lower Innoko/Yukon River area). Under the rule, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game will have primary responsibility for managing wood bison in Alaska.

"We have worked closely with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to get to this point and look forward to supporting them as they move ahead to get wood bison out on the landscape," said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Director Geoff Haskett.

Under section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the Service may establish an experimental population, allowing for the reintroduction of a species to its former range with special rules that allow for some of the management requirements of the ESA to be relaxed to facilitate acceptance by local landowners and managers. Within this final rule (and consistent with ESA section 4(d)), there are exemptions for the incidental effects of development, land management and other lawful activities, and for regulated hunting, in order to ensure management flexibility. These exemptions provide assurance that the establishment of wild wood bison herds will not have unintended consequences for the State of Alaska, private landowners, industry, or Alaska Natives.

Historically, the wood bison ranged throughout the northwestern provinces of Canada and into interior Alaska. Wood bison were last seen in Alaska in the early 1900s, but there are no free-ranging herds today in the United States. The reintroduction of wood bison would restore a key indigenous grazing animal to the northern ecosystem, restore biological and habitat diversity and natural processes, enhance subsistence opportunities, and provide benefits to Alaska's people and economy.

This final rule will become effective 30 days after publication in the Federal Register. A final environmental assessment for this action is available as well.

The final rule and an environmental assessment are available at <http://www.regulations.gov> (search for FWS-R7-ES-2012-0033). In addition, the supporting file for these rules is available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours, at the Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Office, Fisheries and Ecological Services, 1011 East Tudor Road, Anchorage, AK 99503, and at the

Fairbanks Office of the ADF&G, 1300 College Road, Fairbanks, AK 99701. Additional background and supporting information is available in the ADF&G Environmental Review of Wood Bison Restoration in Alaska (ADF&G 2007) at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=woodbison.management>.

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