



# Bison and Elk Management Plan and EIS



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## Where We Are

- Developing Alternatives

## Next Step

- Analyzing Alternatives

# General Information

Lead Agencies: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (National Elk Refuge) and National Park Service (Grand Teton National Park)

Cooperators: U.S.D.A. Forest Service (Bridger-Teton National Forest) and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and the U.S.D.I. Bureau of Land Management

Partners: Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Product of the Planning Process: A bison and elk management plan for the National Elk Refuge and Grand Teton National Park

NEPA Compliance Document Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

Decision Area: Decisions resulting from the planning process will be limited to management activities on the National Elk Refuge (NER) and Grand Teton National Park (GTNP)

EIS Analysis Area: The EIS analysis area will encompass the entire range of the Jackson bison and elk herds, which includes the NER, GTNP, southern Yellowstone National Park and the Buffalo and Jackson Ranger Districts of Bridger-Teton National Forest.

Affected programs: Supplemental (winter) feeding, recreation, habitat management, hunting, population control, disease management, and population goals



## Background Information

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Park Service (NPS) are developing a plan for managing bison and elk inhabiting the National Elk Refuge (NER) and Grand Teton National Park (GTNP), Wyoming. These animals are part of the Jackson elk and bison herds, one of the largest concentrations of free-ranging populations of bison and elk in the world.

Seven prescoping meetings were held from February 10 through May 5, 2001, and ten scoping meetings were held from July 20, 2001 through August 3, 2001. The intent of these meetings was to establish working relationships with interested groups and individuals, to provide information on the resources, planning process, and agencies involved, and to solicit comments from the public regarding desired future conditions, and the strategies to arrive at these conditions.

Issues to be addressed in the EIS will include: How will bison and elk populations and their ecology be affected? How will habitat and other species of wildlife be affected? How will winter feeding operations be affected? How will disease prevalence and transmission be affected? How will recreational and cultural opportunities and social values be affected? And how will commercial operations and the local and regional economy be affected? A full listing of public comments received at the meetings and in writing can be reviewed on the project WebPage (<http://bisonandelkplan.fws.gov/>).

## Website

The bison and elk management plan website was down for almost four months due to a court order issued in a Bureau of Indian Affairs court case. This court order has now been lifted and the project website (<http://bisonandelkplan.fws.gov>) is operational and will be updated as needed throughout the planning process.

## Alternative Development and Analysis

Alternative development meetings were held on November 28, 2001, and November 29, 2001, in Riverton, Wyoming, and Jackson, Wyoming, respectively. The meetings were facilitated by the Center for Resolution, and were well attended by the public. The public input obtained to date is being used by the planning team to identify the range of alternatives that will be analyzed in the environmental impact statement (EIS).

Each of the 11 Native American tribes affiliated with the Jackson Hole region have been contacted to solicit their participation in the planning process. Planning team members have traveled to several reservations and have met with several tribal organizations to brief tribal representatives on the history of the planning project, the reasons for preparing an EIS, and the planning process schedule, and have asked for input on issues and alternatives to consider.

The planning team is now analyzing public comments as well as scientific data from a variety of sources. A scientist from Colorado State University (CSU) is developing a population model of the Jackson Hole elk herd, while scientists from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and CSU are developing a model that will estimate the carrying capacity of the NER and GTNP. Studies are also being conducted on the NER and GTNP with regard to the effects of large ungulate browsing on woody vegetation. Economists from the USGS and CSU are conducting economic surveys at the local, regional, and national levels aimed at assessing the effects of the possible alternatives on the local and regional economy. Other USGS scientists are evaluating the effectiveness of a brucellosis vaccine on elk, and a literature review covering a number of issues that may affect the management plan is ongoing.

Writing has begun on Chapter Three of the draft EIS, which describes the affected environment. In addition, planners are conferring with experts in preparation for the impact analysis, an assessment of environmental consequences covered in detail in Chapter Four of the EIS.

A range of alternatives has been developed, and the alternatives are being refined over time as planning team members evaluate the effects of the various strategies on the natural and socioeconomic environment. The forthcoming management plan must also satisfy the missions, purposes, and policies of the FWS and NPS.

The Scoping Report is almost finished and will be posted on the website as soon as it is completed. This report gives a detailed description of the process to date and summarizes the stakeholder input received in meetings, by mail, and over the internet. A copy of the Scoping Report can also be obtained by contacting our office.

## Estimated Timeline for Actions and Products:

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| 1. Situation Assessment (completed)                          | September 21, 2000                      |
| 2. Prescoping Meetings (completed)                           | February 10 - May 5, 2001               |
| 3. "Notice of Intent" published in <i>Federal Register</i>   | July 18, 2001                           |
| 4. Scoping Meetings (completed)                              | July 20 - August 3, 2001                |
| 5. Alternative Development and Analysis                      | November 1, 2001 -<br>September 1, 2002 |
| 6. Draft Plan/EIS available to the public                    | February 1, 2003                        |
| 7. Final Plan/EIS available to the public                    | April 1, 2004                           |
| 8. "Record of Decision" published in <i>Federal Register</i> | June 15, 2004                           |

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