

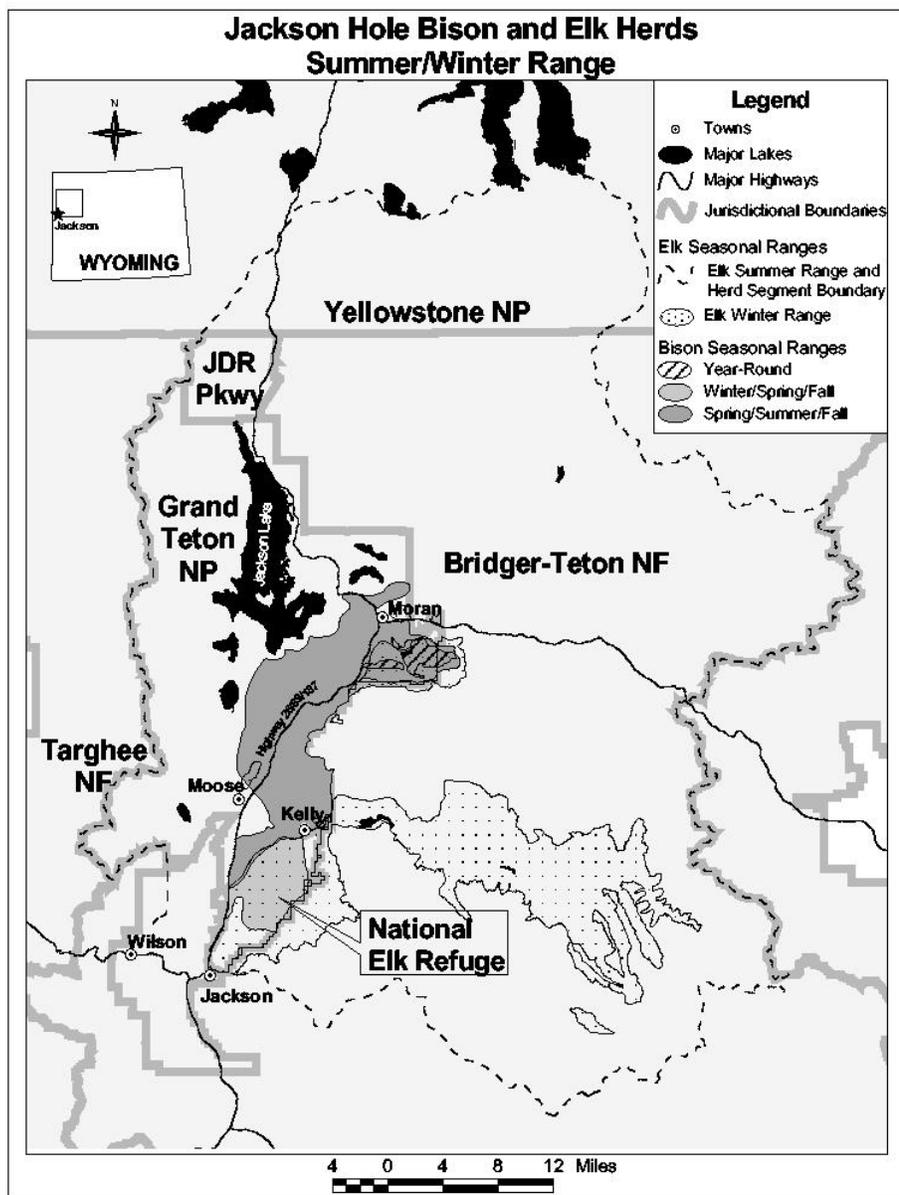
National Elk Refuge and Grand Teton National Park



Bison and Elk Management Plan and EIS



Alternative Development Brochure - Autumn 2001



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- Purpose of Alternative Development Meetings:**
- Define Areas of Agreement
 - Identify a Range of Potential Alternatives

General Information

<u>Lead Agencies:</u>	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (National Elk Refuge) & National Park Service (Grand Teton National Park)
<u>Cooperators:</u>	U.S.D.A. Forest Service (Bridger-Teton National Forest) and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
<u>Partners:</u>	Wyoming Game and Fish Department and Bureau of Land Management
<u>Product of the Planning Process:</u>	A bison and elk management plan and environmental impact statement for the National Elk Refuge and Grand Teton National Park
<u>Decision Area:</u>	Decisions resulting from the planning process will be limited to management activities on the National Elk Refuge and Grand Teton National Park
<u>EIS Analysis Area:</u>	To be determined through scoping At a minimum, the EIS analysis area will be large enough to analyze the effects of the National Elk Refuge/Grand Teton National Park management on the entire Jackson bison and elk herds and their habitat, and socio-economic effects of proposed management within Teton County, Wyoming.
<u>Affected programs:</u>	Supplemental (winter) feeding, recreation, habitat management, hunting, population control, disease management, population goals, and others to be determined during scoping



Purposes of the National Elk Refuge:

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System “is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans” (16 USC 668dd). The NER was established in 1912 as a “winter game (elk) reserve” (37 Stat. 293). This was followed in 1913 with another Act of Congress designating the area as “a winter elk refuge” (37 Stat. 847). Nine years after the NER was established, providing “refuge and breeding grounds for birds” was added as a purpose for which the refuge is to be managed (Exec. Order 3596). This was followed in 1927 by an expansion of the NER for the purpose of providing “for the grazing of, and as a refuge for, American elk and other big game animals” (44 Stat. 1246). Other purposes address threatened and endangered species, wildlife in general, and wildlife-oriented recreation.



Purposes of Grand Teton National Park: In their management of national parks, monuments, and reservations, the fundamental mission of the National Park Service is “... to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations” (16 U.S.C. 1). Grand Teton National Park was established for the purpose of protecting the area’s native plant and animal life and its “spectacular values,” as characterized by the geologic features of the Teton Range and Jackson Hole. Legislation also called for “the permanent conservation of the elk within the Grand Teton National Park” (64 Stat. 849).

Background Information ~ Purpose and Need

Background Information

The National Elk Refuge (NER) and Grand Teton National Park (GTNP), situated at the southern end of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, are adjacent to one another and are located just north of Jackson, Wyoming. The NER is approximately 25,000 acres in size; and GTNP, about 304,000 acres. The elk and bison that inhabit the two areas are part of the Jackson bison and elk herds, which comprise one of the largest concentrations of free-ranging elk and bison in North America—approximately 14,000 elk and 600 bison. The Jackson bison and elk herds migrate across several jurisdictional boundaries including the NER, GTNP, Yellowstone National Park (YNP), Bridger-Teton National Forest (BTNF), Bureau of Land Management (BLM) resource areas, and state and private lands. Because of the wide range of authorities and interests, the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and National Park Service (NPS) are leading a cooperative approach to management planning involving all of the associated federal and state agencies and a broad range of organized and private interests. An environmental impact statement (EIS) will also be completed.

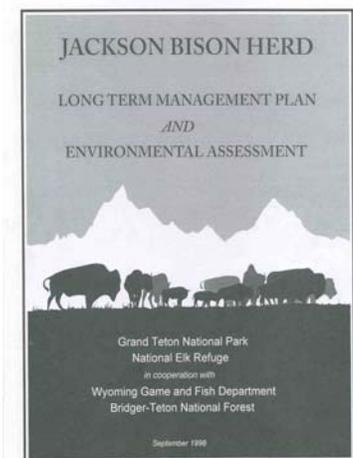
At the current time, it is anticipated that the U. S. Forest Service (USFS) and the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) will serve as cooperating agencies, with the BLM and Wyoming Game and Fish (WGFD) participating as partners.

This National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process began officially with the publication of the “Notice of Intent” in the *Federal Register* on July 18, 2001.

Purpose and Need for the Management Plan

The *Jackson Bison Herd Long-Term Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* was developed during the mid 1990s. The plan, which had the support of the public, tribes, and partnering agencies, was approved in 1996. This document was the result of a series of planning efforts begun in the 1980s to assess and establish actions for 1) herd size, 2) herd reduction, 3) winter distribution, and 4) disease management. A lawsuit in 1998 prevented the implementation of most of the federal management actions outlined in the plan. The court ruled that destruction of bison on NER and GTNP for population control purposes could not be carried out until the effects of the NER’s winter feeding on bison are analyzed through additional NEPA compliance.

No plan for managing elk has ever been completed for either the NER or GTNP. Since winter feeding is the most significant elk and bison management action on the NER, it was determined that a combined bison and elk management plan should be undertaken. This process was recommended by NER and GTNP and directed by the Department of the Interior (DOI) Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks in 1999. The DOI committed to this process in the settlement deliberations for the 1998 lawsuit.



Prescoping and Scoping Results

Comments from the Public Meetings

Seventeen prescoping and scoping meetings were held between February 10 and August 3, 2001. The prescoping meetings gathered and shared information on existing and historical conditions and solicited opinions on desired future conditions and the planning process. Scoping meetings focused on identifying issues and opportunities related to bison and elk management. The following is a summary of the comments received from the public regarding the issues that will be addressed in the EIS. The complete list of meeting comments is available on the project website.

Herd Size

Most members of the public generally agreed that they want healthy bison and elk herds that offer plenty of opportunity for recreational use. There was considerable disagreement over exactly how many animals in each herd were necessary in order to provide optimal viewing and hunting opportunities. Some people thought that there were already too many bison. Other stakeholders felt that the number of both herds should be determined by the carrying capacity of the environment and not arbitrarily set by humans. There were opinions for both increasing the herds' numbers as well as decreasing the numbers. Some people thought that the current state objectives of 350-400 bison and 11,029 elk for the entire Jackson herds were just about right.

Population Control

Sport hunting for bison and elk was recommended as an important management tool that keeps population numbers in check and offers recreational opportunities. Some stakeholders were against hunting of any kind and felt that contraception is the only acceptable means of population control. Some members of the public felt that Native Americans should be allowed to take bison either by hunting or by relocating the animals to the reservations.

Winter Feeding of Bison and Elk

Comments regarding feeding covered every possible scenario, from not feeding bison or elk at all, to feeding throughout every winter. Some stakeholders did not want bison to be fed on the NER where they might compete with elk. Feeding on GTNP was suggested as an alternative. Other people recommended that the agencies consider long-term phase-out of feeding, taking into account forage production, habitat improvement and expansion of range. Some stakeholders felt that the NER should continue to feed, but the way in which elk and bison are fed should change: e.g. switch from pellets to hay, diversify feeding locations and feed earlier to protect habitat.

Habitat

Many people wanted to see habitat restored and improved, but opinions differed on the methods to achieve this goal. Some wanted the planning process to look at winter habitat throughout the region (i.e. taking an ecosystem approach) and to encourage migration out of Jackson Hole to better distribute the herd. Others emphasized improving habitat in GTNP and BTNF by eliminating cattle, allowing wildfires to burn within prescription, and continuing prescribed burning on the NER, increasing irrigation or, conversely, planting only native plants and decreasing irrigation. A thorough analysis of the impacts of both herds on the vegetation in the valley needed to be undertaken to determine the "carrying capacity". However, some citizens pointed out that a forage under four feet of snow is not available to grazers no matter how rich or diversified it may be. Some people expressed concerns about the adverse effects that elk and bison may be having on native habitats, especially willow, aspen, cottonwood communities, and associated wildlife.

Prescoping and Scoping Results

Disease Management

There was much discussion about brucellosis and the high rate of infection in both the bison and the elk herds. This disease is of concern, because of the economic effect it could have on livestock producers if contracted by cattle. Conducting more research, vaccinating elk, bison and cattle, enforcing DOI Health certificate requirements, removing cattle from the area, and treating bison and elk equally when considering the risk of disease transmission to cattle, were all suggestions to deal with the problem. Some stakeholders were concerned with the potential of other more serious diseases getting into the herds such as chronic wasting disease, tuberculosis, pneumonia, bovine viral diarrhea, foot and mouth disease, rinderpest etc. They felt there is a need to assess this risk with regard to the feeding program and one person suggested the development of a contingency plan for any epidemic that may occur. Encouraging elk to leave the NER and migrate to other public lands was one suggested method of alleviating this risk, while other members of the public felt that well fed elk were less likely to contract disease. Many agreed that more research on all of these diseases was warranted.

Recreation

Hunting was identified as a popular form of recreation, but viewing of wildlife, specifically bison and elk, was also recognized as an important recreational past time for local, national and international visitors. The agencies were encouraged to consider and manage the conflicts between winter recreation and wildlife. Although some people felt these conflicts were an educational matter, others felt that all recreation impacts wildlife and should be limited to avoid stressing animals during a critical period in their life cycle.

Other Issues of Concern

State Rights. Some stakeholders were concerned that this planning process will erode the State of Wyoming's authority to manage the elk herd. They also felt that a Wyoming resident's opinion should carry more weight than the opinion of someone from another state. Other people felt that because the NER and GTNP are federal lands supported by the tax dollars of citizens from all over the country, opinions of all citizens should be weighed equally.

Scope of Project and Analysis. A number of people expressed the opinion that the scope of the EIS is too small. They want the present summer and winter ranges, as well as the historic migration routes into the Green River Basin to be analyzed. Some of these people advocate taking a long-term view and making changes gradually. Other members of the public want the agencies to look only at the situation within the NER and GTNP. Some stakeholders felt that the NER was established to feed elk and should stick to its original goals.

Predators. Predation by recently reintroduced wolves and a growing grizzly bear population concerned some stakeholders who feel that the elk population will not be able to coexist with these predators. Others stated that predators are a vital part of the ecosystem. Viewing of wolves and bears is important to many visitors and contributes to the economy of Wyoming.

Tribal Rights. Tribal representatives and other members of the public have stated that the tribes should be actively involved in decisions regarding the bison.

Local Economy. Wildlife viewing and hunting was identified as contributing to the local economy. Many businesses are dependent on abundant wildlife numbers. Some people expressed concerns about the effects of changes in management of bison and elk on the local economy and quality of life in Jackson Hole.

Alternative Development and Analysis

The alternative development meetings (see schedule below) will provide an opportunity for the public to aid the planning team in (1) assessing the areas of agreement on desired planning outcomes, sometimes referred to as the “common ground,” and (2) the range of alternatives that should be analyzed in the EIS. These meetings will be facilitated by a independent third party—a representative of the Jackson Center for Resolution.

The planning team will analyze the public response in this phase of the planning process as related to (1) the missions, purposes, and policies of the FWS and NPS; (2) the goals and objectives of the cooperating and partner agencies; and (3) the environmental consequences of management to implement proposed strategies. This analysis will be used in defining the alternatives to be considered and will be available in the draft EIS. If you are not able to attend the meetings on November 28 and 29, we invite you to send to us your thoughts on alternatives for managing bison and elk on the NER and GTNP.

Estimated Timeline for Actions and Products:

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 - 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

Alternative Development Meeting Schedule

November 28, 2001	Riverton, WY	Holiday Inn (900 East Sunset)
November 29, 2001	Jackson, WY	Snow King Resort (400 E Snow King)

Both meetings will be held from 6 to 10 pm.

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