

NEWS RELEASE

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE 134 Union Boulevard Lakewood, Colorado 80228

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service Release Final Bison/Elk Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and National Park Service (NPS) today announced the publication of the *Final Bison and Elk Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* (Final Plan/EIS) for the National Elk Refuge, Grand Teton National Park, and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway in northwestern Wyoming. The Final Plan/EIS provides agency managers with clear goals and objectives for managing the Jackson bison and elk herds for the next 15 years.

The FWS and NPS made several changes to the Final Plan/EIS preferred alternative after release of the Draft Plan/EIS in 2005, and the subsequent analysis of more than 11,900 written comments and public testimony from private citizens, organizations, and other agencies. These changes include clarifying desired conditions to be achieved over 15 years for the National Elk Refuge and Grand Teton National Park, and using an adaptive management approach for managing bison and elk populations and habitat. Other key elements of the Final Plan/EIS include:

- In close cooperation with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, the agencies will use existing conditions, research, and changing circumstances to provide the basis for developing and implementing a dynamic management framework for decreasing supplemental feeding on the National Elk Refuge. Population management, habitat restoration, monitoring and public education will be important components of this framework.
- The plan will include progressive transition from intensive supplemental winter feeding to greater reliance on free-standing forage using adaptive management actions and established criteria based on the following considerations: level of forage production and availability; desired herd sizes; mitigation of bison and elk conflicts on adjacent lands; winter distribution patterns; prevalence of brucellosis or other wildlife diseases; and public support.
- After initial implementation through a phased approach, about 5,000 elk will winter on the refuge, and the bison numbers will be reduced to about 500 animals (currently estimated at 1,000). Bison and elk hunting on the refuge—and when necessary, the elk herd reduction program in the park—will be used to assist the State in managing these herds.
- Any further reductions in feeding or populations will only occur after initial objectives for habitat and wildlife populations were achieved, and will be based on established triggers, criteria and other considerations of changing biological and social conditions.

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“Solving these difficult issues – many of which have been with us for over 100 years - will not be easy or occur overnight. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service and our agency partners believe that public participation in the planning process has helped to strengthen the final plan. By working together, we can all ensure healthy and sustainable wildlife populations for the future.” said Barry Reiswig, National Elk Refuge manager.

Publication of the Final Plan/EIS followed an interagency review process, in which the Services worked with the U.S. Forest Service, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Wyoming Fish and Game Department to refine and revise the Draft Plan/EIS. The FWS and NPS expect to issue a Record of Decision by spring 2007.

The Final Plan/EIS is available at: <http://www.fws.gov/bisonandelkplan>. In addition a limited number of copies can be obtained by calling (307) 733-9212 or by writing to: Bison and Elk Management Planning Office, National Elk Refuge, P.O. Box 510, Jackson, Wyoming 83001.

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