

# Planning Update

## *Bison and Elk Management Plan National Elk Refuge and Grand Teton National Park*

Issue Eight, Fall 2006

The planning team would like to thank all of you who provided comments on the Draft Bison and Elk Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (Draft Plan/EIS) for the National Elk Refuge and Grand Teton National Park. The public meetings last year were helpful and informative, and the written comments gave us a strong sense of your specific preferences and concerns.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service, in cooperation with several other federal agencies and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, are working together to finalize the plan. We recognize the value of public input to this planning process

and appreciate your willingness to provide us with feedback and to openly express your concerns. We have received over 11,900 comments. These comments reflect a very broad range of opinions about how elk and bison should be managed in Jackson Hole.

We are currently taking a closer look at the proposed management alternatives to ensure that the issues and suggestions that were expressed in the comments are considered and where appropriate, incorporated into the Final Bison and Elk Management Plan/EIS. Any changes to the alternatives, the EIS analysis, or the agencies' preferred alternative will be documented in the Final Plan/EIS. Responses to comments will also be

documented in a companion document that will be published with the Final Plan/EIS, which the agencies intend to complete and make it available to the public in late 2006 or early 2007.

This planning update provides a brief summary of the comments we received, explains how we will respond to the comments, and outlines the next steps in the planning process.

Thank you again for your participation.



*In 2006, the Jackson bison herd grew to about 1,000 animals.*

# Public Comment Overview

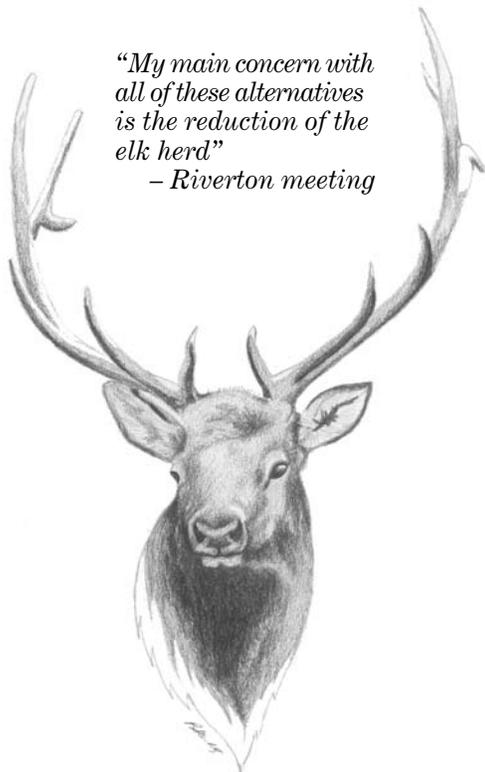
The Draft Management Plan and EIS was available for public review from July 21, 2005 to November 7, 2005. In late August, 2005, the agencies held a series of public open houses and formal hearings in Bozeman, Montana; Jackson, Wyoming; and Riverton, Wyoming. The meetings were conducted as public hearings, which allowed individuals to provide comments which were recorded by a court reporter. In addition to the public hearing testimony, public comments on the Draft Plan/EIS were also received in the form of letters, emails, form letters, and petitions. During the comment period, the agencies received over 11,900 written comments and public testimony from 241 individuals, 37 agencies or organizations, and 1,751 form letters or petitions.

While many issues were raised, most of the concerns and issues were centered around the following topics:

- Population management
- Habitat management
- Supplemental feeding
- Disease
- Public use and economics
- Legal mandates and jurisdiction
- Native American tradition and history

*"My main concern with all of these alternatives is the reduction of the elk herd"*

*– Riverton meeting*



*Concerned citizen speaks out at public meeting in Riverton, Wyoming in August 2005.*

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## Responses to Comments

Comments received and the agencies' responses to comments will be documented in an appendix to the Final Plan and EIS. The appendix will include copies of letters submitted by government agencies, organizations and businesses with the agencies' response printed beside each letter. Additionally, substantive comments made by the public will be summarized and addressed with specific responses. After the Final Plan/EIS is published, public comments and responses will also be available for review at the National Elk Refuge office in Jackson, Wyoming.

## Summary of Comments

Many commenters expressed opposing viewpoints. Some of the specific issues and concerns identified for the seven topic areas are described below.

### Population Management

- Support for or opposition to reducing the size of the bison herd
- Support for or opposition to reducing the size of the elk herd
- Suggestions about population management principles and techniques
- Differences in views about the use of fertility control to manage populations



*Population management is a primary topic of concern.*

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# Public Comment Overview

- Concern about the impacts of elk management decisions on other wildlife species
- Concern about the impacts of management changes on nearby states
- Concern about hunting access
- Concern about the impacts of wolves on elk populations

## Habitat Management

- Support for efforts to restore wildlife migration corridors
- Concern about habitat impacts of livestock grazing and human development in adjacent areas
- Suggestions about whether irrigation is needed and how irrigation should be conducted

## Supplemental Feeding

- Support for or opposition to reductions in supplemental feeding
- Concern about impacts to other wildlife species (such as moose and bighorn sheep) if supplemental feeding is reduced

## Disease

- Concern about the transmission of disease between elk and livestock
- Concern about the spread of chronic wasting disease
- Support for or opposition to vaccinating elk and bison
- Concern about the use and effectiveness of existing vaccines

## Public Use and Economics

- Concern about the economic impacts of herd reductions on local economy
- Concern about the potential economic impacts of disease on ranching and outfitting operations
- Concern about impacts to hunting management and opportunities

## Agency Mandates and Jurisdiction

- Concerns about whether the planning process or the proposed alternatives are consistent with the agencies' missions and purposes
- Comments suggesting increased collaboration between and among federal agencies, state agencies, and landowners
- Concerns about the jurisdiction of federal agencies in making wildlife management decisions



*Elk crossing the creek on the National Elk Refuge. Habitat management is a key topic of concern for many people.*

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## Native American Tradition and History

- Support for and opposition to a specific Native American bison hunt
- Concern about impacts to cultural resources
- Concerns about how the management plan relates to tribal interests and Indian trust responsibilities

## Next Steps

The agencies intend to release the Final Plan/EIS in December 2006 or January 2007. A notice of the availability of the Final Plan/EIS will be published in the Federal Register. In accordance with National Environmental Policy Act, Regional Directors for both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service will issue a Record of Decision on the management plan no sooner than 30 days after the Federal Register notice has been published. The Record of Decision will disclose the alternative selected for implementation and the reasons for its selection. Completion of a final management plan is anticipated by late spring 2007.



*"We need to look at the purpose of the refuge and why it was started -- it was started because we took winter range away from the elk"*

*– Jackson meeting*

*"We encourage you to use the best available science and management principles to emphasize sustainable conservation of wildlife"*

*– Bozeman meeting*

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*Sustainable elk populations is a primary management goal of the planning process, and the public expressed a broad range of opinions on this issue.*

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Moose, WY 83012-0170  
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#### Ongoing Public Involvement

The agencies will continue to keep the public informed throughout the remainder of the planning process. Another planning update is scheduled to be released this winter and will provide additional information on the Final Plan/EIS. Important announcements and any changes to the schedule will be posted on the project website: <http://www.fws.gov/bisonandelkplan/>

#### Contact Information

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