

Summary of public meetings for the National Bison Range Complex

May 8, 2018 Lost Trail Headquarters, all day open house

There were four attendees at this meeting. Three members of the public and the Planning Team representative for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.

Comments and questions: Comments from the public included how beautiful the refuge is and especially the stream restoration project. Also mentioned concerns about lack of current staffing and unknown future staffing concerns. Attendees were also interested in learning more about the refuge.

May 9, 2018, Kalispell, Montana, evening open house (5-8pm, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks office, 490 N. Meridian Rd., Kalispell, MT)

There were three attendees. One representative from Senator Tester's office. The Regional Supervisor for Montana, Fish Wildlife and Parks and the same Planning Team representative for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Due to the small number of attendees, we did not do a presentation. We displayed posters with the draft vision, goals and alternatives as well as posters of the planning process, USFWS Mission and NWRs Mission. Copies of the planning update and a table with further details on the alternatives ("the matrix") were also provided (can be downloaded from CCP website under "Documents").

Comments and questions: The importance of Lost Trail refuge to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks was discussed. MFWP considers this refuge very important and strongly supports discussions about protecting additional lands around the refuge.

May 10, 2018, Charlo, Montana, evening open house (5-8pm, Leon Hall Community Center, 984 Leon Road, Charlo, MT)

There were 7 attendees. There were 4 members of the public. A reporter from Montana Public Radio was also present and covered the meeting (<http://mtpr.org/post/bison-range-seeks-input-comprehensive-conservation-plans>). A Planning Team representative from Lake County and one of the Lake County Commissioners also attended. Service staff did a presentation to provide an overview on where we are to date with the planning process and to share the draft vision, goals and alternatives. There was a question and answer session afterward.

Comments and questions: Staffing levels, both currently, and under any of the alternatives was a common point of question and discussion. We were asked to make the impacts of different staffing levels across the alternatives very clear. We were asked to consider another alternative with all of the management actions in Alternative A (No Action) the same but with higher staffing levels (11+ FTE). However, there were concerns expressed that current staffing levels are inadequate to manage the wildlife and habitat on the National Bison Range.

The public also expressed concern that there were not enough staff to do the CCP - especially those with long-term knowledge or experience on the National Bison Range. The public suggested we bring more people in to the process, including former Bison Range staff who still work for FWS. They also expressed concern that there is not a permanent project leader during the CCP development. We were asked why the Bureau of Reclamation (BoR) was not part of the planning team - we explained that they declined our invitation. A following discussion indicated that BoR does not manage the irrigation system on Ninepipe and Pablo refuges, but rather the Bureau of Indian Affairs does now.

The public indicated that it was important to clarify in the documents any cooperative activities such as weed management and other activities, as applicable.

There was a comment requesting that the Bison Range bring back the group horseback riding event. There was a suggestion to require horses to be diapered to prevent weed seed dispersal and/or provide a vehicle weed wash/cleaning.

The public indicated that we needed to focus on the importance of volunteers for the National Bison Range. They suggested that the alternatives need to include a direction that attracts volunteers (i.e. creates community support).

Getting the word out: consider sending press release through National Bison Range next time or paying for advertisements. There was concern that the Service had not done enough outreach and that we were trying to minimize the number of people that heard about the meetings and had an opportunity to comment.

May 11, 2018, National Bison Range headquarters, all day open house

There were 31 attendees. There were 27 members of the public. Several attendees were there specifically for the open house and some of the attendees were visitors to the Bison Range who became interested in the CCP process after touring the displays in the Visitor's Center. Two representatives from the Planning Team from Lake County attended as well as a Sanders County commissioner. There was also one attendee from the Glacial Lake Missoula organization.

Comments and questions: Many of the same comments and questions that were raised at the Charlo meeting were reiterated at this open house. Specifically, inadequate staffing levels, inadequate resources to complete the CCP and the Service's inadequate level of outreach for this comment period. The public requested that we include an organizational chart in the description of the alternatives.

We did receive a comment that the Service needs to have more information to analyze the connection between the bison herd and habitat quality/management. One option that was discussed was identifying the need for more research on this as an objective or strategy in the CCP for the next five years.

We heard from our Lake and Sanders County partners, and others, that invasive species management was a high priority and that continued partnerships on this front were important.