

About the Document

Title: Establishment of a Nonessential Experimental Population of Wood Bison in Alaska.

Timeline of the Peer review:

- Draft document disseminated: February 2013.
- Peer review initiated: February 2013.
- Peer review to be completed by: March 19, 2013.

Final determination regarding proposed rule expected: between August 2013 and January 2014.

About the Peer Review Process:

In accordance with our July 1, 1994 peer review policy (59 FR 34270) and the Office of Management and Budget's December 16, 2004 Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service intends to subject this proposal to peer review. The Service will nominate potential peer reviewers. We will consider the following criteria for any potential nomination:

- Expertise:** The reviewer should be an expert on wood bison or similar species biology.
- Independence:** The reviewer should not be employed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or any State fish and game agency in states within the NEP area (Alaska). Academic, consulting or government scientists should have sufficient independence from the Service and State fish and game agencies if government supports their work.
- Objectivity:** The reviewer should be recognized by his or her peers as being objective, open minded, and thoughtful. In addition, the reviewer should be comfortable sharing his or her knowledge and perspectives and openly identifying his or her knowledge gaps.
- Conflict of Interest:** The reviewer should not have any financial or other interest that conflicts or that could impair his or her objectivity or create an unfair competitive advantage. If an otherwise qualified reviewer has an unavoidable conflict of interest, the Service may publicly disclose the conflict.

While expertise is the primary consideration, the Service will select peer reviewers (considering, but not limited to, these nominations) that add to a diversity of scientific perspectives relevant to the proposed designation of an NEP of wood bison. Responses will be requested by the close of the comment period. We will not be providing financial compensation to peer reviewers. We will solicit reviews from at least three qualified experts.

The Service will provide each peer reviewer with information explaining their role and instructions for fulfilling that role, the proposed rule for that designation of a nonessential population in central Alaska, and a list of citations. The purpose of seeking independent peer review is to ensure use of the best scientific and commercial information available and to ensure and to maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information upon which the proposed action is based, as well as to ensure that reviews by recognized experts are incorporated into the rulemaking process. Peer reviewers will be advised that they are not to provide advice on policy. Rather, they should focus their review on identifying and characterizing scientific uncertainties. Peer reviewers will be asked to answer questions pertaining to the logic of our assumptions, arguments, and conclusions and to provide any other relevant comments, criticisms, or thoughts. Specific questions the reviewers will be asked include the following: The panel will review key documents relied upon to support the conclusions in the proposed rule. Specific areas in need of peer reviewer input are:

- (1) Whether the boundaries of the proposed nonessential population area are appropriate.
- (2) Information on wood bison occurrences in Alaska, especially any occurrences for which physical evidence might exist, that would indicate that a population of wood bison already exists within the proposed NEP area.
- (3) Information on threats to wood bison in the NEP area that have not been considered in this proposed rule and that might affect a reintroduced population.
- (4) Information on the effects of reintroducing wood bison to Alaska on public and private land management, and economic activities such as hunting, recreation, mining, and oil and gas development.
- (5) Information about the feasibility of conducting reintroductions of wood bison into other areas within the historical range of the species that may be appropriate.

Peer reviewers will provide individual, written responses to the Service. Peer reviewers will be advised that their reviews, including their names and affiliations, will (1) be included in the administrative record of our final determination regarding this proposal (i.e., a final rule or a withdrawal), and (2), be available to the public upon request once all reviews are completed. We will summarize and respond to the issues raised by the peer reviewers in the record supporting our final rulemaking determination. Because this peer review process is running concurrently with public review of the proposed action, peer reviewers will not be provided public comments (although

comments may be viewed through <http://www.regulations.gov>). A final determination regarding this proposed action is expected sometime between August 2013 and January 2014.

About Public Participation

The peer review process will be initiated shortly. Public comments on the proposed rule are scheduled to be accepted until March 19, 2013. You may also submit comments on the draft peer review plan on or before March 19, 2013, via email to Rebecca Toland:

- Subject line “Wood Bison Draft Peer Review Plan Comment”
- Address: rebecca_toland@fws.gov

Contact

For more information, contact Rebecca Toland, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Regional Office, telephone 907-786-3813. Persons who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 800-877-8339.