

Bison Management Plan Advisory Committee Meeting
May 16, 2011
Big River Community Centre

Minutes

Workshop / Meeting started at 10:06 AM

List of participants:

- Robin Fremont – Facilitator
- Rob Tether – Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment
- Glenn Honig – Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment
- Yeen Ten Hwang – Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment
- Gord Vaadeland – Sturgeon River Plains Bison Stewards
- Joanne Reimer – Sturgeon River Plains Bison Stewards
- Seth Cherry – Parks Canada
- Jeff Weir – Parks Canada
- Todd Shury – Parks Canada
- Adam Pidwerbeski – Parks Canada (Recorder)
- Brad Dahl – Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation
- Bryan Lee – Metis Nation of Saskatchewan – Local 108; Fish Lake
- Sarah Kemp de Gereda – Metis Nation of Saskatchewan
- Dallas Swan – Saskatchewan Crop Insurance
- Robert Ermine – Sturgeon Lake First Nation

1. Welcome, introductions, review agenda (accepted), housekeeping (Robin Fremont).

Review of Communication Guidelines

1. Everyone will have an opportunity to speak and have their issue aired, no need for interruptions.
 2. Listen to others to understand their point.
 3. Speak to have others understand your point.
 4. Real dialogue means “Thinking Together” – finding solutions together that are workable.
2. Review Minutes
 - Accepted as presented.
 3. Review of **Terms of Reference for the Sturgeon River Plains Bison Management Plan** (Rob Tether)
 - Current version will be the standard, discard earlier versions
 - Coordinating Committee will be limited to three members (one representative each from Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment, Parks Canada / Prince Albert National Park and the Sturgeon River Plains Bison Stewards). Other staff from the three organizations will be brought in for support as required.

- Consulting Committee now is the **Advisory Committee**
- Vision Statement added
- Lifespan of Advisory Committee – duration of planning process. Afterwards, the Advisory Committee will be invited to participate in periodic updates and to provide feedback on the plan implementation.
- Lifespan of Coordinating Committee – indefinite since they will be tasked with plan implementation.
- List of organizations has been adjusted – a number of groups not yet at the table.

Question: Why is the RM of Paddockwood not included in the Advisory Committee?

Response: RM of Paddockwood (as well as RM of Lakewood) represented by the Agro Environmental Group; also they do not have bison issues per se.

4. **Sturgeon River Plains Bison: Review of Past and Current Research and Monitoring** (Seth Cherry)

- This presentation is posted on the Sturgeon River Plains Bison Stewards web site: www.bisonstewards.ca

Question: What is the number of wolf packs in the bison management area?

Response: Three – perhaps four – their territories overlap.

Question: Would predator (wolf) control in the park keep the bison in the park?

Response: We don't know that the bison are leaving the park due to wolves. These wolves do travel outside the park and are trapped, so their numbers are already being kept down. Pack numbers are fairly low. Bison excursions outside the park due to forage availability and this pre-dates wolf predation.

Question: What is the level of wolf predation on neighboring cattle?

Response: Not a big concern at present. Wolf packs that go outside the park but do not largely prey on cattle are desirable ones to have in the area. However, some landowners have lost cattle (calves) to wolves (Darren Kennedy lost seven calves in the previous year).

Other Comments:

- Bison research details available on Université Laval web site. **ACTION ITEM: Create a link on the Bison Stewards web site to Université Laval bison research on Université Laval web page.**
- Caribou research data available through Government of Saskatchewan web site.
- Joanne Reimer's reports will also be put on the Bison Stewards web page. **ACTION ITEM: Joanne's reports to be put on Stewards web site.**

- Public information sessions and field trips (similar to ‘Bison on the Edge’ Conference) could be organized to provide research updates. **ACTION ITEM: Try and put on a public field trip this summer, coordinating with and using Université Laval researchers.**

5. Bison Diseases in and Around Prince Albert National Park (Todd Shury)

- This presentation is posted on the Sturgeon River Plains Bison Stewards web page: www.bisonstewards.ca

Responses to general questions on anthrax and other diseases:

- Vaccination effective for six months
- Infestations do not spread from animal to animal, but through spores in the soil.
- Role of predators and scavengers can be significant – remains on dead animals scattered across area.
- Origin of anthrax uncertain – one strain found in northern Canada is common in bison.
- Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has sample details from cattle deaths around the park.
- Malignant Catarrhal Fever (MCF) carried by 60% - 80% of sheep can be transmitted to bison from sheep and is fatal to bison (not transmissible between bison).
- Chronic wasting Disease (CWD) not an issue with bison.
- Some diseases are short term and go away on their own (e.g. MCF, pink eye)
- With anthrax, different approaches by different agencies – in 2008 PANP burned and Province buried. Reasons for difference – access and expediency. World Health Organization (WHO) recommends burning (gets rid of spores, less risk of contamination). CFIA encourages burn and bury. We should try for the same protocol inside and outside the park.
- Disease Risk Assessment for the Sturgeon River Plains Bison should be taken (either quantitative or qualitative). This can be done by students at the Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre [University of Saskatchewan]. **ACTION ITEM: Contact Ted Leighton at CCWHC to discuss a qualitative risk assessment for the Sturgeon River Plains Bison.**

6. Group Discussion

- Goals and actions for disease management – group adopted the six goals of the National Wildlife Disease Strategy (additions and amendments can be added as required):
 1. Prevention of emergence
 2. Early detection
 3. Rapid response
 4. Effective disease management
 5. Education and training
 6. Communications

- Not necessary to have a section on each possible disease, only the ones for which we have a greater probability. Will have to maintain some flexibility. Plan could state that specific actions will be developed and implemented for unforeseen or lower probability diseases.
- The “big four” diseases that need to be addressed are:
 - Anthrax
 - Tuberculosis (TB)
 - Brucellosis
 - Bovine Virus Diarrhea (BVD)
- Malignant Catarrhal Fever (MCF) – a lesser concern
- Blackleg – generally is vaccinated against by all producers; need to get to the same level of vaccination for anthrax.

Considerations for incorporating the six goals of the National Wildlife Disease Strategy in management planning

ANTHRAX

1. Prevention of Emergence

- Vaccination of the free-ranging bison not an option
- Vaccination of neighboring cattle will reduce prevalence and is practical
- Education (awareness) is a preventive tool
- Future spread of disease can be prevented by appropriate treatment of carcasses (this point properly belongs in the Rapid Response section – but has some relevance to prevention)
- Keep current with best practices (research) that are developed and tested
- New techniques being experimented with that sample wallow sites (not very successful to date)
- Changing soil ph not an option (e.g. using formaldehyde – environmental hazard)

2. Early detection

- PANP Anthrax Response Plan – utilizes various mechanisms for early detection, including:
 - Routine surveillance and monitoring (ground)
 - Requesting anyone travelling through area to keep a ‘heads up’
 - Air surveillance when outbreaks occur outside of park
 - Intensifying surveillance when environmental conditions indicate increased vigilance
- Two triggers for action: 1) carcass(es) in park; 2) confirmed cases outside park
- Effective communications between agencies, park staff, visitors, outfitters and landowners a requirement
- Education – important tool for early detection

- Hand test kits (free of charge) are available and should be on hand
- Landowners awareness important so that dead animals not dragged across a large area
- Anthrax outbreak has significant consequences for producers – quarantine.
- Treat suspicious case as anthrax – until proven otherwise.

3. Rapid Response

- CFIA only comes out for domestic cases
- Chief contacts – Parks Canada, Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment and Bison Stewards.
- Need to find ways to communicate with landowners without the issue becoming explosive.
- Proactive communications imperative; PANP has communications strategy in place, but now we need a regional strategy.
- Education/communication runs throughout all goals
- Stewards are a key conduit to local landowners
- Speeding up testing process problematic, can be a slow expensive process
- Treating with formalin a priority - ASAP
- Preparedness includes having the equipment and resources available and accessible
- Search management plan for additional carcasses needs to be in place
- Hazing bison back into park puts landowners at ease - less chance for bison to die outside of park.
- Hunters need to be alerted if an outbreak occurs – however some hunters have blanket permission and may not check in regularly with landowners
- In a large scale die off – need to prioritize which areas get treatment
- Fencing / testing known carcass (contaminated) sites can be an option.

4. Effective Disease Management

- Keep up with current research in order to better manage disease response
- Address and resolve the burning vs. burying issue
- Monitoring health status of harvested animals- test harvested animals for antibodies and lesions (also under early detection)
- Establish high probability zones for disease
- Anthrax carcass management – have an equitable and consistent process for landowners. Could possibly have two options: 1) inside the park and 2) outside the park
- Most plans provide a hierarchy of options – sometimes the best option is not feasible.

5. Education and Training

- Training needed for those conducting testing
- Need training using formaldehyde in treating carcasses
- Visitor and landowner awareness of signs of anthrax
- Something like a ‘TIPS line’ could be useful

- Park has an anthrax plan - landowners need to be made aware of the plan and how to deal with diseased bison
- Need to understand that CFIA only deals with domestic animals
- Education is included in every goal – should consolidate education considerations under one goal.

6. Communications

- Plan needs to include a contact list in case of an outbreak (individuals and organizations)
- Educate / communicate the need for cattle owners to use preventive measures (e.g. vaccination)
- Prepared media lines – key points – for press release should be in place.
- Open lines of communication and common understanding between Ministry of Environment, Parks Canada and Bison Stewards (landowners)
- Get experts to review information releases (e.g. medical staff for information regarding human health risks)
- CFIA needs to be part of open line of communication – have CFIA review this part of the management plan
- Timelines need to be established for communication– should be in Rapid Response section
- Develop a fact or information sheet for landowners and others (many such products are already available). Information could be posted on the Bison Stewards web page.
- Information on anthrax (or other priority diseases) could be sent to landowners as part of the annual tax notice.

Moving Forward

- We don't have to have a comprehensive plan for every disease – a risk management assessment would focus our efforts where they need to be.
- Risk assessment would justify the measures that we take – will pursue this (noted above in minutes).
- Key diseases – anthrax, brucellosis, tuberculosis
- Need to determine how much effort will we dedicate to detection
- Need to address domestic / wild bison interactions. Feral domestic bison are also an issue. Bigger than disease issue – part of landowner conflict issue. Protocol for escaped domestic bison is the Domestic Stray Animals Act.
- Three options for completing disease management section:
 1. Coordinating Committee works out the details – submits results to Advisory Committee for feedback
 2. Coordinating Committee and Advisory Committee develop the entire section working together
 3. Coordinating committee with selected experts work on specifics and then submits draft(s) to Advisory Committee for review (THIS IS THE SELECTED OPTION.)

- Management Plan does not have to have a comprehensive disease management strategy for each potential disease – the plan can state that strategies will be developed as required. The best practices for disease management should be in the plan.

7. Plan for the next workshop

List of topics (Rob Tether)

- Will be posted on the Bison Stewards web site (www.bisonstewards.ca).
Summary provided below:
 1. Background and Current Status of Sturgeon River Plains Bison
 2. Disease Monitoring and Management
 3. Habitat Assessment and Planning
 4. Population Demographics – Monitoring and Managing Trends
 - a. Monitoring and Management Tools / Guidelines
 - b. Long-term Conservation of Genetic Diversity
 - c. Population Viability Analyses
 5. Human / Bison Interactions
 - a. Managing Bison / Cattle Interactions (Physical and Genetic)
 - b. Mitigating and Monitoring Property Damage
 6. Understanding and Promoting First nations and Métis Traditional and Current Relationships with Bison
 7. Promoting Social / Economic Benefits of the Sturgeon River Plains Bison
 8. Communications Strategy
 9. Budget
- Some topics may get further sub-divided as we move along in the planning process.

Date of Next Meeting / Workshop

- June 20, 2011; 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM; Big River Community Centre
- Topic: Habitat Assessment / Needs – inside and outside the park; impact of fire on bison
- Joanne Reimer's report will be available: Monitoring Reports – Bison Grazing Behaviors Outside of Park

Communications

- More information will be able to be posted on the Bison Stewards web site – capability has been upgraded
- Emailing between meetings is a good tool
- First Nations involvement and participation needs to be increased
- Invitations for meetings / workshops can be sent as a meeting request with response option.
- Include list of participants as part of workshop minutes

Closing comments regarding today's workshop:

- Overall – a positive experience
- Hopefully turnouts will improve
- Proactive approach to dealing with issues – such as disease – is a good one
- A cooperative and collaborative atmosphere – everybody works well together
- Informative – the template presented was useful
- Flexible approach in workshop management is very good (working as a one group if number of participants is low and splitting up into groups if number of participants is greater)

Workshop /meeting adjourned at 3:40 PM