

Bison Management Plan Advisory Committee Meeting

Minutes

Meeting started at 10:10 am.

1. Robin Fremont – Facilitator started the meeting with a welcome, reviewed the agenda, covered housekeeping and lead the group through Introductions where everyone introduced themselves and who they are representing.

Robin is from Prince Albert, working as a facilitator in Dispute Resolution, self-employed who has experience with agriculture, forestry, family and farm conflict situations.

2. Meeting Principles

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,
5. Play nice in the “sand box” – lessons from Kindergarten.

3. Proposed Management Plan Objectives – Seth Cherry and Rob Tether

Review of the Power Point presentation from the January 10, 2011 public meeting. **These slides will be made available on the Sturgeon River Plains Bison Stewards’ website.**

From Seth’s presentation – the question was asked of the crowd are there any other Management Plan Objectives that should be added to this list (from the existing 5 points)? Answer was to include habitat management as a separate issue.

From Rob’s presentation – question about regulation changes that come from the plan for either Ministry of Environment or Parks Canada? Answer that either jurisdiction will make changes as necessary.

Another comment is regarding Advisory Committee members should be obligated to bring meeting material back to their constituency that they are representing, if a committee member misses a meeting it would be their responsibility to obtain the meeting’s material and ensure they understand the issues that were discussed during the meeting they missed.

If an issue cannot be resolved by consensus, it was suggested that the conflict be recorded in the meeting minutes with all of the conversation and conflicting points recorded and a statement about why the issue could not be resolved by consensus. Fallback procedure was explained to the group i.e. if consensus is not reached (as per terms of reference).

Question – will the meeting minutes be mailed to our emails in the next 2 weeks? Answer – yes, they will be emailed to all Advisory Committee members whether they were at this meeting or not. The meeting minutes and other meeting related documents will also be made available on the Bison Stewards website which can be found at www.bisonstewards.ca. Other bison-related information can be found at the Bison Stewards Facebook page.

4. Guest Speaker – Dr. Phil McLoughlin, Department of Biology, University of Saskatchewan

Slides from Dr. McLoughlin's presentation will be available on the Bison Steward's website. Question during the presentation – the study of the red deer in Scotland is missing an important element of human impact on the red deer population. Human impact on wildlife habitat is a very important issue when discussing the bison-human conflict issue.

High population numbers of bison will mean that the bison will spill out onto the landscape and not be discriminating about which habitat they are choosing.

Another question from the audience about how much habitat humans need, how much farmland do people need? What are the objectives of using so much land? There doesn't seem to be a discussion about how we are going to manage ourselves, only how to manage the bison. What about when one species is displaced at the expense of another (either humans displaced by bison – taking over berry picking land or medicinal plant collection areas, or bison displaced by human activity – farming, ranching, outfitting).

Question about bison management and collaring data. How many bison are collared = 14.

Suggestion to ensure that Aboriginal hunting rights are not infringed upon by the work of this committee.

5. Plan Content Discussion

Committee broke into three separate groups of 6 participants each to discuss what people would like to see as discussion items in the management plan.

List of Issues:

- Determine who pays for various expenses associated with compensation, research dip programs
- Nutritional needs for bison, how is the farmer compensated for subsequent crop damage
- Roles and responsibilities for all action items in the plan
- Information gathering on historical range, pre-settlement information, issues that may have an influence
- Disease issues and how disease affects local land owners, impact outside of park, human consumption
- Impact of industry outside the park and the impact on the bison
- Impact from bison on economic activity, both positive and negative

- The plan must be adaptable and sets the table for the management activities we might need in the future
- Land /herd conflict
- Treaty rights
- Communications – how we communicate internally and outside this advisory committee, ensuring it's a priority through this process
- Who signs the plan? MOE and Parks Canada? Both?
- Effective communication throughout the entire process is very important
- Determine if the Sturgeon River Plains Bison have cattle genes or not. This could determine the direction of the plan. Genetic diversity – what is the current status? How should the long-term genetic health be determined and managed? Do we have a “pure” herd or not? How do we manage the population for genetic diversity
- Monitor and tracking harvesting activity outside the park
- Community harvesting pros and cons – harvesting pressures on the herd
- Need for habitat discussion and potential habitat modifications impacts
- First Nation/Métis – traditional use of habitat and bison of the area, gather information from elders (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal elders) from the area, history of this area and the bison
- Management of nearby domestic bison herds and potential interaction with Sturgeon River bison Hazing and herding roles and responsibility more clearly defined
- Is hazing and herding a good idea? Are they tools in the toolbox
- The province and the park know why they need a management plan, what role do the Bison Stewards play in this process. Bison Stewards should play a role in “engaging” both Aboriginal communities and organizations AND local land owners
- Adaptability and Species at Risk Act: is the management plan adaptable if plains bison make the SARA list?
- Have the plan be forward looking 20-30 years down the road, not just 5 years
- Suggestion for next meeting would be to have a presentation on this particular bison population to explain what the pressures of harvesting by Aboriginal communities. More information regarding the population of this herd.
- Suggestion for a summary, “state of herd”, status report
- Possible to have Daniel Fortin present his findings by conference call and we run the presentation to let this group understand what research has been done to date.
- Should the MOE take on a more regulatory role of the bison herd outside the park. Example, when the population is below XX animals the hunting should be restricted
- A status report showing trends for bison, moose, elk, caribou and wolves
- Target levels for harvesting and population size, trigger thresholds for harvest levels, Bison Steward actions, other management strategies
- Historical population trends, historical conflict information, environmental characteristics
- Harvesting levels must be taken into account, predation, disease

- Possible Solution: Wildlife resources are common property and it's up to the government to regulate their use, no commercialization of the wildlife where it's not more beneficial to one party than another.
 - What is this issue? Commercialization of bison is similar to deer and moose.
 - Pros/cons of harvesting – what are the options?
 - This is a mindset and a specific issue that needs to be captured.
 - Commercialization – harvest by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parties.
- Plan adaptability – who benefits from bison and how?
- Relationship between man and bison herd – what activities and how has it impacted bison – both positive and negative
- Incorporate the Bison Stewards' collection of sociological and vegetation data into a state of the bison report
- The management plan will be for people to ensure that the bison population will be sustainable and healthy.
- Bison safety issues
- How would increased tourism impact farming activities?
- Question about the steering committee membership and why other groups are not represented. Answered by saying that the steering committee is made up of a smaller group to manage the plan creation process and adding in other advisory or consultation committee members to help create this plan. Is the steering committee flexible, what are the options for including other groups or individuals on the steering committee. (TOR)
- The steering committee is made up of representatives that would be directly involved in the management of the plains bison. That may not be the case in the future and the steering committee could be more flexible in the future as the plan is developed and roles and responsibilities are developed. (TOR)
- Change the language to properly reflect what each of the groups represent (Terms of Reference). (TOR)
- Question about how we can get the Chiefs of some of the First Nation communities to these meetings. **Action**: Send those communities a follow up letter to get them to the meetings and discuss at the next meeting. (NA)
- Suggestion to add the previous meetings' minutes approved at the beginning of the next meeting. (TOR)
- Next meeting date: ~~Friday April 15, 2011. Please confirm if April 15 is not workable.~~ Next tentative date is Monday May 16, 2011.
- Location will be Big River Community Hall for ~~April 15, 2011.~~ May 16, 2011.
- Agenda: Steering committee to look at all of the issues and line up guest speakers for next two meetings and further into the winter. Present a vision for the meeting structure to the Advisory Committee.

Roundtable comments:

- Happy with the process, crammed a lot into a day

- Very interesting, good information
- Went well, looking forward to the next meeting
- More participation from the stakeholders that are missing
- Happy with the way the group worked well together
- Is it worth establishing a mission statement for this group so that all participants understand the reason why we are here. It would capture how special this herd is
- Good workshop, good presentation, good discussion, nice play in the sandbox
- Overall good meeting, worked through some problems that were not well explained (TOR, timeline, etc)
- Liked the workshop – style meeting
- Well worth attending
- Thanking the committee for the invitation, disappointed that more representatives were not attending
- Happy that the group is looking at these bison management issues.
- Really good ideas, working out the TOR and meeting agendas, this is an important issue at parks and it's important and working well because all of the interest groups are working together.
- Glad that I came to the meeting today, thank you for the food services and the open communications, glad to see the park superintendent at the meeting and would encourage more managers and Chiefs of the stakeholders to attend future meetings
- Glad that everyone feels comfortable coming and discussing these issues.

What does consensus look like? Four-step problem solving process:

- Identify the issue/problem,
- Why is it an issue/problem,
- Brainstorm solutions, identify all options to address the issue/problem,
- Formulate the best/workable solutions for the group.