

Sturgeon River Plains Bison Management Plan Workshop
Tuesday March 13, 2012
Big River Community Centre
10:00 AM – 4:00 PM
Meeting Minutes

Present

Robin Fremont-Facilitator

Coordinating Committee

Seth Cherry – Prince Albert National Park

- o Jeff Weir
- o Joanne Reimer

Rob Tether- Ministry of Environment

Gord Vaadeland – Sturgeon River Plains Bison Stewards

- o Angela Vaadeland
- o Becky Gillespie

Advisory Committee

Dan Baber – Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corp.

Darrin Kennedy – Big River RM

Cliff Buettner – Prince Albert Grand Council

Ivan Beaulac – Canwood RM

Brad Dahl – Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation

Allan Folden – Shellbrook RM

Guests

Norm Stolle –Prince Albert National Park

Kari Amick – University of Saskatchewan

Meeting Started: at 10:00 am

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

2. Review and approve minutes from previous workshop – January 27, 2012

Presentations

3. Cultural and Historical Significance of the Buffalo

(Danette Starblanket, Executive Director, Lands and Resources Secretariat, FSIN) [PDF file of this presentation placed on the Bison Stewards website

- Questions/comments/answers
 - You mentioned we could access the RG 10 documents from the university? *Response:* Yes, you can obtain the RG 10 Historical Records from the university library, they are a micro film so you have to put them on a reader to view them; they are not a copied document.
 - One challenge this group is facing is ensuring we have a sustainable herd of wild bison. Right now there is a significant amount of loss through First Nation hunting. We are not against the First Nation hunting but it is challenging the herd. There are a few bands hunting the bison so how do we get them to have contact with each other to know how many animals are being taken? And how can we work with the First Nations to ensure the hunting is sustainable. *Response:* We are trying to set up a resource management team which would have one individual from each band who would be a liaison for government agencies, your group, or others who want contact First Nation communities on conservation issues. But we need more capacity for this process to work which is an issue right now. We have asked the province to work with us on this which is one first step. We do realize that we, First Nations communities and groups, need to find other ways to be able work together with other groups, like yourselves, on important conservation issues.
 - There is a bit of urgency on this issue because our herd is only about 200 animals and this past fall 30 bison were harvested most being young breeding females. So at that rate it will only take a few years before the herd is wiped out. Before the fall harvest we want to talk with the local First Nation communities to get the herd status information out very quickly. If you have any suggestions for us on how to communicate with the communities could you please pass them on to us? *Response:* For FSIN we use “Comminique” on FSIN website to communicate. This seems to work well for our organization. (Gord and Danette will try to set up a meeting to discuss communication tactics)
 - RMPP did have individuals in each community and in each region is that a program you are trying to get going? *Response:* Yes it worked well and I am not sure why it fell through but the feds and the province eventually pulled their funding for the program for some reason. But if a program like that gets going again FSIN would be there to coordinate the new process. *Second Response:* PAGC is looking at getting a program such as this going as well.

4. John Hanikenne

- Presenter was unable to present

5. Review Draft Management Plan - Coordinating Committee

- Discuss steps and timeline for rest of plan writing:
 - Timeline- 4 sections left to write:
 - Population Dynamics and Demographics
 - Human Bison Interactions- Landowner Section
 - Human Bison Interactions- Social, Economical & Cultural Importance
 - Adaptive Management Plan
 - Once the draft plan is completed it will be sent to the advisory committee for review sometime in early August.
 - There will be a final advisory committee meeting at end of August to discuss the draft plan.
 - The draft plan will be posted on SRPBS website
 - After the advisory committee has made changes to the draft plan it will be presented to local stakeholders for review.
 - Plan to have an Openhouse meeting during the first part of September:
 - will have information booths set up for key issues and a bear pit forum will be held in 2-3 communities
 - plan to meet with chief and councils and hold open houses on 4-6 First Nations communities
 - And present the draft plan at the Paspiwin Feast in early September
- Questions/comments/answers
 - I would rather see the document as a whole instead of sections, that way you can keep a handle on it for only being a draft plan.
 - If First Nations groups rip the plan apart our advisory committee will have to sit down again to make the appropriate changes to the plan.
 - We should really try to communicate with the local First Nations communities before the draft plan is done so hopefully we can get their buy in and prevent having to re-write the plan.
 - Once the draft is completed we should send it to FSIN and attention it to Danette right away.

- There are a couple avenues for students from U of S to spend some time on helping us setting up communication meetings with First Nations communities.
- Which parts of the park will be burned? *Response:* For late summer burns we plan to burn Longmeadow, for this spring we plan to burn at Sugar Creek and possibly Sturgeon Meadow and Indian Meadow, of course this depends on conditions. These are experimental burns so were not sure how much it will help, but the spring burn might help get the bison onto staying in the park longer, then maybe they will catch on to knowing that there will be new fresh growth coming after the fall/late summer burn. These burns will be a sufficient size to influence the herd, like approximately 500ha. We are targeting low land meadows in the late summer to push back encroachment, and the early summer burns are for the rejuvenating the meadows themselves.
- When you meet the landowners with the draft plan is that a planned meeting or will you meet with individuals? *Response:* We have thought about doing both. We thought we could put on a barbeque and invite them for a more intimate open house type meeting, then perhaps have a larger community meeting after. But we will feel it out to see what the best approach is. *Second Response:* The SRPBS will be doing our landowner surveys again this year so we don't want to burn them out with one on one meetings.
- The Advisory committee is ok with the Coordinating Committee sending the matrix to SCIC ahead of time before the plan is done. (Brad Dahl) All Advisory Committee members present agreed.
- Dan what is your feeling on our chances of getting more compensation from SCIC? *Response:* This year things are tighter; The Feds are putting on more pressure and want some more squeezing. We have had to defend every dollar for some programs so it is hard to say how this will go but it does not hurt to go ahead and try. *Question to response:* Could you try to sell it to them that they will save some money in the long run this way? *Response:* Sometimes they look at compensation a little sideways but we will try.

6. Review and discuss interim harvest plan for implementation in late summer 2012

- It should be stated in the plan that if a voluntary moratorium does not work conservation will kick in and the province has a responsibility to do so. It should be stated if all other avenues fail the harvest will be ceased. *Response:* That is where we will go but realistically that will take a year or so to be put in place.
- It is important that we address Danette and FSIN with the plan as soon as we can, perhaps they can help with the issue. *Response:* I think we need to build on First Nations conservation for bison like Danette had mentioned and maybe we can work together to get that buy in.
- If you figure the herd is 200 and with how ever many cows calving they should be ok. *Response:* The amount of bison being harvested is more than the number of calves born and that doesn't include the small amount that actually survives.

- What about the park controlling the wolf population? *Response:* The province has a program that addresses the wolf population already. *Second Response:* Controlling the wolf population goes against the parks mandate.
- Predator control has proven to be unsuccessful. We need to look at the bigger picture and try not to manage just one species.
- We have a unique predator prey relationship happening here which does not happen in very many other places (wolves preying on bison).
- Will the park burns influence other species? *Response:* It will but we are not creating extra habitat we are just trying to change the movement of the bison. We have lots of collars to gather information to show us the impact the burns have on the bison. We also have a lot of background data, now through an experiment into the mix and we should be able to see the influence.
- In my experience the bison were back in an area within 2-3 days after the burn.
- Will you end up burning all the seed when you burn the meadows? *Response:* There is actually more seed in the soil which regenerates after a fire. Naturally fire would go across the landscape to rejuvenate everything.
- Is there much research in sedge after fire? *Response:* I have not looked into the research, but from what I have seen it will come back quick.
- How can we help while you are doing the burn? *Response:* You need to be trained to participate during the burn. But we do need help with communications, just basically getting the information out to locals. *Second Response:* We could involve people more by taking more pictures and open the area up soon after the burn for people to see.

Meeting Ended at- 12:34 pm