

## **Options for disposition of bison in Fort Collins, Colorado, and Corwin Springs, Montana**

**Introduction:** WiLDIT personnel were informed by Beth Lautner in person on June 7 and 8, of the decision by the Office of the Deputy Administrator to close the animal facility in Fort Collins, Colorado, and the pens at Corwin Springs, Montana, and disband the unit. As per conference call on July 11, 2017, WiLDIT and SPRS personnel (Frey and Clarke) were instructed to construct a list of options for disposition of all bison in the quarantine facility in Corwin Springs and the WiLDIT facility in Fort Collins. Additional time would allow VS to explore more options, but under the current time constraints, these are the most appropriate for the Agency to pursue.

### **Fort Collins bison**

**Option 1 (preferred option)** – We think this option would be best for the Agency allowing the quarantine work to continue under APHIS oversight but managed and funded by Colorado State University. Preliminary discussions with CSU officials have indicated CSU’s willingness to enter into this agreement.

The operation and maintenance of the WiLDIT/CSU animal facility in Fort Collins will be assumed by Colorado State University. The facility consists of USDA equipment installed on CSU ground as per an MOU with CSU. The equipment will be loaned to CSU for a 5 year period during which CSU will conduct quarantine and testing on the seronegative bison, and on completion, place them on tribal and public lands. This will be done under the regulatory oversight of VS personnel. Ownership of the seronegative bison will be immediately transferred to CSU. As per agreements with the National Park Service, the eleven seropositive bison will be consigned to a terminal quarantine location, to an educational display, or if no such options are available go directly to slaughter (as per 2011 and 2012 permits with the National Park Service) where specimens will be collected. If collaborators and cooperating tribes agree to the following, proceeds from the slaughter will go to CSU to help defray expenses of quarantine of seronegative bison. Alternatively, carcasses of seropositive bison will be donated to food banks or tribes. A revised MOU will be drawn up to specify duties and responsibilities of both parties during the five year period. After five years the facility can be closed and USDA equipment excessed.

**Option 2** - This option is contingent on agreement by Yellowstone National Park officials and may require extra time of bison in holding for YNP to complete facilities and agreements.

Seropositive bison will be consigned or go to slaughter as in Option 1. Ownership of seronegative bison will be transferred to Yellowstone National Park and animals transported to YNP for quarantine in their facility under the regulatory oversight of VS personnel. Equipment at the WiLDIT facility will be excessed as time allows.

**Option 3** – This option is contingent on agreements with one or more tribal, private, or other State or Federal entities and likely will require extra time of bison in holding for entity or entities to complete facilities and agreements.

Seropositive bison will be consigned or go to slaughter as in option 1. Ownership of seronegative bison will be transferred to receiving entity or entities. Animals will be transported to new facilities for completion of quarantine under regulatory oversight of VS personnel. Equipment at the WiLDIT facility will be excessed as time allows.

## **Reasons euthanasia of seronegative bison is not considered an appropriate option for the Agency**

1. This is the single most important reason. Documents signed by Jack Rhyan and Mark Davidson state that seronegative bison will be used for conservation purposes. Specifically, two permits with the National Park Service state, "Disease free bison should not be killed as a convenient method to move animals out of USDA facilities." So as a matter of scientific and personal integrity, for the involved individuals and the Agency, euthanasia should not be an option for VS.
2. These are valuable animals with unique "pure" bison genetics and are in the quarantine process destined for relocation to tribal or public lands. Veterinary Services, the National Park Service, Colorado State University (in the case of the Fort Collins animals), and the Montana Department of Livestock have an investment in these animals.
3. Because of the great public interest in the national mammal, and especially those with Yellowstone ancestry, any move to destroy healthy bison in quarantine would undoubtedly be met with considerable litigious and media attention that would damage the Agency.

## **Montana Bison**

In order to meet the agreements, MOU's and EA's signed by APHIS personnel and to maintain scientific value, options are described below.

### **Option 1:**

Breed GonaCon treatment animals and maintain until 2017 calves may be humanely weaned at which time cows will be euthanized, necropsied and carcasses disposed of in landfill. Seronegative 2017 calves will begin quarantine procedures at only approved facility, Corwin Springs. Seropositive 2017 calves will be euthanized. All seronegative adult bison will be entered into quarantine at Corwin Springs separate from seronegative calves.

Breed control animals and maintain until 2017 calves may be humanely weaned, at which time cows will be euthanized and necropsied, carcasses may be sold through slaughter channels (with approval from collaborators) to fund quarantine of seronegative bison or donated to local food banks.

Three sub options: 1) APHIS uses funds, including through sale of seropositive bison at slaughter to fund quarantine until such time that animals graduate and are eligible to be transferred for conservation purposes to public and tribal lands.

2) APHIS maintains bison at Corwin Springs until such time as an agreement can be made with YNP to takeover quarantine procedures at YNP facility once approved. Bison will be transferred and used for conservation herds. This option will require agreement by Yellowstone National Park officials and approval of YNP quarantine facility.

3) APHIS maintains bison at Corwin Springs until such time as an agreement can be made with any other entity that want to takeover quarantine procedures, either at own facility approved by APHIS or at Corwin Springs. Bison will be transferred and used for conservation herds.

**Option 2:**

Breed GonaCon treatment and control animals and maintain until 2017 calves may be humanely weaned at which time cows will be euthanized and necropsied, GonaCon carcasses disposed of in landfill and control carcasses donated to local food banks. All other offspring will be distributed to interested state or university research entities that want to continue brucellosis research and have an approved bison quarantine facility.

**Option 3:**

All seronegative adults are entered into quarantine immediately at Corwin Springs. Any seropositive control animals without calves at side may be slaughtered, tissues collected and carcasses may be sold through slaughter channels to fund quarantine of offspring or donated to local food banks. All other animals are maintained until calves are humanely weaned, at which time GonaCon treated animals will be euthanized, tissues collected and carcasses disposed in landfill. Seropositive controls will be euthanized, tissues collected and carcasses may be sold through slaughter channels to fund quarantine of offspring or donated to local food banks. Calves will be entered into quarantine for conservation purposes. All sub options from Options 1 apply for final disposition.