



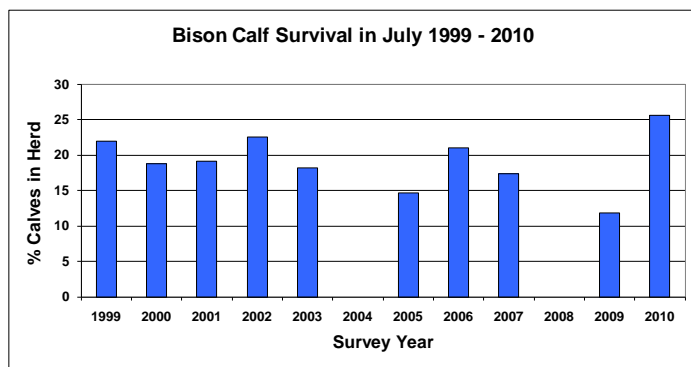
Wood Bison Banter

The latest on Yukon Wood Bison Winter 2010

Bison Calf Survival is Variable

Calves are accounting for a larger portion of the bison population. Environment Yukon biologists counted a sample of the Aishihik bison herd in July 2010 and found 26 percent of the animals were calves.

Over the past 12 years, calves have ranged between 15 and 22 percent of the total population. In summer 2009, calf numbers were the lowest ever at 12 percent. Deep snows may have been the cause, because calf production likely drops when pregnant cows have increased energy demands.



Note: There is no data available for 2004 and 2008.

Bison Population is Stable

Environment Yukon biologists used paint balls in the July 2009 census, which estimated a population of 1151 bison, including calves of the year – a slight increase over the 1,100 bison estimated in 2007.

Paint balls were part of the mark-resight methodology used to count the herd. On the first day, biologists marked 59 bison with paint balls. For two consecutive days after that, two crews familiar with the Aishihik bison range located and counted the bison.

An estimate of the number of bison missed during the counts was made using the numbers of marked and collared bison that were known to be present but not seen during the two counts. In general, the more animals marked, the more accurate the count.

Wood bison are legally listed as a Threatened species under Canada's species at risk legislation. This means that bison in Canada are considered to be a species that is likely to become endangered if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to its extirpation or extinction. Thanks to recovery programs, the Canada-wide population has climbed to about 11,000 animals in the wild today from just 300 in the early 1900s.

Do Bison Compete With Moose and Caribou?

First Nation elders and others raised concerns about bison living and feeding in areas occupied by moose and caribou.

One concern is that bison may be reducing the amount of food available for other ungulates. Another is that bison are chasing moose and caribou out of their traditional habitats.

Two research projects are underway to gather information on the potential competition between bison and other ungulates. Results are expected by the end of 2011.

The first project is mapping the habitat areas used by bison, moose, caribou and other species during the different seasons, using all available location data. The maps will show what habitat types moose, caribou and bison prefer during the different seasons and provide a basis to assess if they compete for the same areas.

The second project is finding out if bison are eating the same food used by the other ungulates. Scat collected from all ungulates at different times of the year, is dried, sent to a lab and examined to see what plants the animals are eating.

Fall 2010 Bison Harvest Update

By the end of November, a total of 42 bison had been harvested, of which ten were cows. Up to 300 bison can be harvested this season.

Bison Collars Help with Herd Counts



Collared Bison *Tom Jung Photo*

As of December 2010, 30 bison are wearing transmitter collars – 27 cows and 3 bulls. Environment Yukon biologists and technicians are out several times a year to monitor these collared bison.

Only eight of the collars use standard radio transmitters that require biologists to be within 10 km to hear the signal. The rest are Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) collars that store location data onboard.

Hunters are not permitted to shoot a collared bison. Valuable information is lost if a collar is removed prematurely. It's stressful for the animal to be sedated and collared – let them be.

Collars help herd managers:

- keep track of population size and trends
- monitor calf survival
- determine where the bison are on the land
- track seasonal movements, and
- assess which places meet the habitat needs for bison.

Check the current Hunting Regulations Summary for what you should do if you find a collar or shoot a collared bison accidentally.

Hunting Rules Changed for 2010-11

In keeping with the adaptive management approach for wood bison, some changes were made to the hunting rules for 2010-11 to reflect input from local communities and bison hunters.

Of note, there will be a six-week break mid-winter (January to mid-February) to give local residents, trappers and wildlife in the core range area, a rest from the noise and disturbance created by bison hunters.

Hunters should refer to the terms and conditions on their permit, as well as the Hunting Regulations Summary and *Hunt Wisely: Bison 2010-2011* for more details.

The summary, brochure and detailed maps are available from any Environment Yukon office or from the Environment Yukon website. Videos on how to identify the sex of a wood bison and how to field dress a bison are also available on the website: (www.environmentyukon.gov.yk.ca/huntingtrapping/fielddressingbisonvideo.php).

Student Poetry

Students participating in school bison hunts in early 2010 were asked to write a poem about their experience.

Bison Hunting

The woods are my home away from home.
I can't believe we have to leave tomorrow.
I am even tempted to run but if I did I would be alone and cold.

Victoria Bolton (Grade 8, J.V. Clark School)

School Hunts

The Yukon Department of Education and Environment Yukon encourage schools to participate in the bison hunt. The four schools that participated in 2010 were J.V. Clark School from Mayo, Elijah Smith and Hidden Valley schools from Whitehorse and Ghuch Tlâ Community School from Carcross. Two students from Watson Lake Secondary School also participated.



Dev Hurlburt was the shooter for the Hidden Valley School in February 2010 *Chris Stacey photo*

During the hunts in February and March, one school successfully harvested a bull and another took a cow. Students not only learn to hunt bison but do many other activities such as winter camping, driving snowmobiles, practice shooting skills, orienteering, ice fishing, setting snares, building fires, telemetry, star gazing and keeping journals of it all.

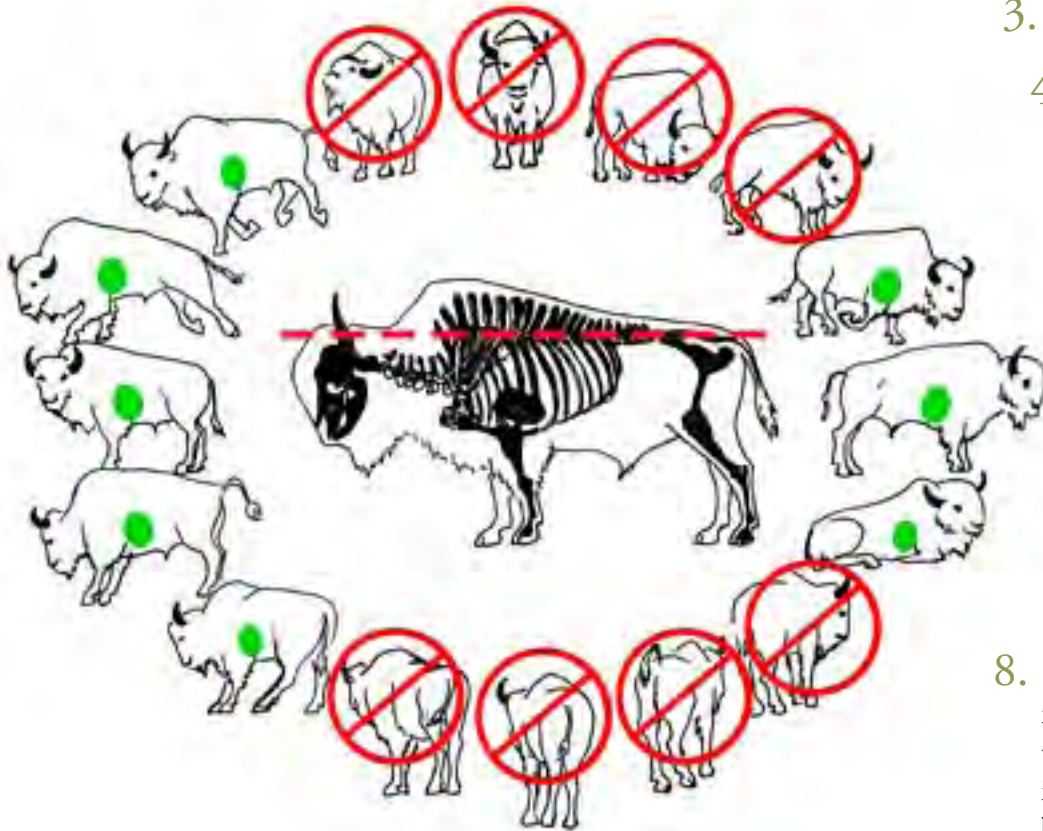


Reduce Wounding Loss

We need to reduce the numbers of bison who are wounded but not killed. Wounded bison can suffer for years from bullet injuries and in many cases die a slow, painful death. Conservation Officers estimate that about one-quarter of the animals harvested last season showed signs of having been wounded earlier.

We all have the responsibility to hunt in an ethical manner that respects the animal. Do not hesitate to contact your local Conservation Officer (CO) if you have any questions about the best ways to do this. An excellent resource is *Hunt Wisely: Bison 2010-2011* published by Environment Yukon.

1. Always take the time to see if a bison is wearing a collar before shooting - they can be difficult to see. If you kill a collared bison, you must report it to a CO right away. You can't eat a recently collared bison because of the drugs used to capture and collar it.



2. Avoid long distance shots.

3. Do not shoot at running bison.

4. Avoid poor angle shots. If you do not have a good shot, don't shoot.

5. Do not shoot at a bison if there is another one behind it.

6. Remember that the kill zone on bison is lower than on other species. Don't shoot too high - bison vertebrae can be 16 inches or longer.

7. If you wound a bison, you must make all reasonable effort to find and recover the animal.

8. If you wound a bison and cannot recover it, please report the incident to a CO. This information will help in case a report is made later of a dead bison in the area.

10. Monitor the bison you downed carefully. Have a follow up shot ready in case the bison gets up - especially when you approach it.
11. Check your permit or the *Hunting Regulations Summary* (p.27) for the firearm requirements.

9. After you shoot, remember to check for signs of a hit such as blood in the snow.

We all need to respect bison.

If you observe unethical or suspicious activity in the field, please contact the *Turn in Poachers* (TIP) hotline at 1-800-661-0525. All calls are anonymous. Cash rewards may be available if your information leads to a successful prosecution.

Bison Harvest Data

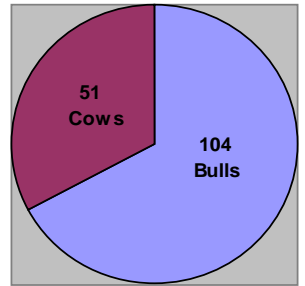
See Something Unusual? Tell Us!

Environment Yukon biologists want to know if you see any unusual occurrence related to bison. There are many things we don't know about bison in the wild.

In particular, let us know if you see bison in an unusual place, outside of their core range. We are also interested in any observations of bison interacting with other wildlife. And when you are butchering a bison, let us know if you see anything odd about the carcass.

Call the Bison Technician with your report(s) at 456-6114 or 1-800-661-0408 x 6114.

155 bison were harvested in 2009-10, a slight increase over the 150 harvested in the year prior. Hunters are encouraged to harvest more cows to bring the harvest closer to a 50:50 split between cows and bulls. Harvesting cows helps stop the bison population from growing. The wood bison harvest is one of the few in Yukon where hunters are encouraged to take cows.



Students Experience Bison First Hand

Poetry

Students participating in school bison hunts in early 2010 were asked to write a poem about their experience.

Bison

Once there was a mighty bison who stood tall and strong, on a mighty mountaintop where the wind would not stop.

After we spot the bison the bison was on the run, when the bison was on the run we began to have fun.

With one big bang the bison flopped to the ground, the ground shook & the bunnys hopped, the skinning started and the meat was chopped.

Natalee Patchett
(Grade 7, Hidden Valley School)



Kedrick Hager-Ball, grade 7 student in Mayo developed orienteering skills while bison hunting. *Christine Blodgett photo*



Hidden Valley students locate bison collars hidden in the snow at the north end of Aishihik Lake, during their bison hunting trip. *Kathi Egli photo*