

Fish and Wildlife Division of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD), with endorsement of the National Wood Bison Recovery Team, is implementing a hunting season as an interim strategy to manage the Hay-Zama wood bison herd.

The Hay-Zama wood bison reintroduction program was started in 1983 to re-establish a healthy population of wood bison in north western Alberta capable of sustaining an annual harvest. Establishing this population was a significant element in the national wood bison management plan to have at least one self-sustaining wood bison herd in each of Alberta, B.C., Yukon and Northwest Territories and Wood Buffalo National Park. Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division, Canadian Wildlife Service and the Dene Tha' First Nation were partners in the reintroduction program. The original management plan called for the release of bison born in the paddock for a two to three year period. The proposed releases were cancelled by 1985 amid growing concerns and fears of the disease issues in bison in and around Wood Buffalo National Park. In 1994, the bison escaped and moved into the vicinity of the confluence of the Hay and Chinchaga Rivers.

The Hay-Zama bison herd has grown in numbers and distribution since 1994 to an estimated 700 in the spring of 2008. The distribution of bison has expanded and they are at risk for contacting diseased bison from WBNP as well as being a vehicle hazard on area roads and highways. The wood bison hunt is being implemented to:

1. Control expansion of the Hay-Zama herd eastward, preventing contact with and contracting of diseases such as bovine brucellosis and tuberculosis from bison moving westward from Wood Buffalo National Park.
2. Address public safety concerns within the communities of Chateh and Zama and along roads in the area. ASRD has responded to complaints of bison in communities and there have been several dozen vehicle collisions with bison on area roads resulting in property damage and the potential for serious injuries to people.
3. Maintain Hay-Zama wood bison population at approximately 400 and limit distribution of these animals until diseased bison issues in and around Wood Buffalo National Park are successfully resolved.

The hunting season for Wood Bison will occur in WMUs, 536 and 539 excluding a core protected area, consisting of the 6 townships (Townships 112 to 114, Ranges 2 and 3, West of the 6th Meridian), see attached map.

The details of the initial 2008/2009 hunt include:

- All hunters (Aboriginal and Recreational) hunting bison will require a Resident Bison Special Licence.
- The area of the hunt is Wildlife Management Units 536 and 539, excluding the Core Protection Area where bison will be protected,
- Successful hunters will have to register their kill(s) with Fish and Wildlife,
- Biological samples from killed bison for disease testing will be requested from all hunters, and
- All hunters will receive a Bison Hunting Education booklet detailing the hunt, what to expect, disease testing and other important information.

The interim strategy to manage the Hay-Zama wood bison herd will be closely monitored. Future management plans will be based on the results from this interim strategy.

Should you have any questions regarding this matter please do not hesitate to contact Lyle Fullerton in our Peace River Office (780-624-6496).

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