

# IUCN SSC Bison Specialist Group

2019 Report



Glenn Plumb



Dennis Jorgensen



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## Chair

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## Red List Authority Coordinators

Greg Wilson <sup>(4)</sup> (American Bison Section)

Vacant (European Bison Section)

## Location/Affiliation

<sup>(1)</sup> National Park Service, US (retired)

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<sup>(3)</sup> Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

<sup>(4)</sup> Parks Canada, Elk Island National Park, Canada

## Number of members

75 (American Bison Section)

34 (European Bison Section)



## Mission statement

The Bison Specialist Group (BSG) is committed to the development of comprehensive and viable strategies and management actions to enhance conservation and ecological restoration of European Bison (*Bison bonasus*) and American Bison (*Bison bison*), including Plains Bison (*Bison bison bison*) and Wood Bison (*Bison bison athabascae*), as wildlife where feasible across their original range. The BSG operates under the authority of the Species Survival Commission of the International Union for Conservation of Nature to conduct comprehensive assessments, provide evidence-based advice and support, and communication and outreach activities in support of this mission.

## Projected impact for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

By the end of 2020, the American Bison Section of the BSG anticipates a substantial advance in the knowledge of the location and size of bison herds through a global bison census. The census will be critical to the understanding of the bison metapopulation across North America, as it will include all jurisdictions in all nations and management designs. This will be a crucial tool for recovering bison at local, national, and international levels.

The world population of European Bison has increased from ~3,000 in 2006 to ~8,400 in 2019. Approximately 1,700 are in captivity, 480 in semi-free living herds, and 6,240 as free-living wildlife, though there is concern about long-term sustainability because ~80% of all

free-living herds include fewer than 150 mature individuals. There is a need to update the 2004 IUCN SSC BSG European Bison conservation action plan to address key issues such as meta-population strategies, changing land use, new science on genetics and landscape ecology, climate change, disease and parasitology, and increasing social interest in restoration of large mammals across Europe.

## Targets for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

### Assess

Green List: produce a new Green List assessment.

Red List: produce an updated Red List assessment report.

Research activities: (1) produce a new global census of the Bison genus; (2) prepare guidelines for veterinarians about bison health protection.

### Plan

Planning: (1) produce new long-term conservation action plans for the American Bison and the European Bison; (2) initiate a series of regional conservation guidelines/strategies.

Policy: advise decision makers regionally.

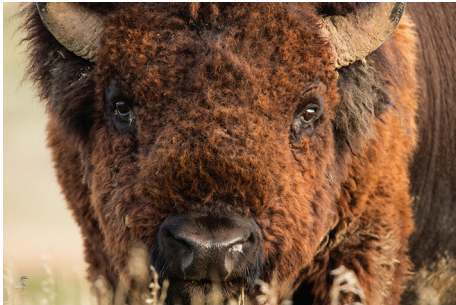
### Communicate

Communication: (1) hold a BSG meeting; (2) create a library.

Scientific meetings: hold a yearly conference.



European Bison  
Photo: Rafal Kowalczyk



Badlands National Park Bison  
Photo: Day's Edge, WWF-US



Bison at Snake Butte, Fort Belknap Reservation, Montana  
Photo: Conservation Media, WWF-US

## Activities and results 2019

### Assess

#### Green List

**i.** An initial test Green List Assessment (GLA) was completed for the North American Northern Great Plains as part of the IUCN protocol testing project. This initial GLA provided sufficient information and confidence in the GLA protocol to initiate an MSc project by Mr. Luke Rogers at the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK), in partnership with the BSG and World Wildlife Fund, to conduct a GLA analysis for the American Bison in three ecoregions (Northern Great Plains, Boreal Forest, South-west Grasslands). (KSR #11, 32)

#### Red List

**i.** The American Bison Red List Assessment Committee is developing a team to conduct an updated Red List assessment, including training and updated information collection. (KSR #2)

#### Research activities

**i.** Mr. Luke Rogers, MSc student at UNK, has initiated the online Global Bison Census <<https://bisonsurvey.com>> to be completed in late 2020, which will provide new detailed information on American Bison abundance, distribution, management, and jurisdiction; this will inform the GLA outlined above, and will be made available to the public. (KSR #32)

### Plan

#### Planning

**i.** The BSG American Bison Section met in October 2019 and decided to develop a suite of regional bison status surveys and conservation strategies, instead of attempting a comprehensive continental conservation action plan. The regional strategies may then be aggregated into a continental framework. (KSR #15)

**ii.** The BSG European Bison Section is partnering with the World Wildlife Fund, Mammal Research Institute Polish Academy of Sciences, the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN), and the IUCN SSC Conservation Planning Specialist Group to undertake conservation planning to produce an updated IUCN SSC BSG Conservation Action Plan that will serve as an innovative, efficient and effective milestone for its potential to empower new initiatives and result in better alignment of multinational conservation strategies and actions. A conservation planning meeting has been confirmed for April 2021 at the BfN International Conservation Academy, Vilm, Germany. (KSR #15)

#### Policy

**i.** The BSG American Bison Section formally participated in the US Department of the Interior Bison Conservation Initiative and co-authored a major government-wide bison population viability assessment. Additional formal presentations were given to the National Bison Association, Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas, American Bison Society, Defenders of Wildlife, and InterTribal Buffalo Council. Overall, five meetings/presentations were made. (KSR #27)

### Communicate

#### Communication

**i.** The BSG American Bison Section met formally in October 2019 at Santa Fe, New Mexico, US, in conjunction with the American Bison Society Biannual Meeting. The meeting included virtual online access/attendance. (KSR #28)

#### Scientific meetings

**i.** The BSG European Bison Section did not formally meet in 2019; only a short ad hoc informal meeting of a small group of interested individuals took place after the 2019 European Bison Friends Society conference. (KSR #28)

### Acknowledgements

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### Summary of activities 2019

Components of Species Conservation Cycle: 3/5

Assess	3	■■■
Plan	3	■■■
Communicate	2	■■

Main KSRs addressed: 2, 11, 15, 27, 28, 32

KSR: Key Species Result