

IUCN SSC Bison Specialist Group

2020 Report



Glenn Plumb



Dennis Jorgensen



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Chair

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Red List Authority Coordinators

Greg Wilson ⁽⁴⁾ (American Bison Section)

Location/Affiliation

⁽¹⁾ National Park Service, US (retired)

⁽²⁾ World Wildlife Fund - US, Northern Great Plains Program, Bozeman, Montana, US

⁽³⁾ Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

⁽⁴⁾ Parks Canada, Elk Island National Park, Canada

Number of members

75 (American Bison Section)

34 (European Bison Section)



IUCN SSC BISON SPECIALIST GROUP

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 athabasca*), 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.

A new Red List Assessment of European Bison in 2020 found that there were only eight subpopulations exceeding Minimum Viable Population (MVP), with a total of 2,518 mature animals and no subpopulation including more than 500 mature animals; thus making this

species nearly qualify for Vulnerable C2a(i).

Additional consideration of free-living subpopulations that are less than MVP indicates that this species warrants Near Threatened status, in light of its dependence on ongoing conservation programmes to persist beyond the next five years, a very limited number of viable free-living subpopulations (eight), and a large number of small isolated free-living subpopulations less than MVP (39).

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

Policy: advise decision makers regionally.

Communicate

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

Scientific meetings: hold a yearly conference.



European Bison, *Bison bonasus*, in meadow complex in Bialowieza National Park, Poland
Photo: Rafal Kowalczyk



Young American Bison cow, *Bison bison*, grazing in Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming, US.
Photo: Dustin H. Ranglack

Activities and results 2020

Assess

Green List

i. In 2019, 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, Southwest Grasslands). In 2020, BSG members served as contributing co-authors to the new IUCN SSC Green Status Protocol and a peer-reviewed manuscript submitted for publication in *Conservation Biology*. (KSR #11, 32)

Red List

i. A Red List assessment for American Bison (*Bison bison*) was completed in 2017, and the American Bison Red List Assessment Committee is on track to conduct an updated Red List assessment in 2022, including training and updated information collection. (KSR #1, 2)

ii. A Red List assessment for European Bison (*Bison bonasus*) was completed in 2020 and was globally highlighted in the 2020 IUCN Red List news release. (KSR #1, 2)

Research activities

i. The MSc student at UNK per above completed the Global Bison Census <bisonsurvey.com> in late 2020, which provides new detailed information on American Bison abundance, distribution, management and jurisdiction that will inform the Green List assessment outlined above and be made available to the public. (KSR #32)

Plan

Planning

i. In 2020, the BSG European Bison Section partnered with the World Wildlife Fund, Mammal Research Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN), Rewilding Europe, European Association of Zoos and Aquaria, Zoo Berlin 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 Scope of Work was developed, though a conservation planning meeting planned for spring 2020 was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (KSR #15)

Policy

i. The European Bison Section advised decision makers regionally. (KSR #27)

Communicate

Communication

i. The American Bison Section held an in-person meeting in the fall of 2019, but did not meet in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (KSR #28)

Scientific meetings

i. The BSG European Bison Section did not formally meet in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (KSR #28)

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Summary of activities 2020

Components of Species Conservation Cycle: 3/5

Assess	4	
Plan	2	
Communicate	2	

Main KSRs addressed: 1, 2, 11, 15, 27, 28, 32

KSR: Key Species Result