

Wood Bison Status Changes in Alberta

Wildlife Regulation was amended to designate wood bison.

In November 2021, the Wildlife Regulation was amended to designate wood bison as Threatened in specified Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) in northern Alberta (Figure 1). This designation protects wood bison from hunting in the specified WMUs by people other than those with Indigenous-specific hunting rights such as Treaty rights. That is, unless a licence is issued under the regulation to specifically enable hunting.

The Threatened designation replaces previous designations of Endangered and Subject Animal for some wood bison. These amendments aim to protect populations of wild wood bison and enable their conservation and recovery for the benefit of all Albertans. The amendments are based on an assessment of Alberta's wood bison risk of extinction, using International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) species risk assessment criteria.

The Wildlife Regulation amendments maintain the existing Northwest Bison Protection Area and establish a new Wabasca Bison Protection Area (Figure 1). For those with Indigenous-specific hunting rights such as Treaty rights, bison hunting regulations in the Northwest Bison Protection Area remain the same – Indigenous persons require a license to hunt bison in this Protection Area. All hunting of bison in the Wabasca Bison Protection Area is now prohibited.

Additional details on these Regulation changes are provided below:

Northwest Bison Protection Area (Hay-Zama and Eththithun Lake wood bison populations)

The amendments maintain regulated hunting in specified portions of the Northwest Bison Protection Area based on issuing a bison special licence and allocation processes for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons. This hunt has been suspended for several years in response to bison population declines, but will be re-instituted when the population recovers (see <https://mywildalberta.ca/hunting/game-species/wood-bison-hunt-hay-zama.aspx>).

During seasons with an active hunt, hunters are asked for voluntary submission of tissue or blood samples from harvested bison to enable disease testing.

Map of Northwest Bison Protection Area (<https://open.alberta.ca/publications/northwest-bison-protection-area-map>)



Wabasca Bison Protection Area (Wabasca wood bison population)

Enactment of the Wabasca Bison Protection Area (Figure 1) is to provide additional protection for a small and declining bison population from all Indigenous and non-Indigenous hunting.

This protection will be in place until the population recovers. Conservation is the immediate priority to ensure the survival of this small, disease-free population. Hunting can resume for individuals holding a bison special licence. Licensed hunting, and hunting by those with Indigenous-specific hunting rights such as Treaty rights, is allowed for wildlife other than bison within the Wabasca Bison Protection Area.

Map of Wabasca Bison Protection Area (<https://open.alberta.ca/publications/wabasca-bison-protection-area-map>)

Wildlife Management Unit 531 (Ronald Lake wood bison population)

Amendments to the Wildlife Regulation maintain the existing protection from harvest of the wood bison population in this WMU, except by those with Indigenous-specific hunting rights such as Treaty rights.

Wildlife Management Unit 534 (Wentzel Lake wood bison population)

This WMU is known to contain bison infected with bovine tuberculosis and brucellosis. The status of bison in this WMU is not changing at this time. The population has not been designated as Threatened and will not receive protection under Alberta's Wildlife Regulation. Indigenous and non-Indigenous harvesting remains unregulated except for any provisions under Alberta's Provincial Parks Act within the Caribou Mountains Wildland Provincial Park.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I hunt bison in Wood Buffalo National Park?

Wood bison in Wood Buffalo National Park are protected under federal legislation. Please contact Parks Canada Agency or Wood Buffalo National Park for more information.

Are wood bison protected if they move into WMUs that are not specified in the Threatened designation under the Wildlife Regulation?

No, if a wild wood bison moves into a WMU that is not specified as part of the Threatened designation under the Wildlife Regulation, it can be harvested by anyone at anytime of the year without a licence, as long as the hunter has legal access to the land for hunting.

Visit the Indigenous hunting and fishing in Alberta webpage (<https://www.alberta.ca/indigenous-hunting-and-fishing-in-alberta.aspx>) for those with Indigenous-specific hunting rights such as Treaty rights, and the Alberta Hunting Guide (<https://albertaregulations.ca/huntingregs/genregs.html>) for general prohibitions.

What were the considerations for deciding which WMUs were included in the area that wild wood bison are designated Threatened?

The designated WMUs and Bison Protection Areas were identified to support conservation and recovery of existing disease-free wild bison populations and provide a basis for future wood bison recovery, while considering Indigenous peoples and stakeholder interests and concerns.

How will the wood bison populations within the designated areas be managed in the future?

Now that wild wood bison are listed as Threatened in designated areas of northern Alberta, Environment and Parks will initiate the development of a recovery plan that will guide wood bison management and recovery. Further information on this planning exercise and opportunities for engagement will be provided in 2022.

How will the Government of Alberta ensure that these changes do not increase the risk of disease transmission to domestic livestock or risk to public safety?

Environment and Parks will continue to work with the federal government, Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, agricultural stakeholders, and local communities to mitigate the risk of disease transmission to livestock as well as any public safety concerns. Additional management actions will be considered as part of future recovery and management planning, or in response to any emerging issues.

How does the status of Threatened affect the domestic bison industry?

Only wild wood bison in specified areas of northern Alberta are listed as Threatened. Domestic bison are specifically excluded from the designation of wood bison as Threatened under the Wildlife Regulation.

How does the status of Threatened affect resource development?

Listing a species as Threatened under Alberta's Wildlife Regulation does not trigger any automatic habitat protections or affect land use. As part of regular department business, public land use planning and approval processes are routinely reviewed and adjustments made, if needed, in relation to wildlife considerations.

What is the vision for hunting of wild bison?

The Government of Alberta wants sustainable wild wood bison populations that provide ecological benefits, support food security for Indigenous communities, and increased hunting, guiding and outfitting opportunities for Albertans.

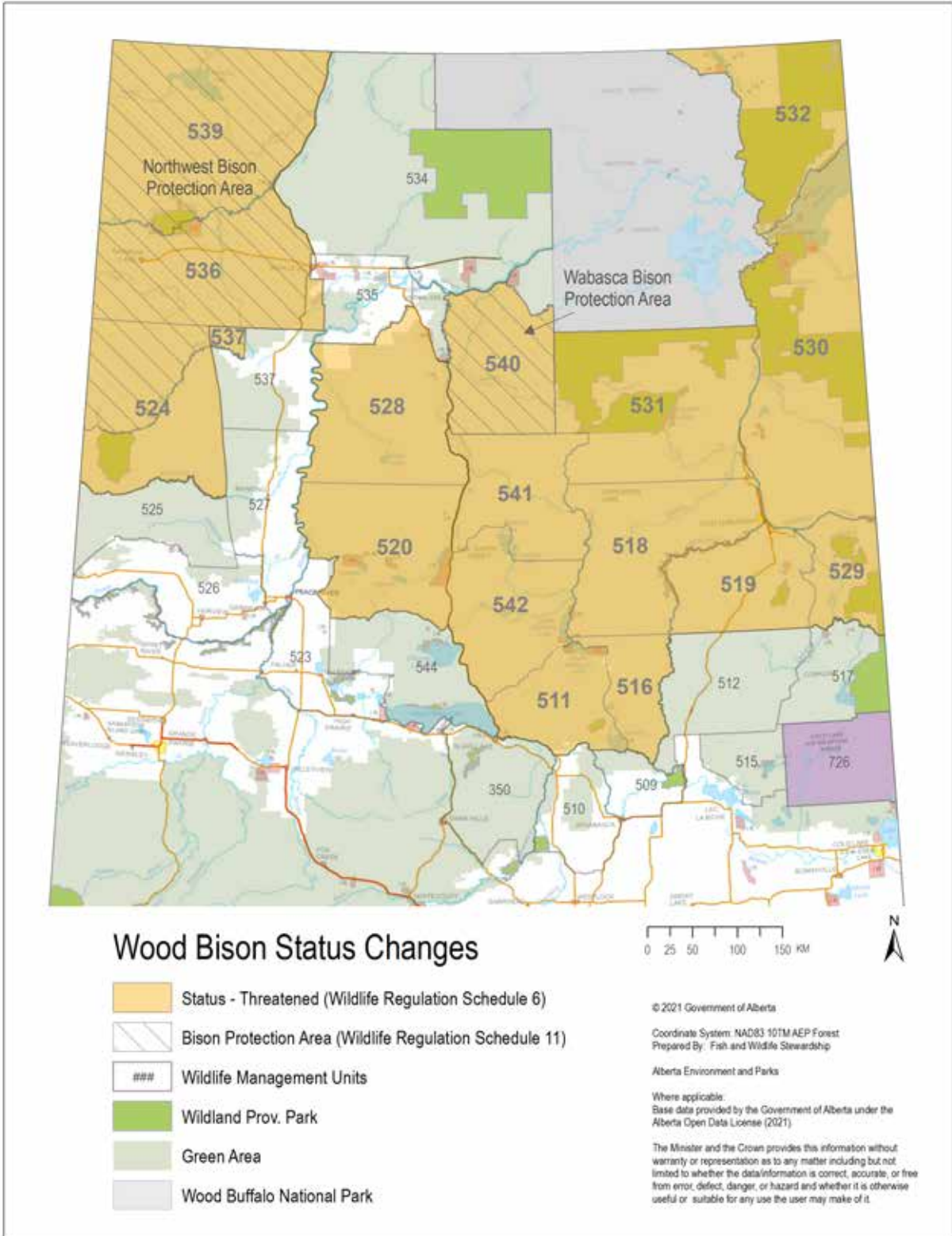


Figure 1 – Wild wood bison are now designated as Threatened in specified Wildlife Management Units in northern Alberta and two Bison Protection Areas have been established under the Wildlife Regulation.