



Hay-Zama Wood Bison 2022-23 Hunting Season

Information for hunters about the Hay-Zama wood bison hunt

About the Hay-Zama Bison Population

The Hay-Zama wood bison reintroduction program started in 1983 as a joint effort among the Canadian Wildlife Service, Dene Tha' First Nation and Alberta Environment and Parks to re-establish a sustainable population of wood bison in northwestern Alberta. The Hay-Zama bison population was first released in 1994 in the northwestern corner of Alberta within a "Bison Protection Area" where bison were considered Endangered under Alberta's *Wildlife Act* and Regulation.

Alberta has conducted annual surveys since the original release of 42 bison. By 2008, based on a minimum count, the population had expanded to 652 bison. Surveys are extensive, with over 3,500 kilometres flown during a survey season.

In 2021, wood bison in specified Wildlife Management Units (WMUs), including the Hay-Zama population, were listed as Threatened under the *Wildlife Act* and Regulation. Also, the Northwest Bison Protection Area in the Regulation (Figure 1) was formally designated. Neither action changed the regulated bison hunt. As per the bison special licence, people with a valid licence can still hunt bison in Bison Hunting Zone 1.

About the Hay-Zama Bison Hunt

Since the winter of 2008-09, the Hay-Zama population in Bison Hunting Zone 1 has had both an Indigenous and recreational hunt, with the objective of managing herd growth and range to:

- Maintain the Hay-Zama wood bison population between 400 and 600 bison and limit expansion eastward until diseased bison issues in and around Wood Buffalo National Park are resolved.
- Address public safety concerns within the communities of Chateh and Zama and conflicts along roadways.

2022-23 Hay-Zama Wood Bison Hunting Season

The Hay-Zama wood bison hunting season is suspended for the 2022-23 season.

The annual population survey in February 2022 resulted in a minimum count of 478 bison. While these results are a positive improvement to the 433 wood bison counted the previous year, there were observations of winter mortality and an additional year of data collection is required to confirm positive population growth before re-instating a sustainability managed harvest.

Hay-Zama Wood Bison Hunt Suspension: What You Need To Know

No licences will be issued for this season to ensure bison numbers can maintain a sustainable harvest.

Bison located in Bison Hunting Zone 1 are within the Northwest Bison Protection Area and are considered Threatened under Alberta's *Wildlife Act*. No bison can be harvested without a licence. See map below (Figure 1).

Common Questions

Are bovine tuberculosis and brucellosis disease an issue in the Hay-Zama population?

No. Since the 2008-09 season, all samples were negative in over 350 bison tested for tuberculosis and brucellosis.

Licensed hunters provided samples for disease surveillance in the 2017-18 season (five years since the last testing in 2011-12). All viable samples were negative for brucellosis. There is no evidence that disease influenced the lower than expected population numbers.

Will the hunt remain suspended indefinitely?

This is not the intent. Alberta Environment and Parks plans to reinstate the hunt when surveys indicate that population management objectives have been satisfied and a limited harvest is sustainable in the long-term. The Hay-Zama population remains a part of the disease management program, the objectives of which are to maintain a reduced herd range to avoid migration towards diseased bison in Wood Buffalo National Park.

Alberta Environment and Parks enhanced its monitoring program of the Hay-Zama population in March 2020. Global Positioning System (GPS) collars on a subset of bison will increase understanding of natural mortality, recruitment, movement patterns, habitat use and other key information to help address recovery actions.

A suspended Hay-Zama hunt is not new. In 2013-14 overwintering mortality caused a one year suspension. The hunt resumed in 2014-15.

How will you make sure bison are not moving eastward?

Bison are known to use travel corridors in their range, including the Zama highway. We continue to monitor their movements with the help of citizen reports when they see bison on the highway, and with movement information from collared bison. Hazing efforts at times push bison westward and away from Highway 35.

We have engaged with stakeholder groups, including local municipalities, to encourage public and local communities to report bison outside of their normal range. The ministry will respond to situations where management actions are required.

Map: Northwest Bison Protection Area

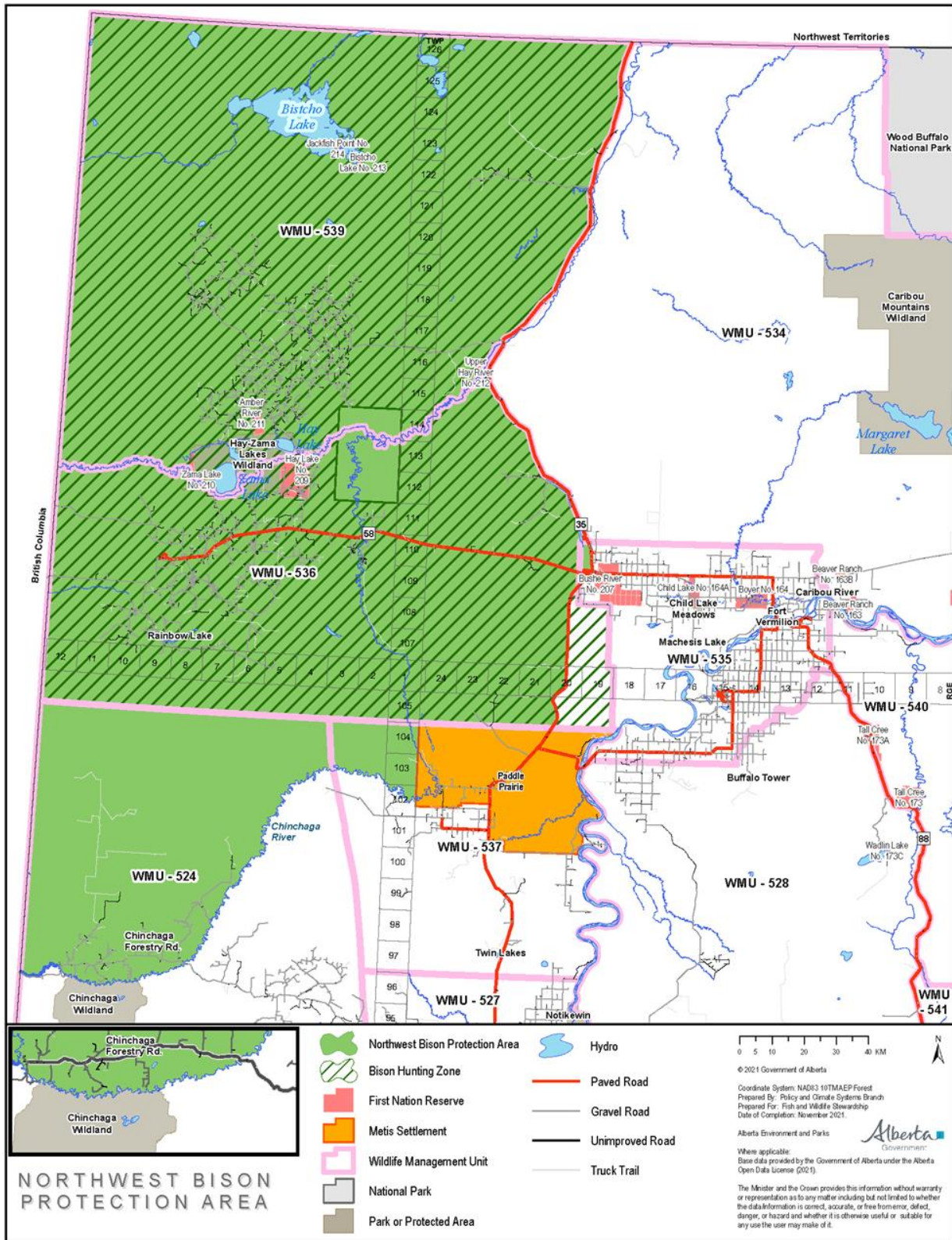


Figure 1: Map of Northwest Bison Protection Area. Downloadable geospatial enabled pdf available from Open Alberta (<https://open.alberta.ca/publications/northwest-bison-protection-area-map>)

For more information, contact the Peace River Environment and Parks office at: 780-624-6496

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