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NEWS RELEASE

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Wood Bison Management Plan Available for Review

A draft management plan for wood bison in the Lower Innoko/Yukon River area is available for public review, and comments will be accepted through February 28, 2015.

The draft plan is available on the Alaska Department of Fish and Game website at:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=woodbison.main>

The plan will be presented to the Federal Subsistence Board in January and to the Alaska Board of Game in February for review and approval. Public comments are appreciated and will be considered in future revisions and refinements of the plan.

The plan is required as one of the final steps prior to releasing wood bison in the wild in spring 2015.

A diverse group of 28 Alaskans representing local communities, regional population centers, landowners, Alaska Native interests, wildlife conservation interests, industry, and State and Federal agencies developed the management plan.

"Everyone brought their concerns, helped identify solutions, and agreed to the principles of the plan," said Rita St. Louis, project planner for wood bison. "It's great to see widespread support for bringing these animals back to our state."

Wood bison were present in Alaska for most of the past ten thousand years, and disappeared over the past 200 years. Skeletal remains and oral histories by Alaska Native elders showed that wood bison were present and hunted for meat, hides and other resources. Sightings of wood bison in Alaska persisted through the early 1900s.

Wood bison are listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act, which normally requires protection of animals and their habitat and can be problematic for natural resource development. However, a special rule under section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act was finalized in May 2014 that establishes wood bison in Alaska as a Nonessential, Experimental Population. The special rule allows hunting of bison and resource development in their habitat, and allows them to be managed similar to other Alaskan wildlife. It is this special rule that requires the development of a management plan prior to the release of wood bison into the wild.

Comments should be sent to:

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More information about wood bison and the restoration project is available on the Department's website at:
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=woodbison.management>

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