

**FEDERAL AID  
FINAL PERFORMANCE REPORT**

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME  
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION  
PO Box 115526  
Juneau, AK 99811-5526

**Alaska Department of Fish and Game  
Wildlife Restoration Grant**

**Grant Number:** AKW-6

**Segment Number: 1**

**Project Number:**

**Project Title:** Wood Bison Transportation

**Project Duration:** February 1, 2015 – January 31, 2016

**Report Period:**

**Report Due Date:** April 30, 2016

**Cooperator:**

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Tom Seaton

**WORK LOCATION:** Fairbanks, Anchorage, Shageluk

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**I. PROBLEM OR NEED THAT PROMPTED THIS RESEARCH**

Wood bison were extirpated in Alaska during the last few hundred years, and by 1900 only a few hundred remained in Canada (Stephenson et al. 2001, Gardner and DeGange 2003). There are now over 5000 wood bison in healthy, free-ranging herds in Canada. Restoring wood bison to one or more parts of their original range in Alaska is a priority in wood bison conservation.

Wood bison restoration is a significant wildlife conservation opportunity for Alaska. Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) has worked with a variety of interests to evaluate the possibility of restoring wood bison in Alaska because of the potential for substantial benefits to wood bison conservation and to the public. During the last 10–15 years the wood bison restoration project has consistently received broad support by people and organizations with diverse interests in Alaska's wildlife.

The wood bison at AWCC have undergone an extensive disease testing and health certification program under a cooperative agreement with the Alaska State Veterinarian and with the involvement and support of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Through March 2014 four wood bison handling and disease testing operations have been conducted and no significant health problems have been identified. The herd has

completed all health certification requirements needed for release to the wild. For many logistical reasons, release can be accomplished only in the springtime. Now we anticipate a release in the spring 2015.

Transporting and establishing wood bison at a proposed release site near Shageluk Alaska. Because of the distance from AWCC and the lack of roads, logistics are expensive and complex. In general, bison must be moved in trailers, loaded onto planes, flown approximately 350 miles, transported from the remote airport to a fenced enclosure, held for a period of time in that enclosure, then “soft released” at the appropriate time.

**II. REVIEW OF PRIOR RESEARCH AND STUDIES IN PROGRESS ON THE PROBLEM OR NEED**

N/A

**III. APPROACHES USED AND FINDINGS RELATED TO THE OBJECTIVES AND TO PROBLEM OR NEED**

This project completes the transportation portion of Alaska’s first wood bison restoration effort. The reintroduction of wood bison has been developing for more than twenty years. The effort has benefited from extensive collaboration with a wide variety of public and agency partners in Alaska and Canada. A high level of cooperation and partnership will continue to be needed to successfully restore one or more wood bison populations in the wild.

**IV. MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

The management implications of this funding are grand. If it weren’t for this funding, the reintroduced population would have been 30 instead of 130. This funding leapt the population forward 10 years in growth, and allowed for a greater genetic diversity and a greater resilience to predation, accidents, and other mortality sources. Size of founder populations is often singled out as one of the deficits in animal relocations. Many years from now, we will look back and be proud of the high number of animals that was used to create this founder population.

**V. SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED ON JOBS**

Federal aid funds were spent on this project to reintroduce wood bison by moving them via truck, aircraft, and river barge from the captive facility at Portage, Alaska to soft release pens near Shageluk Alaska. Funding was directed at the transport contractors, and helped with all the preparations that allowed the reintroduction to happen, such as radiocollar purchase and modification, equipment rental for loading and unloading aircraft, trucks, and barges, building the soft release pens, housing and transport for staff efforts in Portage, Anchorage, and Shageluk areas, and feed and care of bison during captive holding, transport and release. The project was a monumental success. 130 bison

were reintroduced, and not a single animal was injured or died in transport. Some bison traveled 350 miles and some traveled 1000 miles to get to their destination.

**FROM PROJECT STATEMENT:**

**Objectives:**

**Objective 1:** Because of the nature and complexity of this objective, planning began in July 1, 2014 and will continue after the bison are on the ground. Bison shipping containers must be designed and built well ahead of time; some tasks such as transporting hay will be accomplished in early spring 2015 before the bison arrive, but not so early that it will be covered in snow. Transport wood bison from AWCC to the release site and provide feed and care until the wood bison are “soft released” into the wild.

**Job/activity 1a:** transport water tank, fencing, tools and supplies for a 6 acre temporary wood bison enclosure;

**Accomplishments:** Transported 40 tons of feed and 130 bison. Built the temporary enclosure, put it to use, and then removed it, leaving no trace on the landscape.

**Job/activity 1b:** Purchase and transport hay, mineral, and other feeding supplies to the release site;

**Accomplishments:** Purchased and transported hay, mineral, and other feeding supplies to the soft release pens, and to the feeding stations used after release.

**Job/activity 1c:** Purchase & modify bison shipping containers, arrange land and air transport, and rent snow machine, for all phases of moving logistics;

**Accomplishments:** Designed and fabricated 6, 20 ft by 8 ft steel shipping containers. Arranged trucking, air cargo, and barging to transport those containers on several trips, filled with bison.

**Job/activity 1d:** Transport 100 bison from AWCC to the release site by truck and aircraft;

**Accomplishments:** Transported 100 bison from AWCC to the release site by truck and aircraft, and transported and additional 30 adult bull bison by truck and barge.

**VI. PUBLICATIONS**

Wood Bison News Issue Number 9, Fall 2015

**I. ADDITIONAL FEDERAL AID-FUNDED WORK NOT DESCRIBED ABOVE  
THAT WAS ACCOMPLISHED ON THIS PROJECT**

**PREPARED BY: TOM SEATON**

**DATE: 4 DEC 2015**