

**DELTA RIVER BISON CALVING
Proposed Area of Critical Environmental Concern**

Note: This ACEC is being proposed under Alternative C. See descriptions in table below.

Importance: The Delta River riparian zone between Black Rapids and approximately Buffalo Dome, on BLM-GFO managed land, is a narrow river corridor and the southernmost extent of the traditional calving range for the Delta River bison herd. The majority of bison remain at higher elevations along the Delta River corridor throughout calving season (April, May, and June) and into the summer months of July and August, before migrating to lower elevations as the season progresses. In addition, grizzly bears are known to concentrate in this same area during spring and prey upon newborn bison calves.

Since the 1950s, the Delta bison herd has become a source of conflict between private agricultural interests and Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), as more lands in the Delta Junction area have been developed for crop and livestock production. In response, the 1979 Alaska Legislature established the 90,000 acre Delta Junction State Bison Range for the purpose of perpetuating free-ranging bison, by providing adequate winter range and altering seasonal movements of bison and thus reducing damage to agriculture (ADFG Division of Wildlife Conservation 1999). This monumental effort by ADF&G not only reduces the amount of crop and property damage incurred on private lands, it also reduces the likelihood of disease exposure (brucellosis) between cattle and bison.

In the spirit of interagency cooperation, it is recommended that BLM-GFO designate and manage bison habitat in the Delta River corridor as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern. Protection, maintenance, and possibly even enhancement of bison calving habitat would aid ADFG in their efforts to sustain / prolong bison seasonal occupancy of public lands as long as possible throughout the year, thereby further reducing conflicts with private interests.

Description of Area: Proposed area under Alternative C covers 27,202 acres, all of which is unencumbered BLM land

General Stipulations in the Delta Bison ACEC:

Seasonal Limitations

- To protect calving bison, no surface disturbing activities or activities exceeding fourteen days would be permitted from 5/1 to 6/15.

ALTERNATIVES – Delta Bison ACEC

DIFFERENCES IN MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE BY ALTERNATIVE				
Management Actions	Alternative A: Current management	Alternative B: Development end of spectrum	Alternative C: Conserve/maintain end of spectrum	Alternative D
Decision	No ACEC designation.	No ACEC.	Designate ACEC as described above.	No ACEC would be designated. Area described would be managed under measures described below.
Off-Highway-Vehicle (OHV) use	No restrictions.	No restrictions.	OHVs restricted to designated trails 4/15 to 10/15.	OHVs restricted to designated trails May 1 to June 30. Goal to minimize disturbance to calving bison.
New road construction	Considered on case-by-case basis.	Allowed for resource extraction.	No new.	Road construction allowed but limited to those necessary for resource development or extraction. Closed seasonally (5/1 – 6/30) except for emergency purposes.
New airstrip construction	Considered on case-by-case basis.	OK.	No new.	No new airstrip construction unless to support resource development or extraction. Such airstrips would be closed (except for emergency purposes) 5/1 – 6/30.
Minerals: Locatable minerals	Under PLO 5150, open to locatable mineral entry in outer corridor, closed in inner corridor.	Open.	Maintain existing PLO 5150 withdrawals and recommend withdrawal from locatable mineral entry.	Maintain existing closures. Mining operations subject to seasonal restrictions 5/1 to 6/30.
Minerals: Leasable minerals (Oil & Gas)	Under PLO 5150, closed to mineral leasing.	Revoke withdrawal and open.	Maintain existing closure.	Maintain existing closure.

Management Actions	Alternative A: Current management	Alternative B: Development end of spectrum	Alternative C: Conserve/maintain end of spectrum	Alternative D
Minerals: Leasable minerals (Coal)	Under PLO 5150, closed to mineral leasing.	Revoke withdrawal and open for coal leasing, with seasonal stipulations.	Maintain existing closure.	Maintain existing closure.
Minerals: Mineral materials	Considered case-by-case.	Make available.	Do not permit.	Open with stipulations for no activity 5/1 – 6/30.
Public Use Cabins	None currently authorized.	Consider.	Do not permit.	Any new public use cabins should be located along designated trails, closed during 5/1 to 6/30.
Special Recreation Permits (SRP)	No current limits.	No limits.	Limit number issued in area and include stipulations to seasonally limit use.	SRP permits would adhere to general guidelines listed above.
Recreation Facilities	None currently in the area.	Work with ADOT to develop a wayside/interpretive sign to highlight bison.	No new facilities.	No new BLM campgrounds. Other recreation facilities (such as outhouses) would be associated with public use cabins.
Lands and Realty: FLPMA and R&PP leases	Considered case-by-case.	Yes.	No.	FLPMA and R&PP leases would be considered on a case-by-case basis.

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Lands and Realty: FLPMA 302 permits	Considered case-by-case.	Yes.	No.	Occupancy type permits, such as commercial use cabins, would be authorized under the following conditions: 1) no new structures within the area; 2) Existing structures would be authorized only if they can clearly be tied to a commercial enterprise, such as guiding or trapping. Other occupancy permits (non-cabin) would be allowed if consistent with protection of values identified.
Lands and Realty: Rights of Way (ROW)	Considered case-by-case.	Yes.	Avoid.	ROWs would be permitted, with mitigation to minimize impacts to bison (no activity during 5/1 – 6/30, utilize underground powerlines or pipelines whenever possible).
Military permits, activities.	Considered case-by-case.	Yes.	No.	Recommend overflights limited to greater than 1500 feet 5/1 to 6/30. Ground-based activities not permitted 5/1 to 6/30.
Fire	Area is currently managed under a limited suppression class.		No change in suppression class. Prescribed burning activities not permitted 5/1 – 6/15. Primary objective for prescribed or wildland fire will be improvement of forage production and palatability.	Same as C.

