

# STATE OF ALASKA

## DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

### DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

**SARAH PALIN, GOVERNOR**

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April 17, 2007

Dear Alaska Wildlife Enthusiast:

On behalf of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation (ADF&G/DWC), I am happy to announce completion of the report “Wood Bison Restoration in Alaska: A Review of Environmental and Regulatory Issues and Proposed Decisions for Project Implementation” (Environmental Review). This Environmental Review represents a significant milestone in the department’s efforts to evaluate wood bison restoration in Alaska. Public comment on this report will have a major influence in determining whether the department continues to pursue wood bison restoration in Alaska and, if so, where we attempt to restore this historically important species.

Up to this point the proposal to restore wood bison has received support from a wide variety of organizations and individuals interested in Alaska wildlife management and wood bison conservation. In spring 2005 the department established a Wood Bison Restoration Advisory Group that included representatives of several state Fish and Game advisory committees, Native organizations, conservation groups, including both environmental and sportsman’s organizations, and animal welfare interests. After thoroughly reviewing and discussing available information on wood bison, the group unanimously recommended that the department continue to pursue wood bison restoration. The members of this advisory group showed a willingness to set aside differences of opinion on some issues and work together to achieve the common objective of returning wood bison to the wild in Alaska. Continuing this spirit of cooperation will be a key factor in the success of any restoration efforts that are pursued in the future.

Based on public input and thorough biological evaluation, ADF&G believes that wood bison restoration in Alaska represents an outstanding wildlife conservation opportunity and that wood bison restoration will ultimately provide benefits for local and nonlocal hunters and wildlife viewing enthusiasts. It is clear that wood bison are compatible with other wildlife species in the state and can play an important role in restoring and maintaining natural processes. The wood bison restoration project also has significance beyond Alaska. Wood bison restoration in Alaska would help to achieve several goals in Canada’s Wood Bison Recovery Plan and will contribute to international efforts to restore the ecological role of bison throughout North America.

There are some remaining challenges described in the Environmental Review that must be addressed in a cooperative manner in order for the project to move forward. While the department has been preparing this Environmental Review we have also been pursuing several other actions that are necessary to restore wood bison in Alaska. If these actions resolve some regulatory and permitting issues in time, and sufficient public support is evident, we hope to import wood bison stock from Canada in winter 2007–08, and complete preparations to release wood bison into the wild by spring 2010 or 2011.

At present it appears that the issues related to importing bison can be resolved in the coming months, and that there is substantial public interest in working to prepare cooperative management plans to guide wood bison reintroduction and management in specific areas. Continued public support and advocacy from diverse wildlife users will be essential in achieving the wildlife conservation objective of restoring wood bison in Alaska and creating opportunities for diverse users to share in the benefits.

ADF&G is pleased to provide the public with an additional opportunity to comment on this proposal to restore a historically important species to Alaska. We look forward to receiving additional public comments on wood bison restoration. If the public continues to support the project, we are eager to work with various wildlife users, landowners, local governments and managing agencies to evaluate and plan for wood bison restoration in specific locations in Alaska.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "David D. James".

David D. James  
Regional Supervisor  
Division of Wildlife Conservation