



Study specifics

Region: Aishihik area, Yukon

Survey Effort: 8.1 hours, 1,094 km

Survey Date: July 13, 2021

Bison Observed: 954

Adult Bison Observed: 786

Calves Observed: 168

Groups Observed: 39

Group Range Size: 1 – 88

Population survey of reintroduced bison 2021

Project objectives

Population surveys for the Aishihik bison population are used to track their restoration, as well as to support an annual harvest that is popular among Yukoners.

Project background

Bison were reintroduced into the Aishihik area from 1988 to 1992 as part of a national recovery effort to restore the species to its native range.

We conducted the last population survey in July 2016 and estimated 1,325 adults in the herd. A survey was scheduled for July 2019; however, for the third year in a row, we could not conduct the survey due to circumstances beyond our control. In 2021, extensive forest fires made it difficult to procure a helicopter.

Project overview

Instead of a population survey, we sought to obtain a minimum count by counting as many bison as possible during one day.

We focused our search effort on known locations of 22 GPS-collared bison and other areas known to be seasonally used. We had 29 collars active in 2020 and 22 in 2021, which made it harder to find bison.

Key findings

We flew approximately 1,094 km (excluding the distance on the ferry to and from Whitehorse). We observed 39 groups of bison, totaling 786 adults and 168 calves.

The Minimum Number Known Alive in July 2021 was 786 adult bison. By comparison, the Minimum Number Known Alive in July 2020 was 1,054 adult bison.

In July 2021, calf production (two per cent) and the ratio of dominant bulls to adult females and yearlings (seven per cent) were lower than that

observed in July 2020 (26 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively).

Reasons for the lower population values in 2021 versus 2020 are unknown, but may be due to either a poorer survey or an actual decrease in the population. This uncertainty is a hazard of conducting Minimum Number Known Alive surveys.

The true population size remains unknown, and there is a need to get an accurate population estimate to inform a plan review and harvest management.



For more information, please contact

Thomas Jung: 867-667-5766
Senior Wildlife Biologist
Shawn Taylor: 867-633-2394
Kluane Regional Biologist

