

FOR RELEASE #07-125
June 15, 2007

ANNUAL BISON HUNT EXPANDED FOR MORE HARVESTING OPPORTUNITIES

WHITEHORSE – Environment Minister Dennis Fentie announced today that the annual Yukon bison hunt will provide more harvesting opportunities by expanding the hunting area, lengthening the season and increasing the number of permits.

“The government has approved significant changes as recommended by the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, and endorsed by the wood bison technical team. Our current estimate is a minimum of 700 wood bison. We have calculated that the herd grows at a rate of approximately 15 to 20 per cent per year,” Fentie said.

Changes to the hunting regulations will help control population growth, increase hunting opportunities and create a favourable gender ratio. Changes include the following highlights:

- Almost all hunting sub-zones from the Haines Junction area, east to Teslin and then north to Stewart Crossing, will be open to bison hunting;
- Each of the two bison permit hunt seasons will be extended by one month;
- Hunters, who take a cow rather than a bull, will now be able to apply for a bison permit the next license year, rather than waiting five years. However, these hunters will only be eligible to receive a permit if there are permits left over after the lottery; and
- The department has the authority to issue up to a maximum of 1,000 permits in a season, rather than 250; yet, it does not mean 1,000 permits will be issued each year. The change will give wildlife managers the administrative ability to determine and set harvest limits each year.

“We hope hunters will take advantage of these changes to the bison hunt regulations. In return for the reward of a successful hunt, hunters will also play a crucial role in helping to keep the bison population at an ideal level,” Fentie added.

Overall, more hunting permits will be issued this year with a total of 281, up from 244. Licensed hunters will be able to apply for 155 permits this year, up from 132 issued last year. More permits will also be issued by and to the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, the Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation, area outfitters, the Department of Education and the Yukon Fish and Game Association.

Environment Yukon will begin offering the bison permit hunt applications on Monday, June 18 with a submission deadline of 4 p.m. on Friday, July 20.

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Attachment: Detailed background information about the 2007-08 Yukon Wood Bison hunt.

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ATTACHMENT: Detailed Information Regarding the 2007-08 Yukon Wood Bison Hunt

The 170 bison released in the Nisling River valley, between 1988 and 1992, were introduced as part of the national Wood Bison Recovery Program. They expanded their range to the Aishihik, Sekulmun and Hutshi lake watersheds. Surveys conducted in the past year indicate that the herd had grown to about 700. The Wood Bison herd is the most closely supervised wildlife population in Yukon, and must be carefully managed so its population neither drops below 400, nor grows too rapidly.

Hunting is the primary population control. So far wolves do not yet prey extensively on bison. Without hunting, the herd would grow at a rate of 15-20 per cent per year. The bison permit hunt started in 1998: 594 bison – two-thirds of which were bulls – were harvested. There were 87 taken in 2006-07 season. But, even with hunting, the herd continues to grow at a considerable rate.

Yukon Wood Bison, once easy to approach, have become increasingly wary of humans and have expanded their range. A successful hunt now requires more time and effort, but the rewards are substantial. The average adult cow weighs about 450 to 630 kg (1,000 to 1,400 lb.). A large bull can weigh 1,000 kg (2,200 lb.) on the hoof, with much of this weight from the viscera and head.

Yukon government biologists are concerned about the herd's composition and hope harvesting more cows, and fewer bulls, will bring the herd's gender ratio to a level that will eventually lead to a moderate and manageable growth.

Beginning this 2007–08 season, hunters have an incentive to take cows rather than bulls. Now, hunters who take a cow will be able to apply for a bison permit in the next license year, rather than five years later. However, they will only be eligible for a permit if there are some left over after the annual lottery.

Each of the winter/spring permit hunt seasons will be extended by one month. Hunters are now given an option of one of two, three-month periods rather than one of two, two-month hunt periods. This year the two permit hunts are: December, January and February; and, December, January, March.

Overall, more hunting permits are being issued and the number of hunting zones has increased. Permits *will not* be issued for game management zones 1, 2, 6, 10, 11 and sub-zones 4-03, 4-51 (Faro).

The total number of permits being issued has increased to 281 this year, up from 244 last year. Licensed hunters will be able to apply for 155 permits this year from 132 last year. The Champagne and Aishihik First Nations will be issuing 92 permits, rather than 80 last year. The Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation will have 18 permits, rather than 16 last year. Ten permits will be available to area outfitters, five permits will be issued to the Department of Education for its school hunt programs, and one permit will go to the Yukon Fish and Game Association.

In continuing its management and study of the herd, Environment Yukon is collecting data from about 25 radio-collared bison and plans to collar a few more bison this July. Collared bison are protected from hunting.

This winter, Environment Yukon will also be testing a new bison health monitoring program. The department will be asking a small group of experienced bison hunters to collect biological samples and health information.

Hunters will be given training and support, and if the trial project is successful, the program will be expanded to include 'community health monitors' who will work to ensure there is ongoing health information about this important herd. For more information, call Dr. Michelle Oakley at (867) 634-2439 or 1-800-661-0408, extension 2439.