

Species at Risk Act (SARA) Consultation,
Cooperation and Accommodation Project
Plains Bison Listing Workshop for:
Environment and Climate Change Canada –
Canadian Wildlife Service - Prairie Region
Participant Summary Report

Created by:
The Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER)
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CIER
Centre for Indigenous
Environmental Resources

Acknowledgements

The Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER) and Environment and Climate Change Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service (ECCC-CWS) would like to thank the participants that attended the virtual *Species at Risk Act (SARA) Consultation, Cooperation, and Accommodation Project* workshop titled 'Plains Bison: Pre-Listing Workshop' on May 25th, 2022.

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Introduction

The objective of the multi-year *Species at Risk Act (SARA) Consultation, Cooperation and Accommodation Project* is to facilitate Indigenous communities' and organizations' participation in Environment and Climate Change Canada's (ECCC) listing and recovery planning processes for terrestrial species as part of implementing the federal *Species at Risk Act (SARA)*. Each region will focus their resources on an area of study and development that maximizes efforts to each species.

The Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER) role is to support and facilitate a range of activities between Indigenous communities and organizations, and ECCC on developing recovery documents, sharing knowledge and language, addressing threats to terrestrial species at risk survival and recovery, and land use planning for species at risk on reserve lands and within traditional territories. CIER also manages the provision of funds on behalf of ECCC, including: SARA participation fees, capacity funding and Expression of Interest funding for Indigenous-led species at risk (SAR) projects.

The workshop was organized and facilitated by CIER in conjunction with, and lead by, ECCC. There were two key presentations, 'Overview of the federal process for assessing and listing wild Plains Bison with Q & A' lead by Consultation Biologist Wendy Eskowich and the 'Current status of wild Plains Bison in Canada with Q & A' presented by Senior Wildlife Biologist Richard Wiacek. Following the presentations there was a fruitful discussion period in which all participants were invited to share their experiences with Plains Bison, discuss ongoing concerns, and discover other projects of interest brought forth by the various communities and organizations.

Participants

The invite for this online event was distributed by ECCC to its contacts for all First Nations and in total, 41 individuals registered to attend the event and 16 of those attended on the day. These 16 participants (not including CIER and ECCC staff) represented 13 Indigenous nations and organizations.

Workshop Purpose

The specific purpose of this Plains Bison Listing Workshop was to provide an opportunity for Indigenous Peoples to discuss the possible impacts of the potential listing of wild Plains Bison as Threatened under Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*. The workshop aimed to create an ethical space for participants to voice comments or concerns for inclusion in the public record, to help inform the Minister's recommendation on whether or not to list wild Plains Bison.

Specific objectives of the workshop included:

- Communicate details of the federal process for assessing and potentially listing wild Plains Bison under the *Species at Risk Act (SARA)*;
- Discuss the current status of wild Plains Bison in Canada including threats and reasons for the COSEWIC designation;
- Give space for participants to speak to the significance of Plains Bison for their communities and voice comments or concerns about the potential listing of wild Plains Bison;

- Provide a venue to build relationships and start a broader discussion on the recovery of wild Plains Bison in Canada;
- Have regional ECCC staff available to engage in a Q&A to clarify the Species at Risk Recovery Process and/or available funding opportunities to support Indigenous participation in this process;
- Allow participants to provide verbal comments or concerns about the potential listing of wild Plains Bison.

Graphic Recording

A graphic recording (Figure 1) was created by Aaron Russell (Conference Doodles) throughout the presentation to highlight key themes that were iterated and highlighted as significant by workshop participants. Participants had the opportunity to review the graphic recording in real time and provided feedback at the conclusion of the workshop.

Figure 1. Graphic Recording from the Plains Bison Listing Workshop held May 25th, 2022.



Overview of Presentations

Presentation 1: Overview of the federal process for assessing and potentially listing wild Plains Bison

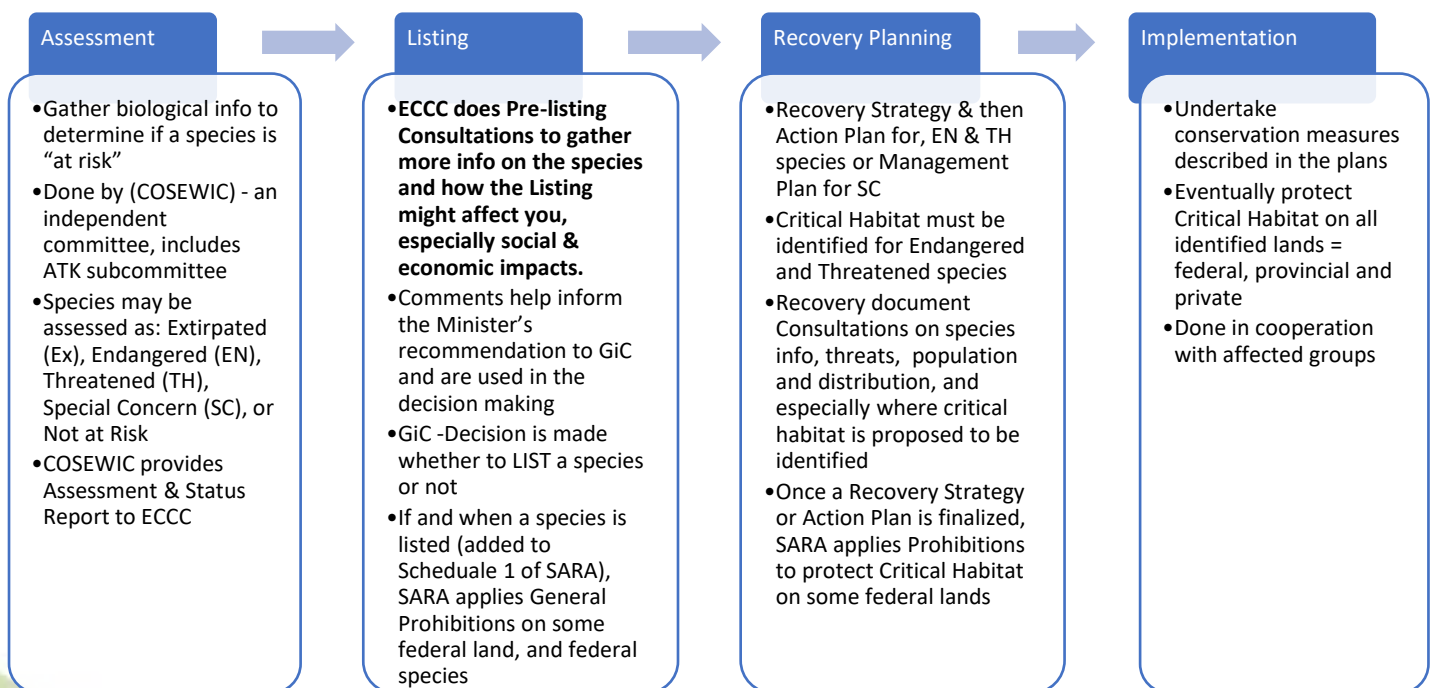
The objective for this presentation was to share information about the federal process for assessing and potentially listing wild Plains Bison under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA).

The *Species at Risk Act* is intended to protect wildlife species at risk in Canada and work in a complementary fashion with Provincial legislation (see Figure 2) to allow for the recovery of those species and their habitats. In Figure 2 below, Plains Bison is currently in the Pre-listing consultation phase (in bold) of the SARA Recovery Planning process.

When deciding whether to list a species, the Minister considers:

- Recommendations from the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) and the Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge sub-committee;
- If the species supports livelihoods (e.g., through harvesting, subsistence, or medicine);
- Potential impacts to people's activities including cultural, social, or economic costs or benefits to individuals, communities, or organizations IF wild Plains Bison is listed;
- Any current/planned activities that may overlap the species' range or harm the species and/or destroy part of its habitat;
- Any other information people choose to share during consultation.

Figure 2. The SARA process as it relates to wild Plains Bison. Adapted from SARA presentation by Wendy Eskowich, ECCC-CWS. Species are generally re-assessed every 10 years.



Presentation 2: Current status of Plains Bison in Canada

The objective of this second presentation was to provide participants with an overview of the historical/current situation of wild Plains Bison and its status within the SARA Recovery Planning Process.

The population of Plains Bison were decimated by settlers (1840–1880) as a result of market hunting and lack of protection, as well as cultivation and alteration of habitat. Currently, Plains Bison have a fragmented distribution with complex management arrangements due to the different populations: wild, conservation and ranch herds. In 2013, COSEWIC evaluated five “wild by nature” herds with an approximate total population size of 2,500. Only herds that are “wild by nature” are considered by COSEWIC and listed under SARA. In 2017, a new “wild by nature” herd was established in Banff National Park.

Factors that support ‘wild’ designation:

- Presence of effective predators
- Mating competition among mature males
- Periodic resource limitation
- Large geographic area to support free-roaming movements and behaviors

Factors that *do not* support ‘wild’ designation:

- Supplemental feeding & watering
- Supplemental disease treatment
- Non-random selection of individual removal (via harvest, translocations, etc.)

Key Themes/Discussion Summary

To start off the discussion, participants were asked, “What word comes to mind when you think about Plains Bison?” Their responses were captured in a word cloud (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Word cloud exercise

What word comes to mind when you think about Plains Bison?



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The discussion and comments that followed broadly covered the following topics:

- *Loss of traditional knowledge of bison*
 - Due to residential schools and colonization in all of its forms and the drastic decline in bison numbers after settlers arrived, many cultural practices, ways of knowing/life and economies regarding bison were not passed down through the generations.
 - However, there is hope for revitalization of this knowledge, as one participant put it, “We are re-learning what we were unable to learn for decades.”
- *Bison support livelihoods*
 - As the bison population numbers are very low, it can be difficult to exercise harvesting/treaty rights.
 - Some Indigenous Peoples still hunt bison according to their traditional cultural practices.
 - Sustainability is inherent in traditional harvesting practices.
 - Several participants raised concern around the uncertainty and lack of a clear answer as to whether listing wild Plains Bison would affect Indigenous hunting rights.
- *Listing under the SARA*
 - General support for the listing of wild Plains Bison to ensure their protection.
 - Aboriginal and Treaty rights must be recognized and respected; further engagement is required.
 - Concern for why wild and farmed bison are considered distinct as there are higher populations of farmed bison.
- *Additional Recommendations*
 - Confusion around jurisdiction (Provincial or Federal ‘ownership’ of the land/leasing of the land). For example, the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range and First Nations’ access to parts of it for harvesting activities.
 - The oil and gas industry have ‘taken over’ the habitat of the Woodland Caribou, don’t want this to happen for Plains Bison.
 - Skepticism of the inclusion of Indigenous groups/communities now, after years of being disregarded on account of the historical/current relationship of settlers and Indigenous Peoples where systemic racism and disenfranchisement has been prevalent
 - Uncertainty around wild vs ranched vs cultural/conservation herds of bison and how this applies to SARA listing, especially in relation to previously captive escapees.
 - Desire for the possible re-introduction of Plains Bison (rematriation) in other Nations’ territories.
 - Curiosity of the level of involvement/influence that other non-Indigenous organizations (stakeholders) have on the listing decision.
 - In-person workshops would be beneficial for the participation of older generations in SARA listing consultations.

Appendix A: Plains Bison Session Agenda

Time (MDT)	Agenda Item (presenter)	Notes
1:00 PM	Welcome and acknowledgements Kate Hewitt, CIER	Acknowledgements: Elder George Desjarlais, West Moberly First Nations Lands Dept. – Opening Prayer Wendy Eskowich, ECCC-CWS Richard Wiacek, ECCC-CWS Paulson Des Brisay, ECCC-CWS Greg Wilson, Parks Canada Melissa Gus, CIER
1:10 PM	Introductions, agenda and housekeeping, workshop process Kate Hewitt, CIER / Melissa Gus, CIER	
1:25 PM	Ice Breaker & opportunity to share	Polling Question #1 (Wordcloud): What word comes to mind when you think of Plains Bison?
1:45 PM	Overview of the federal process for assessing and listing wild Plains Bison with Q & A	Presentation by Wendy Eskowich, ECCC–CWS
2:15 PM	Current status of wild Plains Bison in Canada with Q & A	Presentation by Richard Wiacek, ECCC–CWS
2:45 PM	Break	
3:00 PM	Discussion: Comments on the implications of listing wild Plains Bison Wendy Eskowich, ECCC–CWS	Polling Question #2: <i>Do you think that listing wild Plains Bison is an effective step for protection of the species</i> Polling Question #3: <i>Do you think that listing wild Plains Bison is an effective step for recovery of the species</i>
4:00 PM	Open Q&A (all)	
4:30 PM	Facilitator summary (Kate Hewitt, CIER)	
4:50 PM	Close of workshop	Elder George Desjarlais, West Moberly First Nations Lands Dept. – Closing Prayer

Appendix B: Transcript (Q&A)

Presentation #1 Q&A

Q: Does general prohibitions of listed species under SARA include status Indians and their harvesting rights?

CWS: Ah, the harvest question. I was wondering how far we would get into the presentation before that was asked. Excellent question. You're not going to like my answer. It is a question that we have been asking for some time now, not just as it applies to Plains Bison, but obviously, also caribou, and other harvestable species. So, my answer is: unfortunately, I'm not a lawyer, and the matter is currently with our legal department, so I can't speak to it directly. But what I can tell you, is that the very question that you are asking is, in fact, the type of information or concern or comment that we are looking for today, to give to the Minister to help inform his opinion on whether to list bison or not.

So your question is, "is it going to impact my harvesting rights?" That is exactly what you need to submit today - that you are concerned that it could. That's why I put those first two slides up there about what the Species at Risk Act currently says. And Section 3 says, you know, the Act can't take away from or add to existing Aboriginal traditional or treaty rights. So you can take that as you wish. But I would encourage you to submit that as a comment on the listing.

Q: If the bison are listed, and we have intentions to bring a herd of plains bison into our lands, how would the listing affect our ability to do so? Will it facilitate such a movement or growth? Or make it more difficult? Does it depend on if they're considered farmed or semi-wild?

CWS: You are right at the very end, when you say, "does it depend on if they're considered farmed or semi wild?" And then actually [are they] from the wild stock? And I'm going to defer your question to after we have Richard's presentation, because in that, he does explain the difference between the different statuses: what we call a wild herd versus a farmed versus a semi-wild herd. But in a general sense,, I could say that right now, the listing of the wild plain's bison herds, I don't think it would affect your ability to bring stock. I guess it's going to depend on where that stock comes from.

But I would think in terms of the current management of those wild herds, whether it's listed or not, we're trying to keep them as they are. We're not wanting to have them become further at risk. And so I don't think the listing would affect it, but I don't know for sure.

Q: Are there any known communities who are near the wild herd that may be directly affected by this protection in regard to law and land protection? If there is, will they be contacted directly before this is implemented?

CWS: Absolutely. There are communities who are near the wild herds and they have been contacted directly by myself. And in the letter to them, I have specifically stated that their community either has reserve lands on which the wild herds may be found or are near, and in this term near, I think we picked a 100-kilometer buffer.

So basically, everybody even within the historical range of plains bison range across the prairies received the consultation listing. And then those that are located *close to* those wild herds, their letter emphasized, "You are close to a wild herd... so please pay attention to the letter because we would really appreciate you being here." Yes, so they have been contacted. And we are especially hoping to hear from those communities that *are* close to the wild herds, hear their comments and concerns about the potential listing.

Q: What are considered federal lands? What are considered provincial lands? What are considered traditional territories of Indigenous Peoples? All of those, have they been defined? And under the Species at Risk Act, those definitions, are they the reason I'm asking this is - there's a lake called McCusker, I'm led to believe that there's some buffalo in and around that lake. So when you say that the SARA rules and regulations apply to federal lands, with the air weapons range would be considered federal land or is it still provincial lands leased by the federal government?

CWS: That is an excellent question. And I don't know the answer off the top of my head. I thought I had the answer until you said it. So my understanding from past experiences when it comes to the distinction between ownership versus lease for example, with the PFRA pastures, that it comes down to the ownership of those lands as to how they are defined, but that is my thinking off the top of my head. I would want to confirm that. But if they are, in fact, *owned* by the federal government, the DND lands, then they would be considered federal lands.

Now, under SARA, there are a couple of different groupings of federal lands. There are ones that are called federal lands such as Parks Canada, national parks, national wildlife areas, migratory bird sanctuaries, where some of the listing prohibitions are automatic, if it was listed, would occur on those lands.

And then there are "other federal lands," such as First Nation reserve lands, in which an order needs to be applied in order to, for example, protect critical habitat on those *other federal lands*. And then there are provincial lands. Again, that also would require an order to define critical habitat on those provincial or private lands.

In terms of traditional territories, they are not defined in SARA, as far as I'm aware. But we are very cognisant of the fact that Indigenous traditional territories and rights that go along with those encompass all of those lands.

And so with regards to the specifics of the McCusker herd, yes, there is a herd of wild bison there. This is something that I need to seek for further clarification on because I don't know if the DND lands are owned by the Department of National Defense or if they are leased, but if they are owned by them, they would be considered federal lands.

Follow up Comment: The reason I'm bringing this up is because we're now in the process of working with the government in relation to the Cold Lake herd of the woodland caribou and we're trying to protect their critical habitat so as referred to the somewhere in SARA language.

So, if that's the case, the herd is on the Alberta side in the air weapons range. The McCusker herd of the wild bison in that area, is on the Saskatchewan side. But it's all within our defined traditional lands that [are now called] Canada. Alberta and Saskatchewan are a party in agreement to. So that's why I'm asking these because now, I wasn't aware that there was a herd. This was the first that I've heard of it.

But we have been quite involved in the caribou preservation in our traditional land. So this is why I'm asking. If those are going to be considered federal lands, particularly the air weapons range, then that gives us a little better tool to work with to be able to protect the habitat. Because on the Alberta side, the oil and gas industry have almost decimated the critical habitat of the woodland caribou.

And we're trying like hell to help recover that portion of it. So if that's the case, thank goodness there's no oil and gas development on the Saskatchewan side, which would make it a little easier for us to help protect those. So I'm just curious to know like, can we do that?

CWS: It's a great question. I know, you refer to the Cold Lake caribou herd. There have been a lot of discussions around whose land that is, based on the caribou issues in that area. And we will have to confirm the response. But my understanding, because it's *leased* by Canada, that its provincial; it's recognized as provincial land.

So, if that's the case, and we will have to confirm that, if that's the case that its provincial land, SARA prohibitions wouldn't automatically apply. But they could apply if there was an order, either by the Minister or by GIC: Government in Council = Cabinet. And maybe Greg wants to jump in here if he has some memory of that, too. But I'm not 100 percent certain its provincial. But I think it is, and we'll just have to confirm that for you. But it's a great question. It's really an important question.

To be clear, there wouldn't be any critical habitat identified *unless* this species is listed first. And then critical habitat would be identified as part of the recovery strategy. So, in terms of protecting habitat, critical habitat, and where that is defined, and how that is defined, that step is not even going to happen *unless* [wild] Plains Bison are listed first. So just to be clear on that, that portion of the equation, yeah, is very important.

Follow up Comment/Question: But just to bring you up to speed on this, you are now looking at proposing to list the plains bison. But the woodland caribou have already been listed. And they're in close proximity to each other. So that's why I'm asking, why does it apply to one species in close proximity to another, which is being proposed to be listed? So, the other thing our particular area is that there's a few buffalo ranchers. So, what's the difference between a wild and a buffalo farm?

When you're saying extirpated, are they're going to go out of existence? Well, these farmers aren't going to shoot them, kill them off their farms right away. They're doing it for economic reasons and all that stuff. Why there, and not somewhere else, particularly now that the wild Plains Buffalo are being considered to be listed on SARA, when there's a whole pile of other farmers locally that probably got more than what's available at the McCusker's.

CWS: But absolutely, in terms of the process, what you're asking in terms of the SARA process is very much legitimate and any information we can get to clarify what would happen *if* the bison were listed and how that might interplay on that particular herd on the Alberta side or Saskatchewan. We'll be sure [to look into] and get back to you with that. But right [now], Richard will explain the difference between the wild herds and the local herds and the bison herds in his presentation.

Comment/Q: There's one more question on your presentation that I'm curious about. You know, from the time your ancestors migrated to this country, just part of our planet, which we refer to as Turtle Island, we were here and taking care of Turtle Island and all its inhabitants. And we did pretty good for a good while, because you guys come along and killed off all the buffalo so as you could starve us out and take the clothing away from us and all our medicines.

And now I looked in your presentation that you just said a little while ago, and you're saying that you value Aboriginal traditional knowledge. And by the way, I kind of have a bad taste in my mouth when you say Aboriginal because, you know, the prefix meaning of 'Ab' means 'not.' I beg to differ in that we are the *original* inhabitants of Turtle Island. So why are we, and our point of view valued now, when all of these last few 100 years, we've been telling you, please take it easy, don't do this, don't do that. But you did it anyway.

And now you're looking at saving a species of animal that you guys had wiped out. It's hard to understand from the stories that I've heard since I was a kid. And I'm kind of an old man now over the hill type of thing. So, I'm just curious why all this language suddenly. It bothers me. And now you're asking for our

traditional knowledge. Well, you guys take the traditional knowledge out of a bunch of us through your residential schools and everything else. Which makes it kind of tough to get it back. Because our traditions have been the oral traditions.

When we were sent to residential schools, that was beaten out of us by the people who were supposedly teaching there. And so, it's hard to understand, from my perspective, why all of this becomes so important all of a sudden, when you did all of this for the last 200 or 300 years, kind of hard. But anyways, I'll pass that on to Richard. Just remember that we're not Aboriginal here. We are original to this part of the world. You were original to another part of the world where your ancestors were. So pleased when you say Aboriginal, be careful about how you use that.

CWS: I want to thank you very much for your comments and for educating me on that. I had never thought of looking at the word Aboriginal as that and going forward, I will be very careful when that is used, and I really do appreciate you drawing that to my attention and for sharing your thoughts with me on that. So, thank you for that.

PRESENTATION #2 Q&A

Q: Would you consider the caribou in Jasper National Park which are to be corralled this year to be considered wild by nature?

CWS: I would consider them to be, well, wild by nature - if they're not yet corralled, they'd be wild by nature. And that's a good, that's a tough question. It depends on how long they would be corralled for, what conditions they're kept under. If most of the factors in terms of social structures or some of the other natural factors that are affecting the herd, then they would likely be considered wild by nature. If they're corralled but that's a tough one to answer. I think that would require a little bit more thought to give a definitive answer to that.

Q: While designation for Grasslands National Park herd, what would the natural predators be in that area? Or is that one of the limitations of the definition?

CWS: I believe that's one of the limitations. I'm aware that some of the natural predators are moving eastward out of the Rocky Mountains. There's been grizzly bears seen further and further east in Alberta. I don't believe they've gone to grassland yet. So, I don't believe wolves are there, but coyotes are there. So yeah, I think the predators is one of those limiting factors on that herd.

Q: I have one question for you, there's one that you mentioned, I believe it's the Sturgeon River. When they get out of there, whatever they're enclosed in, they're subjected to harvesting. Who does the harvesting?

CWS: Yeah, sure. So, they don't actually get out of anything. There's no fence between Prince Albert National Park and surrounding provincial land. So, then they're free to go back and forth. And there's limits on hunting, but there's no limits on Indigenous hunting in the area. So, it's usually Indigenous Peoples that have been doing the hunting

Q: So, after five years, let's say that it is listed. Like what does that number have to return to before it is unlisted again?

CWS: That's a good question. We would need to see the numbers increased substantially. So, we probably need to see at least a doubling of the population. And we would need to see a few additional herds added to the number of existing herds to probably put them into a special concern category. So, there'd be, I think a number of things would have to happen for down list to occur.

Q: So, I need to say, down listing to special concern, are they a special concern right now?

CWS: They're not. They're not listed at all right now under SARA. So, the COSEWIC has recommended that we list them as threatened. So, if we do this then, that's likely what we would list them as. And if in the future, the populations go up, and they've reached a threshold that COSEWIC considers is a threshold for classifying as Special Concern, because you could make that recommendation. And then again, we go through another listing process. We would do additional consultation and engagement on whether we were to down-list them at that point. But currently, they're not listed, and we are considering listing them as threatened.

For species that are assessed as threatened or endangered, a recovery strategy would be written if they are listed. And part of the requirement of a recovery strategy is then to also identify critical habitat, which the [habitat] species rely upon, defined in the Species at Risk Act as "the habitat necessary for their survival and recovery of a listed species." And so critical habitat would be identified eventually, if they are listed as threatened, in a recovery strategy or an action plan.

If they were ever to be listed and then down listed as special concern, special concern species do not have critical habitat identified. Their recovery is based upon what's called a Management

Plan. It's sort of more broad conservation measures. So right now, the COSEWIC assessment is threatened. If they are listed as threatened, [that] carries with it the identification and potential protection of critical habitat, which is something to be aware of, in forming an opinion on potential impacts, versus a species of special concern in which SARA does not regulate or require the protection, identification or protection of critical habitat.

Q: So, I guess one of my questions would be for this critical habitat, if, let's say, the herd does grow, let's say it is listed, and then like in two years, the herd grows substantially. And now you have more of them roaming around. And let's say they are outside their buffer zone of 100 kilometers, like you said, and now they go on to our traditional lands, but we're not allowed to harvest any of it because of that buffer. Is that what is that?

CWS: No, actually, that 100-kilometer buffer I mentioned, was just an arbitrary buffer that we selected to *make sure* that the First Nations communities and Metis groups within 100 kilometers of those particular wild herds got a [specific] notification about the potential listing - the wording in it was slightly changed compared to everybody else's [notification].

All the other communities across the whole historic range got a letter that said, "If you're interested and want to comment on the potential listing, here's your opportunity during the comment period", where as the First Nations and Metis groups *close* to those herds, and Indigenous organizations, got a letter that said, "because you are so close to these herds, we encourage you to have a closer look at the information and provide comments." So that's the only thing with the 100-kilometer buffer.

But in terms of down the road, if it's listed, the identification of critical habitat in a recovery strategy would take place in consultation with groups that could be affected by that identification of critical habitat, however broad it is. So, if it goes, for example, outside of a national park area, then the communities around that would be engaged, but everybody receives that notification and opportunity to provide comment in the development of that recovery strategy.

There wouldn't be like, oh, 100-kilometer buffer, and then you're cut off, and I'm not going to contact you and let you know about the opportunity to be informed and cooperate within the development of the recovery strategy. Especially for a species like this, we would tend to go broader, and engage and consult and cooperate in the writing of a recovery strategy if the species is listed. So yeah, not 100-kilometer buffer and if you're outside of that, we're not going to talk to you. Not at all. Everybody will be notified.

Q: I'm asking about when it is listed, right, and we were talking about like right now, you said that it can be like if they go outside of the park, right, then they can be harvested right. So now, if it is listed, then there will be no more harvesting of those animals?

CWS: *If* it is listed, there would be no more harvesting [on some lands]. There would be automatic prohibitions on the federal park lands. But those automatic prohibitions would not be applied to animals that go outside of the national park boundaries depending on what the land tenure is outside of that. Unless there is an order put in place to restrict that harvest.

And secondly, the whole question of the day, Indigenous rights to harvest is very pertinent to that discussion. So, protection of the individuals from harvest, that blanket statement in the SARA process, would apply to non-Indigenous people, for sure. And then the question of regarding Indigenous harvest outside of the national park boundaries, and to some extent, possibly even within, depending what the *current* rights are, I don't know if there is any Indigenous harvest allowed in the parks, or going on in the parks right now. But that is still a topic of conversation yet to be had.

That's why the question is with legal and being discussed, because we recognize it's a key question to [inform] how Indigenous groups would feel about the potential listing. Which is why

it's frustrating not to have an answer yet to be able to tell you. So that's why I say if that's the main concern, and it very well should be, then be sure to submit that as one of the comments on the potential listing.

I think one thing to keep in mind is that the provincial and territorial hunting regulations are going to have a major role here as well. For example, Wood Bison are currently listed as threatened, which is what wild Plains Bison are proposed to be listed as. And there is Indigenous and non-Indigenous hunting of Wood Bison in Yukon, outside of federal lands, and Indigenous hunting in some places in Northwest Territories outside of federal lands. And there can be Indigenous and non-Indigenous hunting in some parts of Alberta, outside of federal lands as well.

Q: So, are you able to tell us what the characteristics of a Plains Bison and the Woods Bison are- that you could tell us the difference in terms of how they look?

CWS: In terms of how they look, the Wood Bison are bigger. They've got a hump, a very distinctive hump above the shoulders. The Plains Bison are more rounded above the shoulders. There are also differences in the type of the hair on top on the upper portion of the head. Wood Bison kind of comes forward and Plains Bison are more of an afro look if you can call it that. There are differences in the beard shape and length. There are differences in the chaps on the legs. So, there are distinct body differences, body shapes, images between the Plains Bison and the Wood Bison.

Q: It appears that the majority of this information that you're passing on, is addressed to the Indigenous communities wherever the Plains Bison are roaming around. What about those other ones? Like I mentioned earlier, I was curious about the air weapons range people, there's military people there. Are they involved in any of these discussions? What about the non-Indigenous communities wherever these bison are being located, you mentioned was one at Prince Albert National Park or what about the community of Prince Albert?

CWS: I can give you a really quick answer and then be happy to communicate with you further on it. In terms of the listing, prelisting consultations, those other groups were engaged previously, back in 2015, when Plains Bison first went through this process. And their comments will be considered, along with anything that happens during this consultation period as well. So, bison industry was consulted. The listing consultation also {went} on the public registry to [consult] the public as a broad thing.

So interested agencies, conservation groups, bison ranchers, everybody got notification of the opportunity to provide comments on the potential listing back in 2015. Right now, we are reengaging and reconsulting just with Indigenous groups, because we want to be sure that there is an opportunity for First Nations in particular, and Metis groups close to those herds, to have their [individual] voices and concerns and questions considered when the Minister makes his recommendation. When we did this process back in 2015, because we didn't know as much then, the number of Indigenous groups that we engaged directly with, (like sent an email with or however it was done, I wasn't privy to that back in 2015), was small. So, we wanted to redo this, because it has been deemed that the amount of consultation that we did back then was inadequate. So that's why now we are reopening the conversation just with Indigenous groups. But all comments received previously will be taken together. And you can get that information.

That's exactly what goes into that Regulatory Impact Assessment Statement (RIAS). So, all the comments are taken in and grouped together by different themes, according to social or economics, and those are in that report that comes out at the 30-day CG1 proposed listing. So that's where you can actually see what other groups said What were the other concerns? So that RIAS report is published at that time, and that is sent out. And then I'll be happy to have a further conversation with you. We're not seeking Indigenous knowledge about Plains Bison, but rather your comments and concerns about the potential listing during this particular process right now. So, I just wanted to clarify that.

Open-Discussion: Comments on the implications of listing wild Plains Bison

Participants were invited to share information or answer a few of the questions provided from Environment and Climate Control Canada (ECCC) below.

Questions/Polls asked to Participants:

Figure 3:

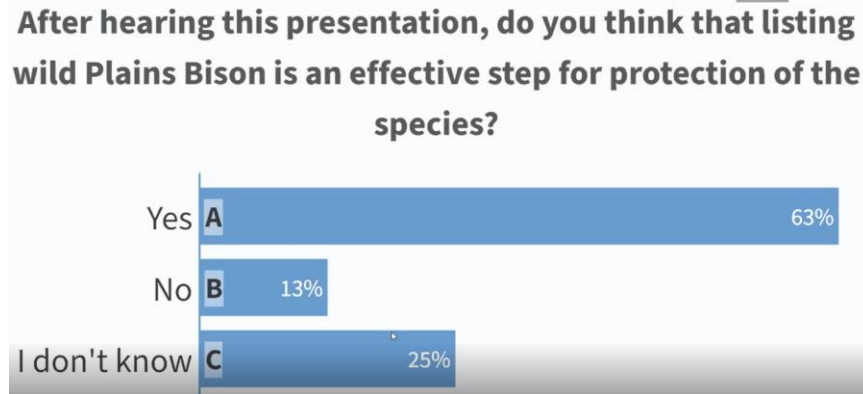
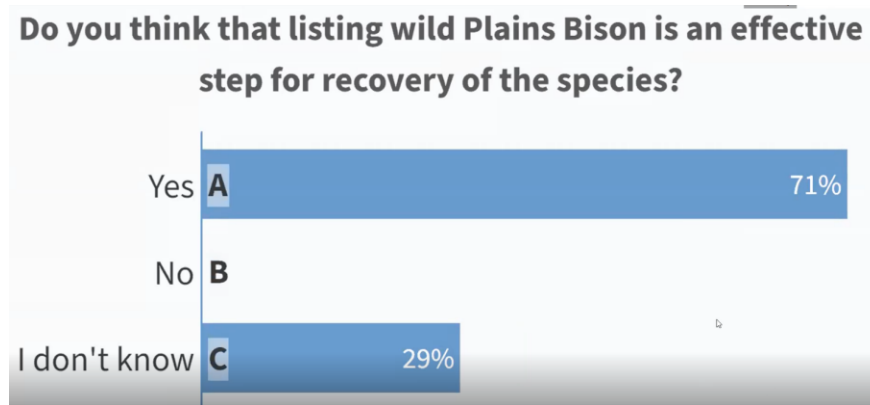


Figure 4:



Other Questions presented for further Discussion:

1. In your community/territory:

- a. Do the wild herds of Plains Bison support livelihoods, e.g., through harvesting, subsistence, or medicine?
- b. Do the wild herds of Plains Bison provide cultural or spiritual benefits?
- c. Do the wild herds of Plains Bison provide environmental benefits?

2. How would listing the wild herds of Plains Bison impact you and/or your community?

- a. What are some costs and/or benefits that would result with listing wild herds of Plains Bison?
- b. Are there any current or planned activities that would be impacted by listing wild Plains Bison?

Comment: I think what was said earlier, about the way that we have not being able to use the buffalo for years and years. And now that we are reintroducing herds into our own communities, I think that right now, we're relearning what we weren't able to learn for decades. For over 100 years, I guess there's some of that stuff has been lost. And as far as the wild herd sustaining us now that I think, with us, like, how would you know, that between a tame and a wild, you know, they don't know that. I mean, it's that living being doesn't know that. It's us that put that tag on them, right. Just because they are put in a fence doesn't mean they are tame. One of the things that I think my concern is, is about like, when we talk about wild herds, and supporting livelihoods, one of the things that I would be thinking of is, if it is listed, and this has to do with what the farmers were saying, that if a wild bison were to come to our land OK, well, what are they going to do? Yeah, please come in and shoot them in. And this was in the community.

And one of the communities where I live, you know, some of their herd got out. And we're talking about herding the buffalo. It's like, oh, how would you herd these buffaloes back into their camp, right? And so, I phoned my dad, and I was taught, I was saying, what do you think this, this buffalo farmer would know, this bison farmer? And he says, well, the best way to do that he says, is with he says, with a shotgun.

And basically, that's how you would control them, I guess. You'd have to. You can't just round them up, I guess. I don't know, I'm going off on a tangent because there's other stuff that I want to say as well. But I'll let some other people in on this conversation and I will express my concerns after.

Q: After all the damage has been done, you're now coming and saying, how can the Indigenous community help to bring back the Plains Buffalo, and all other endangered species in in this country, and probably on this continent North America? Because there's more people in the US than here. So, they cover more land there.

I have a curious point, that is, where is the US? I don't hear from them. And what their opinions are? I would sure like to get that as well. Anyway, I just thought I'd bring that up. Because you're asking us to provide this by way of supporting livelihoods through harvesting, subsistence, medicines. What are they getting out of it?

CWS: But I do hear your point about why we are coming to you now. And I think it's in the spirit of reconciliation and learning from our mistakes and knowing that everybody's knowledge is valuable. And for the benefit of the species at risk going forward. We're trying to do the best we can together on this planet to help preserve the habitats and the species that we all share this ecosystem with. So, I guess that's why we're coming back to our Indigenous partners and brothers right now. We're admitting we don't have all the answers in western science, and just providing the opportunity to share that knowledge and work together for species at risk.

Comment: I just wanted to share we're from The Key First Nation, and in southeast central Saskatchewan. And I put it into the chat, but we were part of a repatriation project. And I just wanted to, for the record, say that I'm 100 percent in support of [adding] the pure Plains Bison on the Species at Risk list. And I did put it in the chat group as well. So just so as everybody notes that. Thank you.