

ISSUES SUBMITTAL FORM

Date: 08/15/2025

ISSUE:	Should CPW make regulation changes to implement Senate Bill 25-053 (Protect Wild Bison)?
DISCUSSION (FACTS AND FIGURES, EXPLANATION OF ISSUE):	
<p>Colorado Senate Bill 25-053 created a dual classification system for bison in Colorado. As of January 1, 2026, bison will be classified as either (1) big game wildlife (“wild bison”) or (2) “domestic bison,” meaning privately owned bison, bison legally reduced to captivity, bison that have escaped lawful captivity, and bison owned by or lawfully reduced to captivity by an Indian tribe, including hybrids with domestic cattle. CPW’s current regulation #1103.A characterizes bison as domestic animals/livestock, which are “exempted from the requirements of Parks and Wildlife Commission regulations.” Therefore, CPW’s current regulatory framework needs to be revised due to the passage of Senate Bill 25-053 (Protect Wild Bison).</p> <p>SB25-053 was intended to protect wild bison coming into Colorado from the Utah Book Cliffs bison herd. The Utah Book Cliffs bison are northwest of Grand Junction and southwest of Rangely. Once Book Cliffs bison entered Colorado, they were unprotected due to CPW’s domestic animal classification in #1103.A. In Utah, the Book Cliffs bison herd is managed by the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources as big game wildlife with regulated hunting. The current population estimate is 580 bison. The bison that exist closer to Colorado generally do not mix with other subherds to the west. There are approximately 130 bison in the sub-herd closest to Colorado.</p> <p>It’s important to note that no diseases of concern have been detected in the Book Cliffs bison herd, including in 2023 and 2024 live animal captures and hunter-harvest sampling. Book Cliffs bison are routinely tested for Brucellosis and Mycoplasma bovis.</p> <p>Colorado District Wildlife Managers have confirmed approximately 12 bison harvests in Colorado in the last 10 years. An estimated 25 bison have been harvested in Colorado in the last 20 years.</p> <p>This issue paper proposes new and amended regulations in Chapters W-0 (General Provisions), W-2 (Big Game), W-11 (Wildlife Parks and Unregulated Wildlife), and W-17 (Game Damage) to implement SB25-053.</p> <p>These proposed regulations are necessary to manage wild bison as big game wildlife and are intended to provide the initial tools necessary to address the following challenges:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Range conditions and forage competition between wild bison, livestock, and other wildlife.2. Damage by wild bison, including fence damage.3. Disease concerns. <p>This issue paper does not propose a regular hunting season for wild bison. The Division plans to do so through a future issue paper after appropriate stakeholder engagement. The Division expects to develop the Book Cliffs Herd Management Plan over the next 18 months, which will guide the future regulations concerning the regulated hunting of wild bison. The Division proposes the creation of a random selection process for the purpose of accepting applications to establish a roster of eligible wild bison hunters in order to issue licenses as authorized by the Director pursuant to regulation #230 if necessary. For licenses issued pursuant to regulations #271, and #272, they will follow the normal issuing process for those types of licenses if necessary.</p>	
STATE LAW REQUIRES CPW TO SOLICIT INPUT FROM STAKEHOLDERS THAT MAY BE AFFECTED POSITIVELY OR NEGATIVELY BY THE PROPOSED RULES. THE FOLLOWING STAKEHOLDERS HAVE BEEN ADVISED OF AND INVITED TO PROVIDE INPUT ON THE REGULATORY CHANGES PROPOSED IN THIS ISSUE PAPER:	

***IT IS ASSUMED THAT ALL NECESSARY INTERNAL PARTIES HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED*.**

This legislation originated in the American Indian Affairs Interim Study Committee. It received extensive public engagement and commenting during the Senate Agriculture Committee Hearing, House Agricultural Committee Hearing, and was also discussed in detail on both the Senate and House floors.

ALTERNATIVES: (POSSIBLE OUTCOMES or POSSIBLE REGULATIONS):

1. ***Preferred Alternative*:** To implement SB25-053, multiple areas in regulation will need to be updated.

The first set of changes is for CHAPTER W-0 - GENERAL PROVISIONS:

Definitions

#000.A.6 Bison.

a. "Domestic bison" means privately owned bison, bison legally reduced to captivity, bison that have escaped lawful captivity, and bison owned by or lawfully reduced to captivity by an Indian tribe. Domestic bison, including hybrids with domestic cattle, are domestic animals pursuant to regulation #1103.

b. "Wild bison" means the big game species bison.

#001 - Hunt Codes

A. Hunt Codes are a series of eight sequential letters and numbers which denote the species, sex of animal, unit number, season, and hunt type for each choice shown on the application:

1. Species - The first character of the hunt code is a letter denoting species:

A for pronghorn

B for black bear

C for desert bighorn sheep

D for deer

E for elk

G for mountain goat

H for small game or furbearer

L for mountain lion

M for moose

N for wild bison

P for greater prairie-chicken

S for rocky mountain bighorn sheep

T for wild turkey

O. Antler and Horn Collection

These regulations govern the collection of shed antlers, shed horns, or antlers or horns naturally attached to skull plates.

1. On any lands east of I-25, any person may, with lawful access, collect shed antlers or horns at any time. On private lands west of I-25, any person may, with lawful access, collect shed antlers or horns at any time. Public lands west of I-25 are closed to collection from January 1 through April 30, annually. On public lands west of I-25, any person may collect shed antlers or horns from May 1 through December 31, annually, except in GMUs 54, 55, 66, 67, and 551 where the collection of shed antlers or horns shall further be prohibited between legal sunset and 10:00 AM from May 1 through May 15 annually.

2. Possession of antlers or horns on public lands west of I-25 from January 1 through April 30 is prohibited. Possession of antlers or horns on public lands in GMUs 54, 55, 66, 67, and 551 between legal sunset and 10:00 AM from May 1 through May 15 annually is prohibited. Possession of antlers or horns on private property without lawful access is

prohibited. Each antler or horn will be treated singularly for the purpose of this regulation, unless naturally attached together on a skull plate.

3. For the purpose of this regulatory provision, the following terms have the following definitions:

a. "Antlers" means the bony, deciduous appendages protruding from the heads of members of the deer family (Cervidae), including deer, elk, and moose.

b. "Collect" means to search for, locate, stockpile, or possess shed antlers, shed horns, or antlers or horns naturally attached to skull plates of big game animals on public land or attempt to search for, locate, stockpile, or possess shed antlers, shed horns, or antlers or horns naturally attached to skull plates of big game animals on public land.

c. "Horns" means the hard, permanent or deciduous appendages protruding from the heads of bighorn sheep, **wild bison**, mountain goats, or pronghorn.

d. "Public land(s)" means federal lands and lands owned or administered by the Division.

e. "Shed antler" or "shed horn" means one or more antlers and/or horns having become naturally separated from the skull.

#003 -

A. Except as provided below, no person shall have in possession or transport the carcass, or portion of a carcass, of any game wildlife unless evidence of sex remains naturally attached thereto. The fact that a carcass or portion of a carcass is merely accompanied by an unattached head, horns, antlers, genitals, or other evidence of sex does not satisfy this requirement. If less than twenty (20) pounds of big game meat is possessed or transported with a donation certificate, evidence of sex is not required. Once the carcass is cut into processed meat (commercially or otherwise); cut, wrapped and frozen; or stored at the residence of the licensee, evidence of sex is no longer required.

B. In those units, or portions thereof, where antler point or horn restrictions exist for deer, elk, mountain goats, bighorn sheep and wild bison, any of the following must accompany the carcass as evidence of compliance with point restrictions:

1. Deer and elk

a. Head or skull plate with antlers naturally attached.

2. Mountain goats, bighorn sheep, and **wild bison**.

a. Head or intact skull with horns naturally attached.

C. Any of the following, which must be naturally attached to the carcass or a portion of the carcass as described in paragraph A of this section, shall be considered evidence of sex:

1. Deer, elk, pronghorn, moose, bighorn sheep, desert bighorn sheep, and **wild bison**.

a. Male - head, including any antlers or horns, testicle, scrotum, or penis.

b. Female - head, udder (mammary), or vulva.

APPENDIX F - Wildlife License and Pass Prices (1) Resident and nonresident licenses

Resident Nonresident (cc) WILD BISON \$382.91 \$2,820.78

The second set of changes is for Chapter W-2: BIG GAME

#205 – Annual Bag Limits and Maximum Numbers of Licenses per Person

A. Deer, elk, pronghorn, black bear, mountain lion, moose, rocky mountain bighorn sheep, mountain goat, and **wild bison**.

The annual bag and possession limit for deer, elk, pronghorn, black bear, mountain lion, rocky mountain bighorn sheep, mountain goat, and **wild bison** shall be the total number of animals taken on all licenses which can be legally obtained by the hunter for each species during that license year, as established in the following lists. Big game taken during a hunting season established as a portion of the preceding license year's hunting seasons shall be counted as part of the preceding year's bag limit. When a license allows hunting in more than one Game

Management Unit, the unit listed in the hunt code on the license shall determine the maximum number of annual licenses a license holder may obtain for that species.

Notwithstanding the ("List A," "List B," "List C") license categories set forth in this regulation, any license that is administratively converted to a private-land-only license as part of the Landowner Preference Program will retain the ("List A," "List B," "List C") status of its original hunt code.

9. Wild Bison

a. One License - Any hunter may obtain one wild bison license. The lifetime bag limit for wild bison is one, except when issued in accordance with regulation #230, #271, or #272.

Provided further that application restrictions in regulation #206 apply.

#217 – Season Tables and Hunt Code Descriptions

A. Big Game season tables are established by species (sheep, goat, bear, lion, deer, elk, pronghorn, wild bison, and moose) and hunt (archery, muzzle-loading, early, regular, plains, private land only, late, and Ranching for Wildlife). Tables contain general information describing the hunt type, season dates, unit(s) or portions thereof, hunt code, license types, and numbers.

#230 – Special Management Licenses for Sheep, Goat, and Wild Bison

A. The Director is authorized to issue special management licenses for bighorn sheep, mountain goat, and wild bison when necessary to:

1. prevent exposure of a sheep, goat, or wild bison, population to disease which could result from sheep, goats, or wild bison, having had contact with domestic livestock which present a disease transmission risk; either within or outside of an established game management unit; or to prevent the potential spread of disease by sheep, goats, or wild bison, pioneering from units with such disease.
2. allow for targeted surveillance of sheep, goat, or wild bison populations for management purposes.
3. prevent unplanned expansion of sheep, goat, or wild bison outside of established game management units for the species.

B. Sheep and goat Licenses will be offered to unsuccessful applicants for an adjacent or nearby unit for the same species, in the order in which they would have been drawn if successful. Wild bison licenses will be distributed randomly from the wild bison roster.

C. Manner of Take will be rifle and associated methods.

D. Mandatory check requirements are the same as for established seasons for sheep or goat except that mandatory tissue submission requirements may be stipulated for individual targeted surveillance hunts. Wild bison taken under these Special Management Licenses are required to be submitted for mandatory checks in accordance with regulation #274.

E. Such licenses will not use or generate preference points.

Special Seasons

ARTICLE XII – Special Hunting Seasons/Licenses for Big Game

#271 – Big Game Animals Causing Damage and Big Game Populations Over Objective

A. Special Population Management Seasons for Big Game Ungulates

1. The Director shall have the authority to establish special management seasons for antlerless or female big game ungulates in specific game management units or portions thereof which significantly exceed the population objective, when the anticipated harvest from the current year's archery, muzzle-loading and regular rifle seasons did not occur. Provided further that

the Director shall have the authority to establish these hunts between November 16 and February 28, to specify a time period for each of these hunts but not to exceed ten days each, and shall authorize hunters to use designated unfilled big game licenses for these hunts and units.

2. The Director shall have the authority to allocate antlerless deer and/or elk licenses on existing Ranching for Wildlife properties located in game management units where deer or elk populations significantly exceed the population objective. These licenses shall be in addition to the number of licenses allocated to each ranch pursuant to the Cooperative Agreement established in #210(A)(2). The additional allocation and use of the antlerless licenses provided for in this section shall be allocated by season(s) and quota(s) established in the ranch's respective Cooperative Agreement and subject to the following provisions:

a. No ranch shall be required to accept any additional antlerless licenses.

b. The public allocation of such additional antlerless licenses shall only be offered to hunters who have successfully drawn antlered, either-sex or antlerless licenses for the same species on the ranch. Public hunters who choose to purchase one additional antlerless license from the Division shall be required to use the additional license during the season established for the license for which they drew. No more than one additional antlerless license will be available to any public hunter.

c. The allocation of such additional antlerless licenses for private seasons shall be equal to, and not to exceed, the total number of additional antlerless licenses allocated to public hunters.

B. Special Game Damage Seasons for Big Game Ungulates

1. The Director shall have the authority to establish special hunting seasons for big game ungulates, ~~between August 15 and February 28,~~ when necessary to control damage to property. Seasons shall be for the taking of antlerless or female animals unless the Director has determined that the taking of antlered ~~or male~~ animals is necessary ~~in order~~ to alleviate the damage. ~~These seasons may occur year-round for male wild bison, between August 15 and January 31 for female wild bison, and between August 15 and February 28 for other ungulates.~~

#272 - Big Game Disease/Animal Health Seasons

1. Special Hunting Seasons for Disease Management in Big Game

a. The Director shall have the authority to establish special hunting seasons for big game, when hunting harvest has not been adequate to reduce the incidence of disease, to reduce emigration of infected animals, or to otherwise control expansion of the disease.

1. No more than 200 licenses per species shall be issued annually per Game Management Unit (GMU) unless authorized by the Director

2. Seasons shall be for the taking of antlerless or female animals unless the Director has authorized the issuance of male ~~(antlered)~~ licenses. No more than 10% of the licenses shall be issued for male ~~(antlered)~~ animals unless authorized by the Director.

ARTICLE XIII - Wild Bison

#273 - Wild bison seasons are closed statewide except as authorized by the Director in accordance with regulations #230, #271, and #272.

#274 Special Restrictions

A. Licensed hunters who take wild bison must present the head with horns attached to any submission site for inspection by an employee of the Division on or before the 5th working day after the taking thereof.

- B. Any unsuccessful wild bison licensee must complete and return the mandatory questionnaire to the Division within thirty (30) days after the close of the season.
- C. At the time of the mandatory check, the Division shall be authorized to extract and retain the incisor teeth. If not unfrozen, the Division may retain heads as necessary for thawing sufficient to extract the incisor teeth.

The third set of changes covers Chapter W-11: WILDLIFE PARKS AND UNREGULATED WILDLIFE

#1103 - EXEMPTIONS FROM LICENSE REQUIREMENTS:

A. Domestic animals - The following animals are considered domestic and are exempted from the requirements of Parks and Wildlife Commission regulations:

Domestic bison, meaning privately owned bison, bison legally reduced to captivity, bison that have escaped lawful captivity, and bison owned by or lawfully reduced to captivity by an Indian tribe, including hybrids with domestic cattle.

The fourth set of changes covers Chapter W-17: Damage Caused by Wildlife

Add wild bison to regulation #1762 to include wild bison crops under cultivation basis:

#1762 – EVALUATION AND SETTLEMENT PROCEDURE

A. Damage to a growing hay crop shall be evaluated by one of the following three methods or any other method agreed upon in writing by the claimant and the Division.

1. If comparable undamaged areas are available, the method of comparing harvest yield on damaged versus undamaged areas, and adjusting for difference in production, if any, not due to big game use.

Or:

2. Where comparable, undamaged areas are available the selection of comparative sample plots of the damaged and undamaged crop, and clipping, air drying, and weighing vegetation within each plot to determine the quantity and quality of forage removed by wildlife may be used as an option to the method described under #1762 a. 1.

Or:

3. Where comparable damaged and undamaged areas are not available from which to obtain samples, damage shall be evaluated on a cured or air dried forage basis of 2.2 pounds per deer day use, 2.5 pounds per sheep day use, 8.8 pounds per elk day use, 1.6 pounds per pronghorn day use, 2.1 pounds per mountain goat day use, ~~and~~ 15.3 pounds per moose day use, **and 19.5 pounds per wild bison day use** or under conditions existing at the time or place of damage. If this method is used big game counts must be made at least once every ten days and no claim for damage by loss of livestock forage caused by big game shall be submitted for the same time period.

Add wild bison to regulation #1772 to include wild bison cured or air dried forage basis:

#1772 – EVALUATION AND SETTLEMENT PROCEDURE

A. Damage to a harvested crop shall be evaluated as follows or by any other method agreed upon in writing by the claimant and the Division.

1. Damage to stacked hay shall be evaluated by calculating the pounds of hay which have been damaged by big game through:

- a. calculation of the volume of hay removed or damaged;
- b. determining the number of bales damaged based on bailing wires or strings remaining or number of bales originally in the stack.

2. Damage to harvested crops, other than haystacks, and crops being fed to livestock shall be evaluated on a cured or air dried forage basis of 2.2 pounds per deer day use, 2.5 pounds per sheep day use, 8.8 pounds per elk day use, 1.6 pounds per pronghorn day

use, 2.1 pounds per mountain goat day use, 19.5 pounds per wild bison per day, and 15.3 pounds per moose day use, or under conditions existing at the time and place of damage.
 B. Value of any crop shall be the market value at the time and place of damage.

Add wild bison to regulation #1792 to include a wild bison AUM equivalent:

#1792 – EVALUATION AND SETTLEMENT PROCEDURE

A. The amount of damage shall be the difference between the grazing capacity of the area and the amount of grazing actually realized by the claimant, provided that the amount of damage calculated in this way could have been caused by the number and kind of big game animals documented to have used the designated area or damage can be determined strictly on the basis of the number of big game animals counted on the property during the damage period. The amount of damage that could have been caused by big game shall be based on the following annual average livestock animal unit month (AUM) equivalents:

- 13.6 pronghorn months = 1 AUM
- 8.7 bighorn months = 1 AUM
- 9.9 deer months = 1 AUM
- 2.5 elk months = 1 AUM
- 1.4 moose months = 1 AUM
- 10.3 mountain goat months = 1 AUM
- .75 wild bison months = 1 AUM

Add bison to regulation #17103 to include bison AUM equivalent:

#17103 – EVALUATION AND SETTLEMENT PROCEDURE

A. The amount of damage shall be the difference between the grazing capacity of the area and the amount of grazing actually realized by the claimant, provided that the amount of damage calculated in this way could have been caused by the number and kind of big game animals documented to have used the designated area during the deferral period. The amount of damage that could have been caused by big game shall be based on the following annual average livestock animal unit month (AUM) equivalents:

- 13.6 pronghorn months = 1 AUM
- 8.7 bighorn months = 1 AUM
- 9.9 deer months = 1 AUM
- 2.5 elk months = 1 AUM
- 1.4 moose months = 1 AUM
- 10.3 mountain goat months = 1 AUM
- .75 wild bison months = 1 AUM

If the deferred grazing land contains a substantial amount of herbage other than grasses and legumes, the AUM equivalents must be adjusted for the amount of herbage consumed by wildlife which is not livestock forage. This is accomplished by dividing the appropriate AUM equivalent from the list above, by the proportion of dietary overlap for the species of wildlife and livestock involved. This proportion shall be obtained from the following table unless some other figure can be shown to reflect more accurately the actual situation.

DEGREE OF DIETARY OVERLAP BETWEEN VARIOUS BIG GAME SPECIES AND DOMESTIC CATTLE AND SHEEP.

	COW	SHEEP
ELK	.91	.96
DEER	.50	.80

PRONGHORN		.80	.80
WILD BISON		.91	.91
2. Alternative 2: Status Quo			
Issue Raised by:	Mike Quartuch - Assistant Director of the Policy and Planning Branch		
Author of the issue paper (if different than person raising the issue):	Andy Holland (Big Game Manager), Jake Matter (Senior Assistant Attorney General), Ray Aberle (Deputy Assistant Director - Lands Unit), Hilary Hernandez (Regulations Manager)		
CC:			
APPROVED FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION BY:	Executive Management Team		
REQUIRES NEW SPACE IN THE BROCHURE?	YES		
ARE ADEQUATE STAFF AND FUNDING RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO IMPLEMENT?	YES		
REGION, BRANCH, OR SECTION LEADING IMPLEMENTATION	Terrestrial and Outdoor Recreation and Lands		
RECOMMENDED FOR CONSENT AGENDA?	NO		