



# Cultural Heritage Lesson #3: IT'S A DILEMMA- YOU DECIDE

**Overview:** This lesson focuses on the difficulty of balancing a natural/cultural management decision while adhering to the National Park Service dual mission statement.

### Learner Outcomes

Youth will:

1. Be able to describe a cultural management dilemma facing Yellowstone National Park.
2. Understand the pros and cons associated with the management of Yellowstone's cultural and natural resources.

### Getting Ready

**Materials:** Youth need journals and writing utensils; staff need handouts.

### Lesson at a Glance

#### **It's a Dilemma- You Decide (30 minutes)**

Youth role play a scenario in which they are Yellowstone managers who are faced with a decision surrounding bison and brucellosis. Then they will journal about their choices before working as a group to create an adaptive bison management decision.

#### **Discussion (20 minutes)**

Each group presents their preferred choice, explaining the key factors and reasons for their decision.

#### **Concluding the Lesson (10 minutes)**

Youth reflect about the challenges of balancing a dual mission statement while making a management decision.

Park legislation offers some guidance. Yellowstone became the world's first national park with the signing of the Yellowstone Park Act on March 1, 1872. The act is only a few paragraphs and leaves much open to interpretation. It reads that Yellowstone is to be "a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people." The act also states "...regulations shall provide for the preservation, from injury or spoliation, of all timber, mineral deposits, natural curiosities, or wonders... and their retention in their natural condition." Park managers must forever struggle with this dual mandate to both preserve and use, and the challenge becomes increasingly difficult as more people desire to visit parks. As the value of wild places becomes increasingly clear, we are struggling to decide, with limited resources, just what can and should be saved."

### Suggested Procedure

#### **It's a Dilemma- You Decide (30 minutes)**

Staff will:

1. Explain that Yellowstone National Park officials are often faced with difficult management decisions because of the dual mission statement.
2. Divide youth in two groups and explain that they will be playing the part of Yellowstone National Park managers. They will be making wise and adaptive cultural and natural resource management decisions regarding bison and brucellosis.
3. Distribute the Bison Dilemma Cards and instruct them to read it carefully. Ask: What do you think is the preferred course of action? Instruct them to journal about it individually. Encourage them to imagine different scenarios and to make a pros and cons list of the available options in their journal.
4. After they finish journaling, start a group discussion. Ask: What, as a group, do you think is the preferred course of action?
  - Instruct them to reach a consensus on one course of action or formulate another solution. Have them consult with you if they need additional information. **(F1)**



## Background

The following material is used in the suggested procedure and is necessary to instruct the lesson. Adapted from the National Park Service's Explore Your National Park Yellowstone Teachers Guide (1997).

“The notion of a national park may be confusing for many. To most, the term “park” has no more meaning than “forest,” or “monument,” or any of the other titles the federal government has bestowed upon its holding. It may have less, because other parks they are familiar with are amusement parks and city parks. Many people view all parks simply as public places of recreation.

The basic premise that has long distinguished national parks from other federal lands is that of preservation versus conservation. Most federal lands, such as national forests (US Department of Agriculture), are managed for a variety of purposes including timber, minerals, water, power and recreation, with a management goal of providing the greatest good for the greatest number of people. National park lands set aside for their natural significance constitute a tiny fraction of the public domain. They are set aside to preserve a few undisturbed samples of natural America so that we can enjoy them and learn from them. The product is much less tangible- and less economically quantifiable- than the products of the multiple-use lands. In its purest form, the idea is appealing. The resource is naturalness, or wildness and if it were this simple, management would entail nothing more than leaving the places alone.

Parks are not ecological islands, even the largest of them. Exotic fauna and flora move into the park, and native fauna and flora move out onto lands with other legislative mandates. Of other importance is the National Park Service mandate that requires human fauna be able to move about in the parks as well, and their migration routes become paved and buildings appear near them. Very quickly the challenge to use and yet preserve becomes overwhelming.



- During the group discussion, pose the following questions: **(F2)**
  - i. How are you accounting for the bison's importance to different indigenous cultures of North America?
  - ii. How do your choices from each column fit with one another?
  - iii. What are the pros and cons of the options you chose?
  - iv. Could your decision be applied in the real world? Consider limited budgets, time, and employees.

### **Discussion** (20 minutes) **(S1)**

1. After the small groups have made a choice, instruct them to elect two spokespeople from each group to present their group's adaptive bison management plan.
  - a. Ask each group to answer the following in their presentation:
    - i. What decision did your group reach?
    - ii. What were the three key factors/reasons for your group's decision?
    - iii. What additional information did you need to make an informed decision?
2. After both groups have presented, ask:
  - a. What decision making processes did you use to reach your decision?
  - b. How did the groups' processes differ?
  - c. Do you think that Yellowstone managers use a similar process?
3. Invite them to build on the thoughts and ideas from the presentations. If time allows, discuss the issue as it currently stands in the park (refer to the latest Yellowstone Resources and Issues Handbook available at though the Yellowstone National Park Foundation).



**Conclude:** (10 minutes) Explain that National Parks belong to all of us. It is everyone's responsibility to learn about and care for the parks across the country. Ask: **(S2)**

- a. How was it balancing a dual mission statement of the National Park Service while making management decisions?
- b. What insights or challenges could you reflect on from this lesson?
- c. How did you overcome those challenges?
- d. How do you think Yellowstone National Park officials overcome management challenges?

Wrap up by sharing the words of the 32<sup>nd</sup> President Franklin D. Roosevelt:

“There is nothing so American as our National Parks. The scenery and wildlife are native. The fundamental idea behind the parks is native. It is, in brief, that the country belongs to the people that it is in process of making for the enrichment of the lives of all of us. That parks stand as the outward symbol of this great human principle” (National Park Service, 1997).

Assessment Check Ins:

**(F1):** Provides insight into the degree and depth of youths analysis.

**(F2):** Provides knowledge on their decision making process.

**(S1):** Assesses what they have learned by reflecting on their group decision.

**(S2):** Assesses what they have learned about dilemmas that face the park's management.

Staff Notes:

- This lesson is discussion orientated. Emphasize that everyone has the right to voice their opinion and it is important to be respectful even if they disagree.



## References:

Dary, D. (1989) *The Buffalo Book: The Full Sage of the American Animal*. n.l.: Swallow Press/Ohio University Press.

National Park Service. (1997). *Explore Your National Park Yellowstone Teachers Guide*. Yellowstone National Park, WY.

*The lesson "It's a Dilemma" served as the central activity. It was modified in the following ways:*

- a. Instructional language was changed to match the REC.*
- b. The introduction and conclusion were additions.*
- c. Some material from the original lesson was not included because of the shorter length of this lesson.*

Impacts on Cultural Resources. (2013). Retrieved from:

<http://www.nps.gov/yell/parkmgmt/bisoneiscon8.htm>

*Incorporates the Impacts on Cultural Resources to serve as content for the Bison Dilemma Card. It was modified in the following ways:*

- a. Instructional language was changed to match the REC.*
- b. Cultural heritage was emphasized.*

Yellowstone National Park. (2013). *Yellowstone Resources and Issues Handbook: 2013*. Yellowstone National Park, WY.

## Handouts:

- Bison Dilemma Card

### **Bison Dilemma Card**

The following material is from contributing author Yellowstone National Park Ranger Matt Ohlen, M.A.

Early Euro-American explorers described Bison as “the world looked like one robe” and wrote that the plains were black and appeared to be moving with the herds of bison. The most commonly used estimates of their numbers were between 30 and 60 million (Dary, 1989, pg. 20, Yellowstone National Park, 2013).

By the time Yellowstone National Park was established in 1872, bison herds outside the park were almost eliminated. Primarily because of poaching, Yellowstone bison numbers declined until after the turn of the century when fewer than 50 were known to exist in the park. This small herd was the last wild, free-ranging herd in the country.

After conservation efforts were enacted, their numbers gradually began to increase; today bison are not threatened or endangered. The North American bison population is approximately 500,000 animals and Yellowstone’s population numbered approximately 4,200 in 2013 (Yellowstone National Park, 2013, pg. 178-185).

Bison were an important part of the landscape for over half the continent because they provided food, clothing, fuel, tools, and shelter. They were central to Plains tribal and spiritual culture, and were viewed as an earthly link to the spiritual world. For many tribes, bison represent power and strength. For example, the Shoshone believe that spiritual power is concentrated in the physical form of the bison. Traditional use of bison by humans centers on hunting bison for tribal economy and culture and is evidenced in the archeological record (Dary, 1989, pg. 20).

Seeking food on the northern range during harsh winters, many bison migrate out of the park onto surrounding land as their instincts have led them to do for centuries. But since settlement, some of these areas are now ranches and other private lands. Some landowners do not like bison on their property because they can damage fences and are capable of passing on a disease to cattle. Brucellosis can end a pregnancy, decrease milk production, and/or cause infertility. If any of a rancher’s cattle are found to have brucellosis, many restrictions are put upon that rancher’s animals and potentially all the ranchers in that region. These restrictions can include slaughter of an infected cattle herd or restrictions on shipping the animals for sale. Both would result in economic hardship to ranchers.

Yellowstone’s managers, along with other federal and state agencies, have agreed upon a plan to guide decisions about what to do when bison leave the park called the Interagency Bison Management Plan (IBMP). It is an adaptive management plan, meaning it can change with the times, and has two main goals. The first is to prevent bison from passing brucellosis to cattle in the surrounding areas. The second is to maintain a wild, free-ranging population of bison in Yellowstone.

Many stakeholders that are interested in bison management have challenged the decisions made through the IBMP in court. Consequently, the government agencies involved in the

## Yellowstone YCC REC

IBMP often have to make difficult decisions and compromises when trying to reach agreement about what to do when bison leave the park. Some groups want bison to roam anywhere outside of the park as they did before settlement. Other groups want action from Yellowstone's managers to keep bison from leaving the park and bringing brucellosis with them. Groups on both sides of the issue cite either the presence or lack of bison as an important piece of their cultural history. Although there is a low risk of transmission of brucellosis from bison to cattle, an official decision has to be made about how to maintain a free-ranging bison herd while also preventing -the transmission of brucellosis (Yellowstone National Park, 2013, pg. 178-185).

**Directions:** Choose one option from each column below to form an adaptive bison management plan. When choosing an option from each column, be aware that not all options will fit with one another. Make sure to pick options from one column that do not prevent your choice in the other column from happening. Consider the pros and cons of each option as well as its real-life chances of being accomplished within limited budgets, time, and employees.

**Column A**

- A1.** Allow bison to exit the park only when there is no chance they will be calving (brucellosis is transmitted by calving females)
- A2.** Allow bison to exit the park all year as long as they stay in designated bison tolerance areas
- A3.** Only let bull bison exit the park.
- A4.** Let the bison wander outside the park only on public land. Hazing will be necessary to keep them on public land.
- A5.** Let the bison wander outside the park on all lands. Compensate landowners for the damage bison do to their property.
- A6.** Purchase the grazing rights to public land outside the park to guarantee no cattle will be on the land. This would allow bison to be on those lands even during calving season.

**Column B**

- B1.** Do not let bison leave the park at all. Those that don't respond to hazing will be captured and held in a corral and fed until spring green-up occurs.
- B2.** Capture all bison leaving the park and test for brucellosis. Those testing negative would be allowed to wander. Those found positive would be sent to slaughter
- B3.** Capture all bison leaving the park and send sufficient numbers to slaughter to keep the heard at 3,500 animals. At this population it is less likely to have large numbers of bison leaving the park.
- B4.** Capture all bison leaving the park and ship the brucellosis free animals to other public herds.
- B5.** Promote hunting by tribes and individuals when bison leave the park. Try to recruit enough hunters to harvest most bison that leave the park.