



Plains Bison Hunting Information Package

Introduction

This letter is for hunters who received a Limited Entry Hunting (LEH) authorization for Bison. Hunting this massive animal in the spectacular Muskwa foothills is a unique opportunity. Fortunately, they are relatively abundant on their range, having an average density in their use area of about 0.2 per km², apparently balancing their numbers with the food resources. During the hunt period you can expect to find the animals west of 122 degrees 50 minutes in the Sikanni and Halfway River valleys. This is the largest free ranging, disease-free plains bison herd in the world.

Hunting bison can be more complicated than hunting other big game in British Columbia. Bison are one of the hardest North American animals to kill and care must be taken in shot placement and animal marking. Finally, the hunt area is remote and weather conditions can be extreme. The key to staying safe and having success is thoughtful planning. During the last few seasons, due to weather conditions, access has been difficult for hunters. We can only advise that this is truly a wilderness area, and you must be prepared to adapt to changing conditions (i.e. virtually no snow one winter and almost too much snow the next). This has been an issue for many people who must travel some distance from home and are all the more subject to the variable weather situations that they might encounter. Several groups of people for example, realizing there was almost no snow prior to leaving for the hunt this past year, brought both 4X4 ATV's and snow machines. Please note that ATV's are only permitted to **10m** on either side of the designated trails. Those who wish to have the best all-around access option, and are able to, bring horses but these cannot practically be used once the ground is icy. There are also local guide-outfitters who can provide more services than most hunters are equipped to cope with on their own. Hunters should seriously consider their options and individual abilities. It has been our experience that those who experience disappointment and frustration with the access issue did not adequately comprehend the actual situations they would be faced with. There is a distinct lack of amenities in the hunt area, and even those experienced in hunting under extreme conditions will find this hunt a challenge.

Identifying Bull and Cow Bison

Hunters should know the sex of the animal they are shooting. Even though, either sex is legal, if you are seeking a male, you must apply a concerted effort when studying a bison to distinguish between a male and a female. An experienced bison hunter can separate them from one year of age onwards, however familiarity and proficiency does take practice. The differences between sexes results from a series of distinctions and there is no substitute for taking your time.

While trophy class bulls are easier to distinguish from other bison, it is more difficult to separate younger males from cows. Use a composite of characters to make your determination. Some differences are:

Characteristic	Males	Females
sex organs	penis sheath (very hard to see), watch urination (down from the belly).	vulva (must be close), watch urination (back from the rump).
horns	from the front they tend to point straight up (although out in 2-year olds), may curve inward on older bulls. usually thick at the base and tapered like a pencil tip. from the side they tend to appear vertical or slightly forward bent.	from the front they usually curve inward (although modestly in 2-year olds). they are usually narrow at the base and taper slowly rather like a hand scythe. from the side they tend to hook back at the tip.
head	wider, blockier	narrower

Several features are poor indicators and should not be relied upon. Size of the animals can be quite variable, with some cows exceeding some bulls in size. Calves may be standing near bulls. You have to examine several animals of each gender to gain familiarity with the distinctions; the first group you see may be all cows and calves. Remember a cow bison is an enormous animal!

Shooting

Selective, humane dispatching of an animal is paramount. Heart/lung shots are recommended. In that regard, it must be remembered that the shoulder is very tall on bison and so you must aim for the lower third, directly behind the front 'elbow', to achieve effective shot placement. Head shots are not recommended as the vital area is small, and several angles actually offer enough bone to deflect a bullet. Likewise the spine is a very small target, is hard to mark on the animal, and accurate shot placement there is not easily done.

Bison are herd animals and will seek the herd when stressed. Thus when you encounter bison they will likely be in a group. It can be confusing keeping track of the animal you have carefully selected as the bison you want. This is especially important after your shot, as the stricken animal will often run to the herd. If you decide to shoot again you will likely have a difficult time re-identifying your animal. It is recommended that you find a bison some distance from the rest of the herd to avoid this scenario. You will find that disturbed bison move into forest so tracking a wounded animal in a herd can be very difficult. The optimal solution is to choose a bison away from a group and away from trees. If it doesn't run after your well placed shot, don't move and remain concealed. Properly hit, the wounded animal will go down in a matter of minutes. If the wounded animal rejoins the herd, do not shoot again until absolutely sure which bison is yours; then shoot only when there is no chance of hitting another animal.

Bison are large animals with extensive non-vital areas. There is no substitute for a well-placed shot, however your animal will be more humanely taken and the margin for error will be reduced by the use of suitable firearms. Rifles must fire a minimum 175 grain bullet which retains 2800 joules (2000 foot pounds) or more energy at 100 meters. That energy will be of best use if you get close to your selected bison before shooting. If you are unsure of the ballistic characteristics of your particular rifle and ammunition, the ammunition manufacturers publish them and most retailers will have the tables for your reference.

The key element of successful shooting is to take your time. It is possible that you will only be drawn for this hunt once in your lifetime, so make sure to do it right.

Care of Meat

Bison muscle mass on a medium to large animal is significantly greater than for most other species. Cooling of the meat is critical to avoid spoilage, even in cold outdoor temperatures. It is recommended that the meat should be quickly removed from the bones where mass is greatest to prevent spoilage. It is also critical to remove the hide soon after the animal is down. Souring can occur in a few hours if the carcass is not properly cared for.

The Plains Bison Range

The hunt occurs in the heart of winter. Temperatures could drop to -40 degrees Celsius and there might be strong winds and heavy snowfall. It is your own responsibility to come prepared for all potential inclement weather conditions.

The hunt area is basically wilderness, and there is little chance of harvesting your bison near what little road access there is. As noted above, weather and snow conditions vary, and it is up to you to come prepared for a range of conditions from no snow to very deep snow. If there is adequate snow cover, you will probably wish to utilize a snow machine. If not, then your option should be an ATV as there is very little road vehicle access available. Snow machine travel and retrieving of your bison on crown land is legal; however, you cannot chase bison or carry a loaded firearm, from or on a snow machine or ATV. Much of the bison range is within the Muskwa Kechika Access Management Area (see map section). Within that area, aside from the restriction by snow, there is limited legal vehicle access allowed other than by snow machine or ATV regardless. ATVs are restricted to designated routes only, up to 10 meters on either side of the trails (see map section).

Private Property

Most of the bison range is crown land. There are however some private holdings within Zone D of 7-42. These are shown in color on the 94G National Topographic System (NTS) 1:250,000 map sheet available from Maps BC agents and also on LEH maps available from the Fish and Wildlife branch (see the map section). Individuals can also create their own maps in the free online mapping tool iMap (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/data/geographic-data-services/web-based-mapping/imapbc>); customized maps can be created through this program that show LEH and private land boundaries. It is unlawful and an offence to trespass or hunt on private property without the permission of the landowner. It is the hunter's responsibility to contact landowners.

Guided Hunts and Accommodations

Several Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship licensed guiding operations are available in the bison hunt area and may have openings for guided hunts. There are also accommodations available in the area, but demand is very high and finding accommodations can be difficult. Be sure to call early to arrange guide services or reserve accommodations.

Maps

The bison LEH hunt area is represented on a 1:250,000 NTS map that can be purchased through a Maps BC agent. Electronic maps in pdf format showing LEH hunt areas 742 Zone C and 742 Zone D can also be obtained through the Wildlife and Ecosystems Branch online at www.gov.bc.ca/leh-zone-maps

Access maps can also be obtained through the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area Plan web site here: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/crown-land-water/land-use-planning/regions/northeast/muskwa-kechika>

Private Land within Bison Zone D of 7-42

