



Photo: Syd Cannings

Wood Bison

Bison bison athabasca

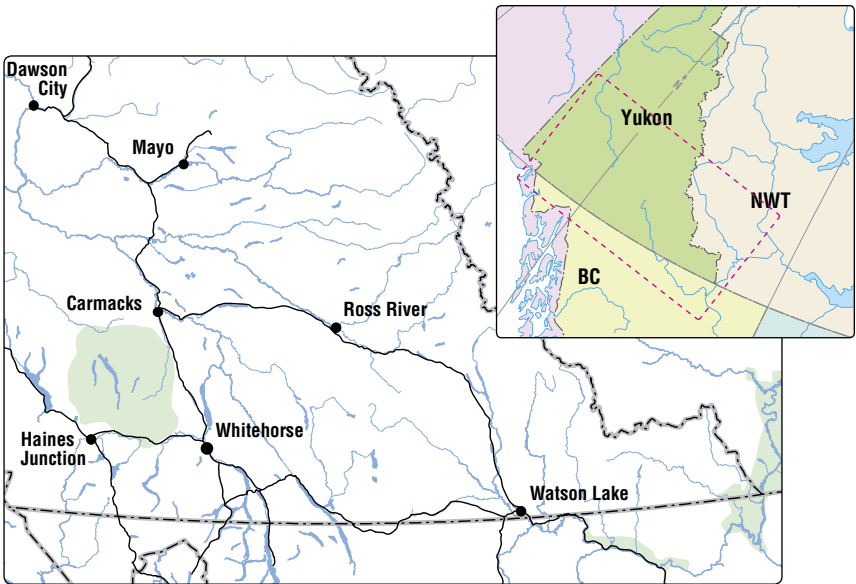
THREATENED

Formerly roaming the open grasslands and woodlands throughout much of Yukon, Wood Bison disappeared about 350 years ago. Between 1986 and 1992, 142 bison were brought to Yukon. They were released along the Nisling River west of Carmacks, but subsequently moved south into the Aishihik and Hutshi lake watersheds. The Aishihik herd numbers about 1,300. Other Wood Bison were released at Nahanni Butte, Northwest Territories—this herd has grown to 400 animals, and regularly crosses the border into the southeastern Yukon. Others were

released in the Liard region of British Columbia—this herd, numbering about 140 animals, often ranges into Yukon near Contact Creek.

Description

Wood Bison are dark brown with a very large head, distinct beard, and shoulder hump. They are larger than Plains Bison, and can be distinguished from them on a number of characters, including: the highest point of the hump is well forward of the front legs in Wood Bison; there are virtually no furry 'chaps' on the front legs in Wood Bison; and the cape grades smoothly back rather than ending abruptly behind the shoulders as it does in the Plains Bison.



Wood Bison Range

Typical Habitat

Wood Bison rely on a variety of grasses and sedges found on south-facing slopes, wetlands, open meadows, and alpine tundra.

Potential Threats

- Contact with livestock or other bison could introduce diseases such as anthrax, brucellosis, and tuberculosis.
- Collisions with traffic.
- Because the Wood Bison population was reduced to just a few dozen individuals in the 1960s, the remaining genetic diversity is very low and the genetic diversity in the reintroduced populations is even more limited. This means a greater susceptibility to diseases and a potential decreased ability to adapt to a changing environment.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Wood Bison are the largest land mammals in North America.
- The Aishihik herd in southwest Yukon is the second largest disease-free, free-ranging Wood Bison herd in the world.
- Various forms of bison inhabited Yukon for perhaps as long as 700,000 years. Fossils indicate that changes in appearance and size happened quickly during the ice ages.
- Bison along with Woolly Mammoth and caribou were dominant species for thousands of years in Yukon.