

Bison Specialist Group



The Bison Specialist Group consists of two units, one for European bison and another for North American bison. The purpose of the North American Bison Specialist Group (NABSG) is to contribute to the development of comprehensive and viable strategies and management actions to improve conservation and achieve ecological restoration of plains bison and wood bison where feasible throughout the original range of each subspecies.

A review of key activities in North America:

- Through the 2013 year we renewed the membership list for the North American Bison Specialist Group (NABSG). The NABSG is a network of people involved in bison conservation and recovery, and who are able to contribute scientific knowledge, effectively influence bison conservation, or engage in conservation projects. There are now 80 registered members and numerous collaborators spanning the range of the species from Mexico to Alaska.
- The NABSG hosted an internet dialogue in August-September about what defines a wild bison. We compiled the input from each of the participants to identify key principles for a definition of “Wild” bison. A discussion about this issue is planned for the NABSG meeting in Montana.
- On September 26, 2013 we hosted the first IUCN face to face meeting since the Vermejo meeting in 2005. The meeting was attended by 45 members and a vigorous discussion was held about the definition of “wild” bison and the pending IUCN Red List assessment for bison.
- At the IUCN meeting a subgroup was formed to work on Red List assessment of North American Bison. The subgroup laid out a process for accomplishing this task. Dr. Cormack Gates (Red List Authority) and Keith Aune (NABSG Chair) will lead the effort.

A review of key activities of Europe – the main problems were discussed during annual conference, held in Poland, September 5-6th. Most important issues discussed are presented below:

- In Europe, the legal status of the species is not an uniform one. In some countries wisent is a protected species as property of the State in other countries all wisents (even from free ranging herds) belong to private owners or other entities and are subject to veterinary regulations for cattle. There is a need to elaborate and propose more uniform legal status of the wisent, which could serve the conservation of the species at global level. The wisent would maintain its status of endangered species, however means for its protection could also include a limited commercial use. Funds obtained in this way would be designated for the conservation of wisent populations. More details are under discussion between BSG members and other people involved in species protection and breeding.
- A disputable issue of an appurtenance of wisents from Byelorussia to the Lowland line - According the Pedigree Book, Byelorussian populations belong to the Lowland line (LB) but this has been questioned by geneticists from the Institute of Mammal Biology on the basis of their molecular studies. It was stated during meeting that results of those studies should be verified, and a comparison should also consider other European populations and will be done in Warsaw University of Life Sciences where collected are genes of more than 2000 individuals. The suggestion of an appurtenance of Byelorussian population to LC line may be connected with a printing error in the issue of EBPB for years 1965-1969. To conclude, premises about the necessity for a change of the status of Byelorussian wisents are not verified and without comparative studies and detailed analysis of results from two laboratories no such changes are possible. In such situation, according to BSG the status of wisents from the Byelorussia remains unchanged.

- At the meeting a subgroup was formed to work on Red List assessment of European bison. The subgroup laid out a process for accomplishing this task. Prof. Kajetan Perzanowski and Wanda Olech (Red List Authority) will lead the effort.



North American Bison -*Photo by Jeff Burrell*



North American BSG meeting in Montana-*Photo by Keith Aune*



The annual European bison conference 2013 (*photo by Roman Lizon*)



The European bison herd (*photo by Piotr Wawrzyniak*)