

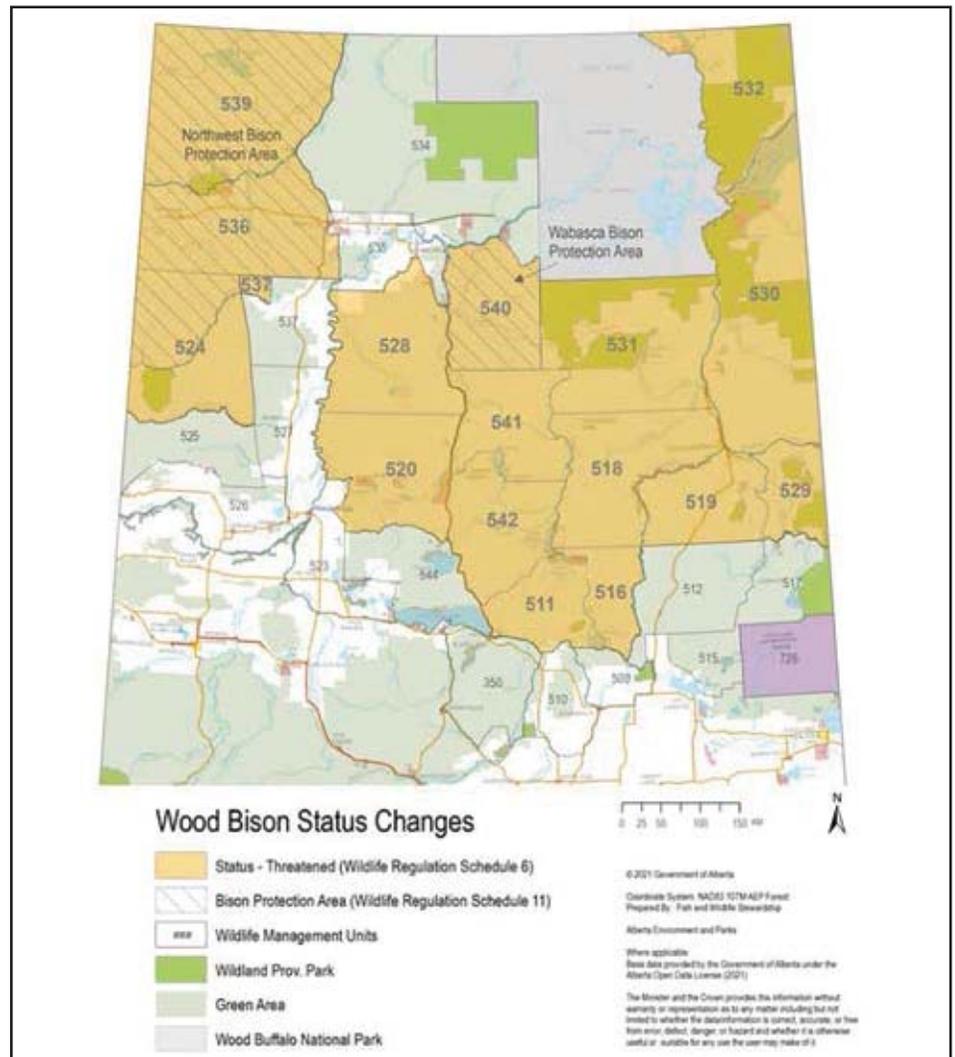
## Wood Bison Are Officially Wildlife

In November 2021, the Government of Alberta amended the Wildlife Regulation under the *Alberta Wildlife Act* to finally designate wood bison as a *threatened* species, formally acknowledging wood bison as wildlife for the first time in our province.

Under this amendment, wood bison are

considered *threatened* within specified Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) across the northern part of the province – one of which was newly created under this provision. A threatened listing affords these WMU populations protection from hunting by anyone other than those with Indigenous and/or Treaty hunting rights.

The four WMUs for wood bison and their



Government of Alberta map showing the Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) where wood bison have been designated as Threatened under the revised Wildlife Act Regulation, as well as the two Bison Protection Areas.

associated populations include: Northwest Bison Protection Area (Hay-Zama and Etthithun Lake wood bison populations), Wildlife Management Unit 531 (Ronald Lake wood bison population), Wildlife Management Unit 534 (Wentzel Lake wood bison population), and Wabasca Bison Protection Area (Wabasca wood bison population). The latter WMU was newly formed under this amendment.

We would like to recognise some important contributions made by the Government of Canada leading up to this provincial amendment. In February 2020, Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) released an Imminent Threat Assessment for wood bison in Canada in response to conservation concerns over the Ronald Lake and Wabasca bison herds. The assessment found there is an imminent threat to the recovery of wood bison in Canada, making species recovery objectives highly unlikely or impossible. Threats include the potential for contracting bovine diseases – bovine tuberculosis and brucellosis – from bison within Wood Buffalo National Park, and range loss from industrial development.

The second contribution that played an important role in this status change for wood bison in Alberta was the release of a draft conservation agreement between the Government of Alberta and the

Government of Canada under Section 11 of the *Species at Risk Act*. This was released for public comment between June 25 to August 24, 2021 and was intended to outline roles and responsibilities to protect and conserve the Ronald Lake and Wabasca wood bison herds in Alberta. AWA submitted a comment letter as part of this consultation process supporting the draft conservation agreement, and we are looking forward to the release of the finalised agreement.

AWA is encouraged to see these changes to regulations under Alberta's archaic Wildlife Act and hope they signal renewed intent from the Government of Alberta to pursue meaningful actions in the protection and recovery of wood bison populations. AWA continues to participate in conservation initiatives for wood bison through our membership on the Ronald Lake Bison Herd (RLBH) Cooperative Management Board. The board is a multi-stakeholder entity that exists to advise the Minister of Environment and Parks on matters related to the long-term sustainability of the RLBH, including the sustainability of Indigenous traditional use and cultural connection to the herd. We look forward to providing future updates to AWA members on the board's progress as we work towards the recovery of the RLBH.

–Phillip Meintzer, *Conservation Specialist*