

Alaska Wood Bison Restoration A Resource For The People



Tom Seaton

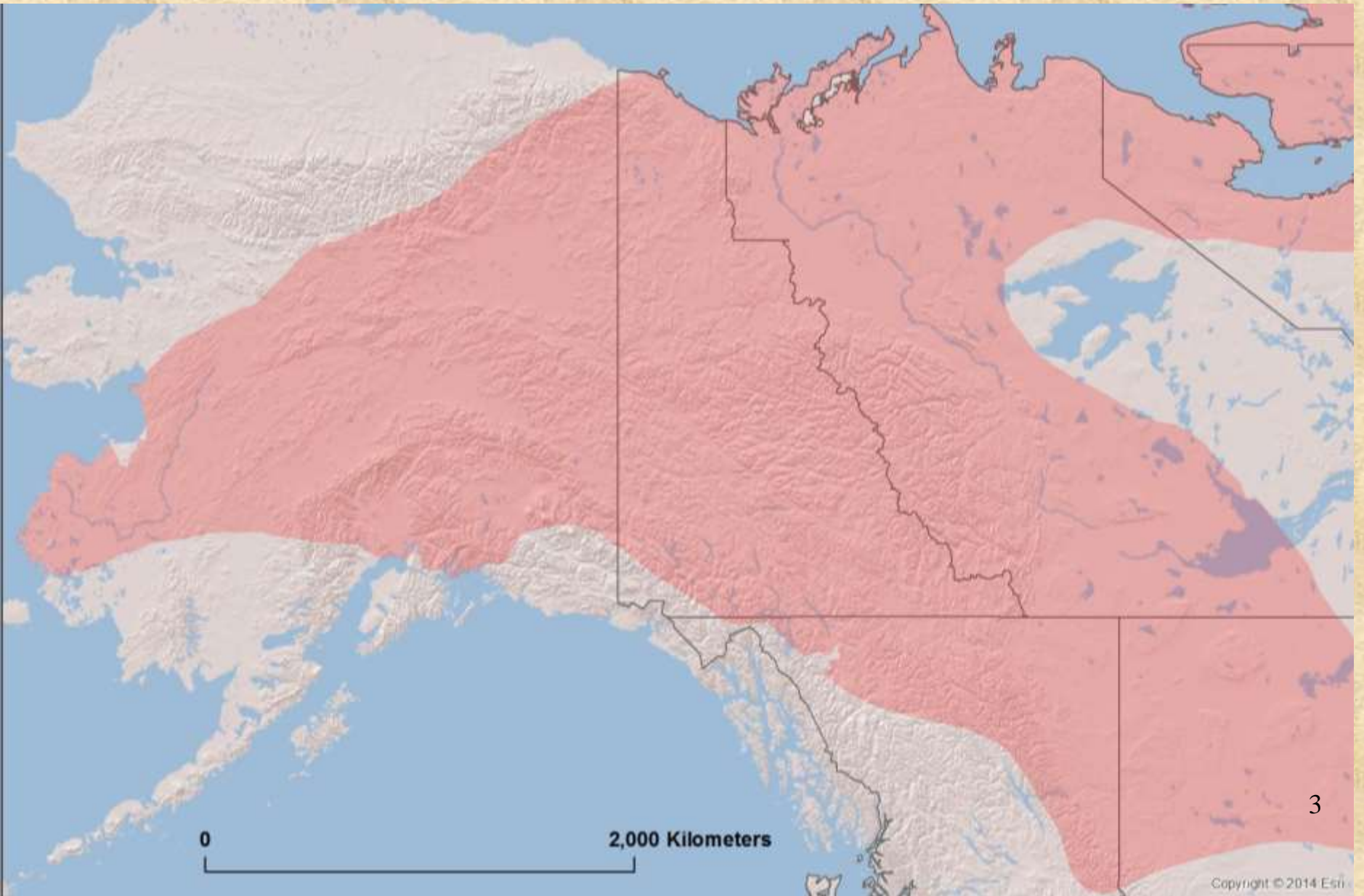
Alaska Department of Fish and Game 2017



Wood Bison Original Range



Wood Bison Original Range



Wood Bison Range 120 YBP



Northern Bison Range NOW

- What should the future be like in 200 years?

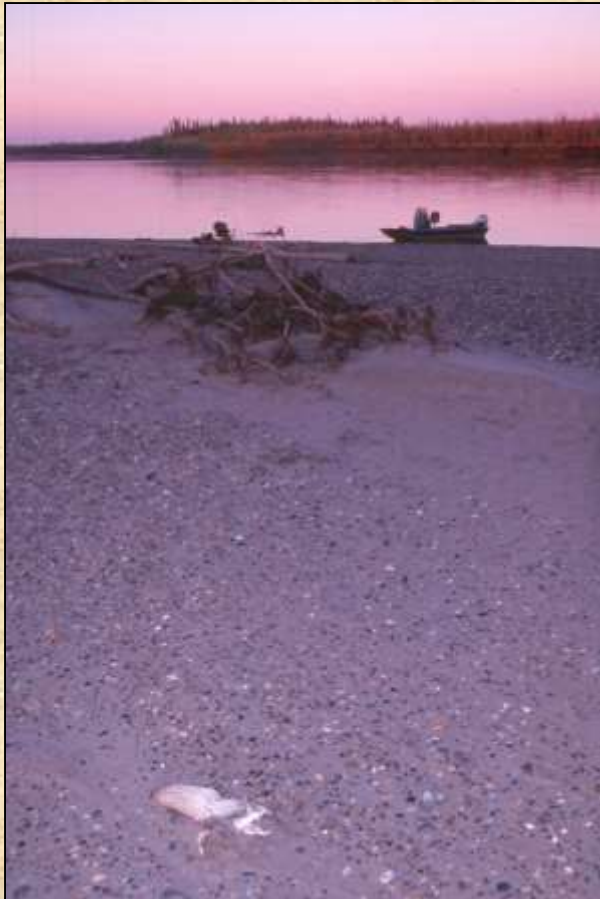


Northern Bison Range year 2200

- Total restoration or isolated, small populations?



Wood bison bones are present across much of Alaska.



Bison horn core found on the
Porcupine River

Native elders provided historic accounts of wood bison



The late
Reverend
David Salmon,
Chalkyitsik, AK

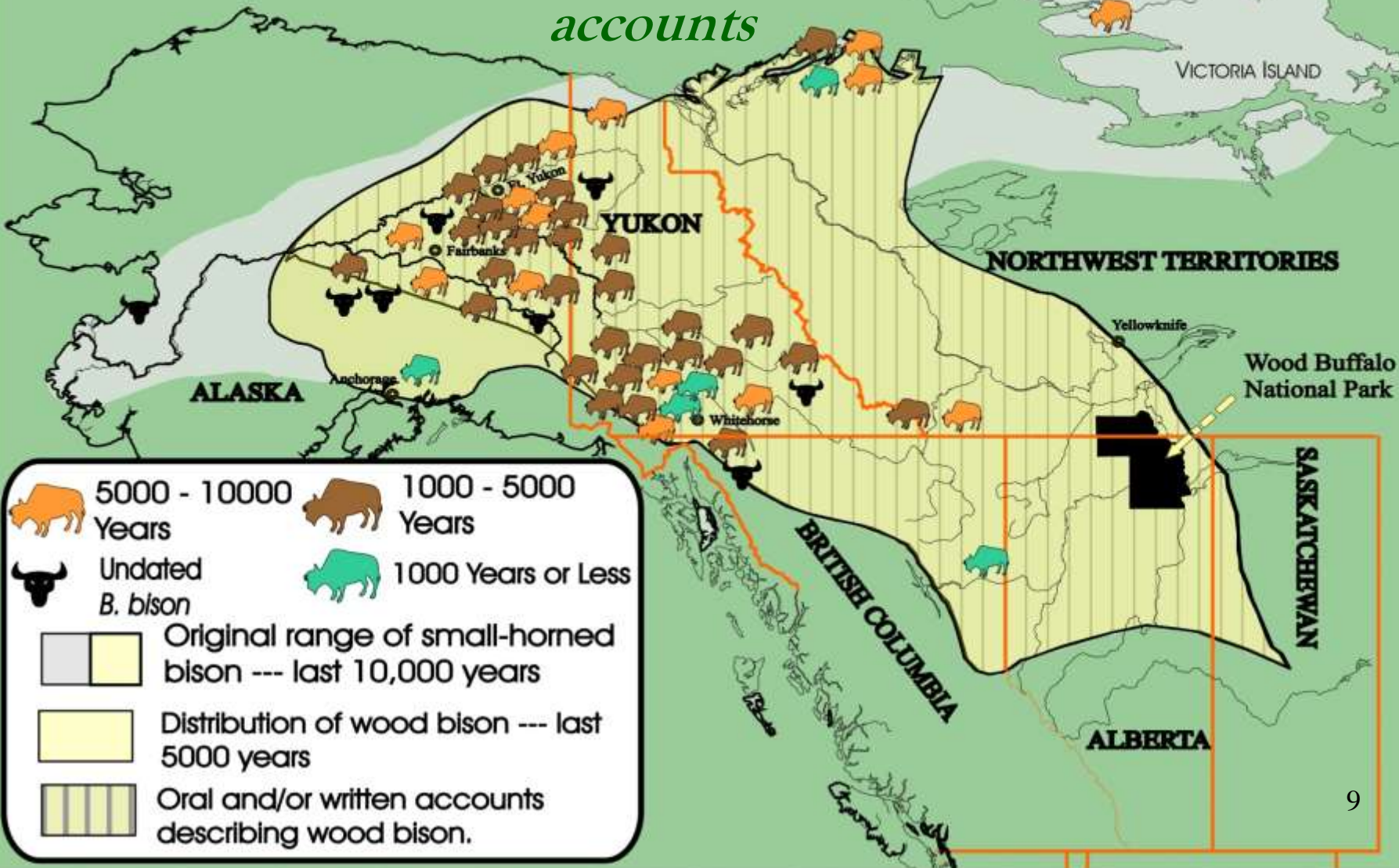
- Bison were hunted and used as a source of food and materials.
- Bison disappeared within last few centuries.



The late
Mary Sam
Beaver, AK

Currently known original range

*Putting the information together:
Radiocarbon dates and historical
accounts*



Strong Public Support



Wood Bison Planning Team



- 28 different interest groups
- 5 Year plan approved by State and Federal Boards

Local Involvement



Survival and Reproduction

- 130 Wood Bison released in 2015
- 19% mortality in first year
 - Making conversion from captive to wild was difficult
 - Natural Selection in action- Weak were removed and strong remain to build future generations.
- 2% mortality in second year (one human caused)
 - No evidence of Predation or Disease
- Reproduction strong
 - 16, 17, and 25 calves born in wild during first three calving seasons
- 150 wild Alaska wood bison in 2017

- High growth rates of young
- Great body condition of adults



CHALLENGES

We need more education and outreach so that folks can understand and become a part of restoration

- Communities up and down the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers are asking for bison in their backyard

We need more populations

- The safest way to restore wood bison is to create several populations that will eventually merge
- Each population or subpopulation needs significant local public planning.



Why Restore Wild Bison?

- Conservation of the species in its wild state
 - Ecological functions are beneficial to other species
- Benefits to citizens
 - Wildlife and Fish populations fluctuate. Food security is tied to diversity of resources
 - Harvest rate of bison is up to 4 times higher than moose & caribou.



FUTURE

- Only 10K wild bison in the world. 4.5K are wood bison
 - 1/3 the number of wild Rhinos
- Alaska currently holds 10% of world's wild bison
- Alaska has enough habitat to hold 30K bison
 - Most North American bison habitat is agricultural
 - If we chose to, Alaska could have more bison than the rest of the world combined, and be the world leader in bison conservation.



COST : BENEFIT RATIO

- Only about \$5M spent in 25 years on wood bison restoration.
- Same as construction of one mile of paved road in Alaska
- Return is around \$290M in 50 years.
 - \$81M in meat value
 - \$205M spent on wood bison hunts
 - \$3M paid to local land owners for access
- Other benefits- human health, activity, emotional, social, cultural, etc.
- Benefits will continue as long as regulated hunting and modern wildlife management exists.



Keys To Success

- Education first

- Provide the information that local people need to enjoy and be stewards of the resource.

- Scoping

- If they aren't supportive, don't force it, take the animals to a place where people are supportive.
- If the resource is really that good, they will eventually request it.

- Outreach



- Spend significant effort and time getting to know local people
- Spend significant effort training local people with the skills they need to be stewards of a resource.
- Build trust with local people
- Make it easy for local people to comply with regulations
- Employ local people whenever possible to help with the restoration effort

A herd of five bison and one calf are walking across a vast, flat, frozen expanse of water. The ice is light blue and white with some darker patches. The bison are dark brown and are moving from left to right. The calf is smaller and is also moving in the same direction. The foreground shows a grassy bank with some snow patches.

END

(Actually beginning)