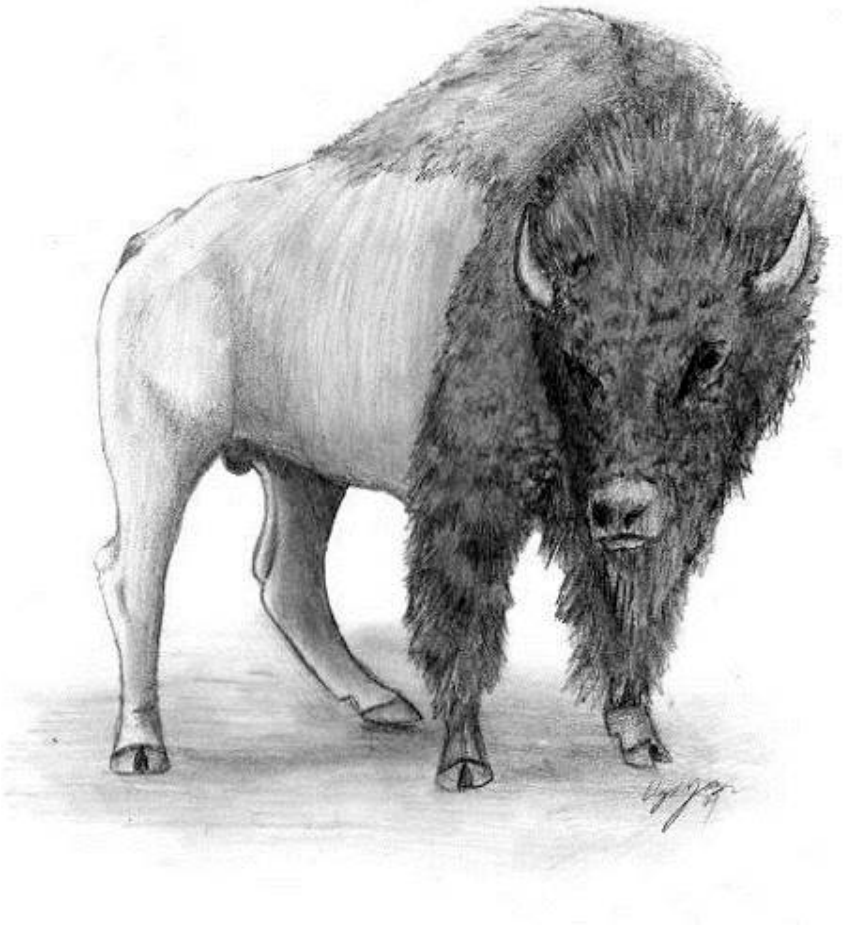
Bison Hunter Packet Spring/Summer 2017



Congratulations on drawing one of the few bison permits available in North America on a wild free range public land bison herd. Harvesting an animal from the House Rock herd can be one of the most challenging and yet rewarding big game hunts in Arizona. These hunts may tax you mentally and physically, so be prepared. We've put this bison hunter packet together to pass on some hunting tips that have been learned from past Kaibab hunters, some legal requirements concerning your hunt and characteristics to look for to help you identify sex and age of bison. Our hope is the information contained in this packet will increase your hunting experience with this unique animal, increase your odds of being successful for this once in a life time harvest in Arizona and lastly, we hope it will maximize the time bison spend on the Kaibab National Forest where they will be available for hunters during all bison seasons. *What you do prior to and during your hunt will not only have an impact on your hunt, but on other hunters during and after your hunt.*

Arizona Game and Fish Dept. contact for all House Rock bison hunts- Mike Rice, 928-606-2290 or mrice@azgfd.gov.

BISON HUNTING TIPS

Where to Hunt and What to Expect

The House Rock bison herd spends a great deal of time on Grand Canyon National Park (GCNP). They do roam off the Park though, where they are available to harvest. For all seasons, concentrate within three miles of the GCNP and Kaibab National Forest (KNF) boundary. They will occasionally roam further north, but hunting further north without fresh bison activity will be unproductive. Also, driving forest roads in this core area will also be unproductive (see the next section). ***Most effective technique used to harvest a bison is sitting water and established salt stations within this three mile area of the Park.*** The closer to the Park boundary the higher bison activity you will find. Often they will leave the Park for water and/or salt and return to the safety of the Park. The following sections, if they are followed, will aid in bison spending a greater amount of time on KNF and off the safety of GCNP.

Minimize Driving Near GCNP

Extremely Important: The less vehicular traffic on the KNF within 3 miles of GCNP, the more likely bison will stay on the forest and not retreat to the safety of GCNP, where they become unavailable not only to you, but those hunting after you. Minimizing your driving (including ATVs and UTVs) in this area, especially in the mornings and evenings is critical. Past hunts have shown, more vehicle disturbance in this area will push bison back to GCNP and less available for you to harvest. Consider walking or riding a bike instead of driving to where you want to hunt.

Camp Away From the GCNP Boundary

Camping near the GCNP boundary with the associated camp noise will also increase disturbance to bison and as past hunts have shown cause bison to retreat to safety on GCNP.

Limit Scouting Trips During Open Bison Seasons

Scouting prior to your hunt will also increase herd disturbance and push bison back to GCNP. It will also be detrimental to the success of bison hunters with a current open season prior to your hunt. They will be mad at you, if you disturb their hunt. Bison seasons are continuous from now to the end of the year. Attending the bison hunter clinic, talking with past Kaibab bison hunters, talking with hunters with tags before you (from the provided hunter list) and using new mapping software and imaging are great ways to scout without an actual trip. Saves money and leave time too! Interestingly, on some aerial image maps you can see bison in openings.

Be Patient When a Herd Approaches and Remain Concealed after Taking a Shot

We cannot over emphasize this, it is very important for all bison hunters to follow. When a herd comes in be patient, they will be there for a while; you don't have to shoot right away. **Take your time and make the first shot count!** This will decrease wounding and increase the likelihood of putting your tag on a bison. After a shot is taken at a bison, a typical herd response is to surround the wounded/down animal. It frequently does not make a difference if the weapon is a bow, rifle or muzzleloader. It is believed the smell of blood and the behavior of the wounded animal trigger this herd response. This typical response was used long ago by bison hunters to decimate bison in the 1800's. Bison don't necessarily equate the shot, blood and wounded animal as a bad thing. Sometimes they do, but usually not. Use this behavior for the benefit of other hunters. After shooting a bison, remain quiet and hidden and do not reveal yourself until the herd moves out of the area, leaving the harvested animal behind. Be patient; this may take up awhile. If you push the herd off the wounded animal and cause them to run off, the herd will typically retreat to safety in GCNP and you may lose a wounded animal that can still keep up with the herd. If they walk off on their own, they will likely be available for other hunters either during or following your hunt. You may also be able to get another opportunity to put down a wounded animal by remaining hidden. You may also be able to call other hunters into your

location by radio to take additional bison. This practice has been used in the past to harvest multiple animals from the same herd.

Work Together with Other Bison Hunters

Our hope is hunters will work together to increase everyone's hunt success. Contact information is encouraged to be shared with other hunters. Remembering the point that bison unlike other big game animals typically remain after a shot. As stated above, this behavior can increase hunt success for other hunters. Use this behavior to your advantage as it can lead to multiple animals being taken from the same herd at the same time. Sharing information with other hunters is encouraged following your hunt to increase the likelihood of another hunter's success after you *(hence the provided previous hunter list, all on the list are willing to help you be successful).*

Orientation Meeting

The Department has set up a trailer at the intersection of FR 270 at FR 223 (GPS coordinates N36 22.906, W112 08.533). For the June-August hunts, we plan to hold an orientation meeting at 7 PM on the Thursday night before the opener of each hunt to reiterate hunt strategies, locations and etc.

Bison Herd Structure and Natural History

Each bison social group consists of roughly 20-50 animals and are matriarchal, meaning the herd is led by a female. When the lead female is removed, she usually is replaced by one of her offspring or other relative. Again, this herd behavior was identified and used by the early bison hunters to decimate plains bison in the 1870-80's. Sometimes these social groups come together to form larger groups of over 100 animals. Even in these larger groups, the individual social groups stay together.

The rut typically runs from July-September, so in the summer Kaibab hunts, herd bulls will likely be with each social group. Outside of the rut, the older mature bulls will roam together or singularly, similar to the behavior observed in bull elk. Year round though, bulls younger than 4 or 5 years of age will remain with the social groups. For this reason, it is important to look at multiple sex identification characteristics rather than relying on any single characteristic.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

What must be removed from the field after the harvest of a bison?

1. Arizona Revised Statues (ARS) 17-309A.5 states it is unlawful for a person to take a game bird, game mammal or game fish and knowingly permit edible portions to go to waste. What this means is **all** edible meat from a bison must be removed from the field. Organs (heart, liver, etc.) are not considered meat and can be left in the field.
2. ARS 17-309A.19 states it is unlawful for a person to possess or transport the carcass or parts of a carcass of any wildlife that cannot be identified to species and legality. What this means is that you must possess in the field the part(s) of a harvested bison so the carcass, meat or animal parts in your possession can be readily identified as coming from a bison; including any sex or age requirements. So, to be legal in the field a successful hunter must possess at a minimum a hind leg with the tag attached through the gambrel (R12-4-302). The tagged leg must be kept in your possession till you reach either your home or a meat processor. In addition, with the following permit designations, you must have the following **at a minimum**:

    1. ***Any bison*** permit- All that is required is one leg with the *tag attached through the gambrel* for identification
    2. ***Cow bison only*** permit- neither a yearling bull nor adult bull is legal and cannot be harvested during this hunt.
        - Proof of sex- the udder or genitalia attached to a patch of the hide
    3. ***Cow or yearling bison only*** permit- an adult bull is not legal and cannot be harvested during this hunt.

        <u>If an adult or yearling cow is harvested:</u>

- Proof of sex- the udder or genitalia attached to a patch of the hide

If a yearling bull is harvested:

- Proof of sex - the penile sheath or part of genitalia attached to a patch of the hide **and**
- Proof of age- the whole lower jaw must be in possession

Checkout Requirements

There is a check out requirement (found in Commission Rule **R12-4-306)** on the House Rock bison herd. Each hunter issued a bison permit **shall check out** no more than three days after the end of the hunt, regardless of whether you are successful, unsuccessful or did not hunt. There is no physical checkout required. Call the Department's Flagstaff regional office at (928) 774-5045 to checkout or stop by the Jacob Lake Check deer station during an open deer hunting season (junior deer seasons and early/late general deer season). Call only the Flagstaff office, as other AGFD offices will not have bison checkout forms.

At the time of check-out, be prepared to provide all of the following information:
a. Hunter's name
b. Hunter's contact number
c. Tag number
d. Sex of bison taken
e. Age of the bison taken: adult or yearling
f. Number of days hunted, and
g. Number of bison seen while hunting

Baiting

Baiting with edible or ingestible substances is unlawful. Placing of bait like hay and grain to attract bison is illegal and those responsible for doing so will be cited. Following is the exact wording of Commission Rule R12-4-303A:

a. An individual shall not use edible or ingestible substances to aid in taking big game. The use of edible or ingestible substances to aid in taking big game is unlawful when:
    i. An individual places edible or ingestible substances for the purpose of attracting or taking game, or
    ii. An individual knowingly takes big game with the aid of edible or ingestible substances placed for the purpose of attracting wildlife to a specific location.
    iii. The aforementioned does not limit Department employees or Department agents in performing their official duties.

Placing salt produced for the livestock industry however, is legal to use and hunt over. There are already multiple salt "stations" in the main bison hunt areas near GCNP. These established salt locations are productive in harvesting bison.

What if you wound an animal and it moves onto GCNP?

- Hunting is not permitted on GCNP
- However, individuals wishing to remove wildlife that has been legally shot outside of the park boundary and has subsequently died within the park boundary must contact Grand Canyon National Park Dispatch at **928-638-7805** and give the location of the animal in question. You also tell the Park entrance station attendant and they will call a Ranger for you
- The ranger needs to determine the animal was originally wounded outside the park and has in all ways been legally taken
- Once the determination is made, the ranger is authorized to release the animal to you
- Vehicle retrieval though is not allowed on GCNP
- These are guidelines and the investigating Park Ranger has the final say

Motorized Big Game Retrieval of Legally Taken Bison

The Kaibab National Forest allows for the motorized big game retrieval of all legally taken bison with the exception of no motorized retrieval within any wilderness area. Retrieval is allowed within one mile of an open road and one trip (one vehicle) in and out. This includes the

meadows along Highway 67. If it is wet or muddy though and driving off road will leave ruts, retrieval is not allowed as it will cause resource damage and you can be cited. As stated above, there is no motorized retrieval on GCNP. If a wounded animal dies on GCNP, you will have the pack it out (see above section for details).

Hunting Spots on Public Land are NOT Exclusively Reserved for Any Hunter

From page 10 of the 2016-17 Arizona Hunting Regulations: ""First Come – First Serve" is a common courtesy that should be used when more than one person wants to hunt the same area or waterhole, regardless of who has a tree stand or blind in the area. The Arizona Game and Fish Department reminds all hunters that confrontations in hunting situations can involve firearms and hot tempers. Whether you are in the city or next to a waterhole, any threats, intimidation, assault, or disorderly conduct can result in citations, arrests and/or jail time. Please refrain from confrontational behavior — ethical hunting is everyone's business". This includes salt stations. We encourage all hunters to work together for an enjoyable hunt. There are enough hunting locations for all. Teaming up with other hunters on a single location is also encouraged, especially given bison herd behavior to stick around and surround a wounded animal.

Blood Collection:

Although not a requirement, we are asking hunters assistance in collecting blood samples from all harvested bison. This blood is sampled for Brucellosis, a disease that can cause abortions in bison, cattle and deer. It has never been detected in Arizona and we hope to keep Arizona free of it. Please do not freeze the blood sample as it destroys it for the test. There will be a mini-refrigerator on the west end of the North Kaibab deer check station (under the covered storage area), approximately a ¼ mile south and west of Jacob Lake for you to put the blood sample in or drop it off at the Flagstaff Game and Fish Office M-F 8-5. Dip a small empty water bottle in a **clean** pool of blood. A quarter full is fine. Make sure to write legibly with your hunt and permit number and name. Again, other AGFD offices won't know what to do with these blood samples, so please do not take blood to any other AGFD office.

Non-Lead Ammo

The North Kaibab is home to Arizona's population of California Condors. Condors are endangered and are very susceptible to lead poison obtained from lead fragments in animal carcasses and gut piles. To reduce lead available to Condors in Condor range, the Department recommends using non-lead ammunition. The Department is offering a free box of non-lead ammunition (or bullets if you are a reloader) in the caliber of your choice, to all big game hunters on the North Kaibab. We ask each hunter to continue the long tradition North American sportsman have demonstrated over the years in wildlife conservation and do your part to help Condors. Using non-lead ammo is encouraged, but not mandatory. Further information can be obtained from Allen Zufelt, the Department's Condor Coordinator at (928) 214-1249.

Please Report Any and All Hunting Violations Promptly to:

Arizona Game and Fish
OPERATION GAME THIEF
1-800-352-0700
www.azgfd.gov/thief

The sooner a violation is report, the greater the likelihood of apprehension. Also, if mistakes are made and multiple animals or the wrong animal is killed, please call the Operation Game Thief number to report the situation promptly. A game ranger will respond and assess the circumstances. Failure to report mistakes may result in full prosecution.

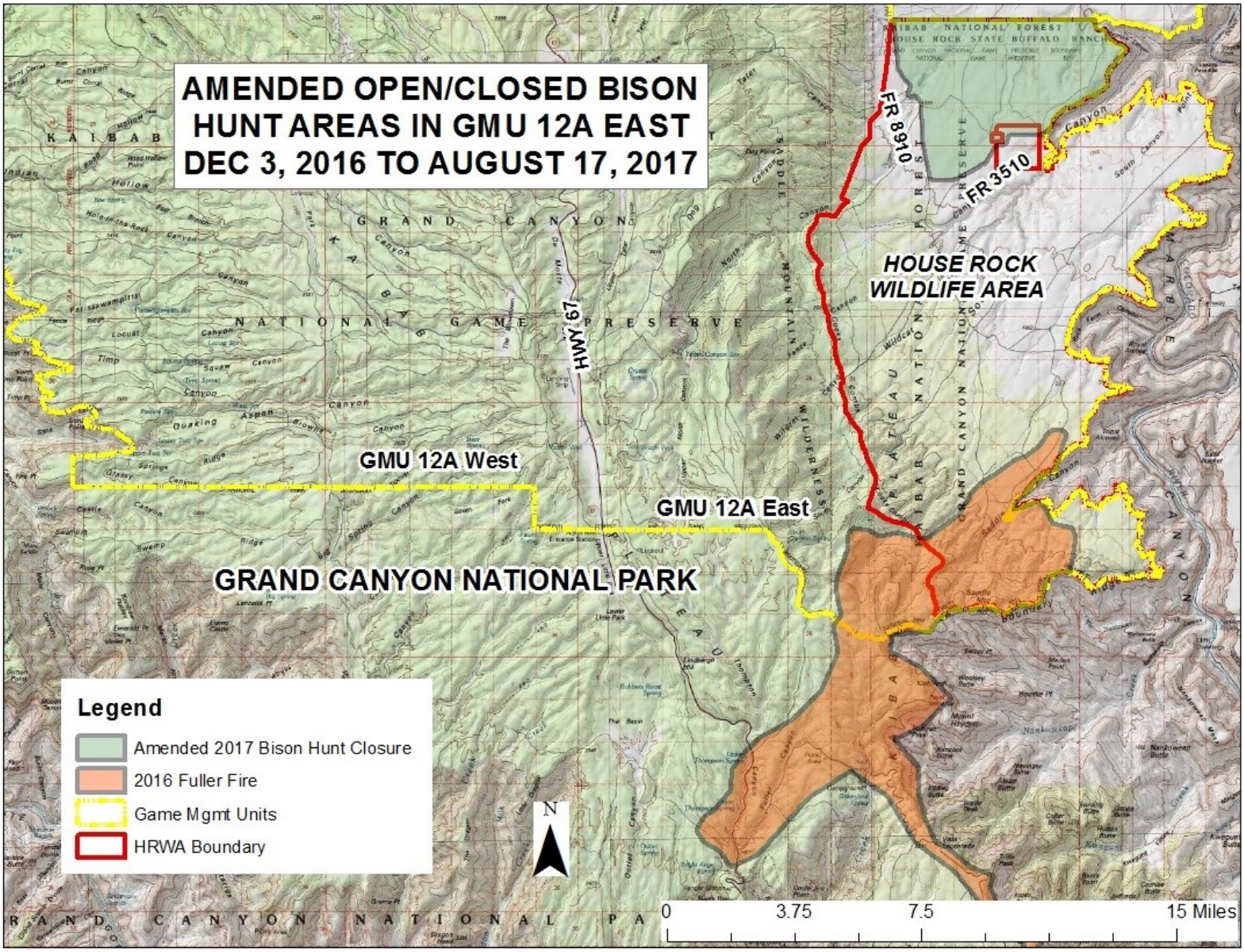
Free Map Program

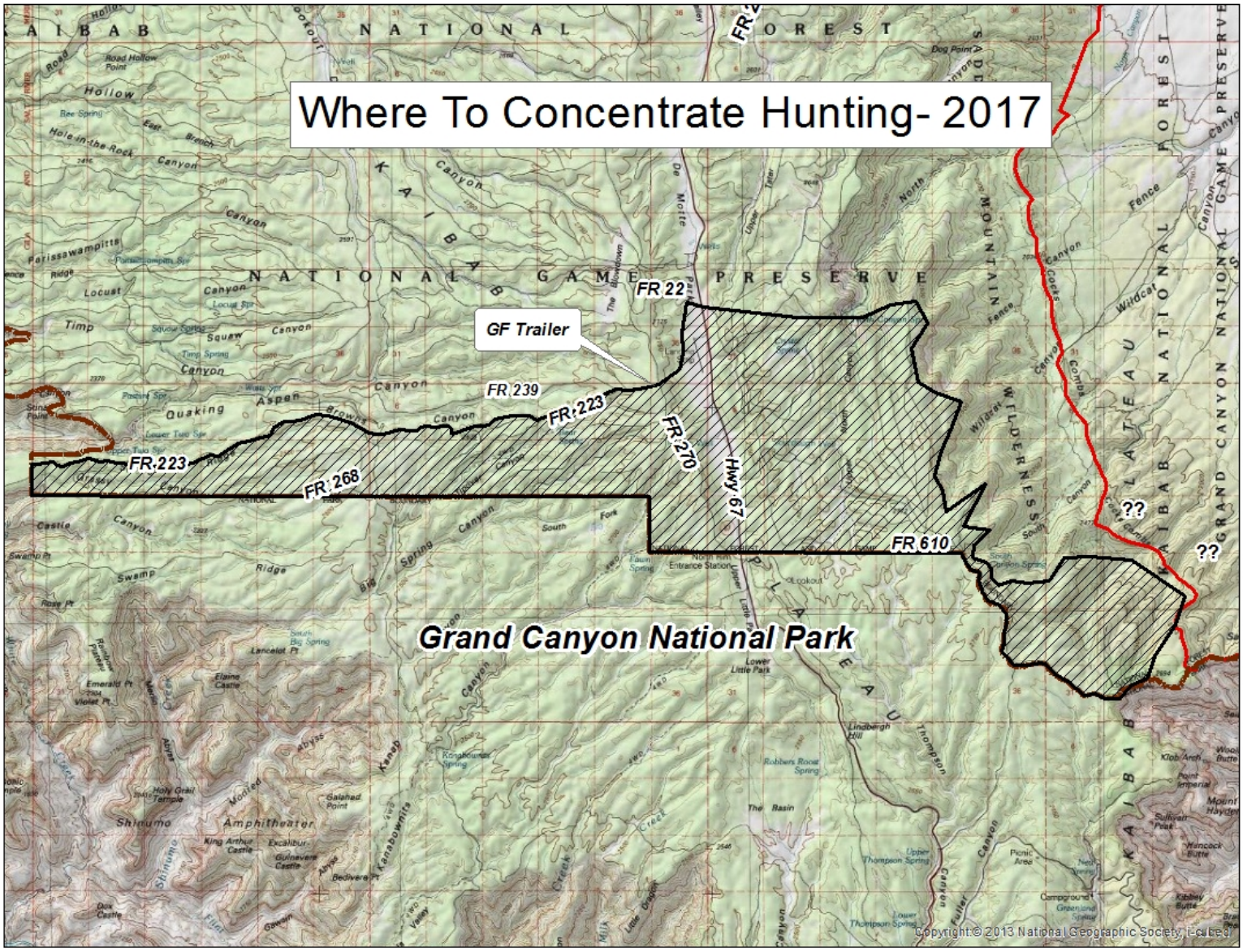
A free map program is available on the Arizona Game and Fish Dept. website. The direct link is http://www.azaccessmap.com. It can display maps in topo or aerial imagery. It also has layers available for Arizona Game & Fish maintained wildlife waters and other useful information.

Open Hunt Areas

There is a revision to the open area in 2017 that you can hunt bison. The closed area was amended on December 3, 2016 by the Arizona Game and Fish Commission. Each hunter was mailed a letter of this change. The new smaller closed area of GMU 12A East now reads from Note 4 of the online Spring hunt regulations:

4. A portion of east central unit 12A East is closed to hunting. Beginning at the intersection of Forest Road 8910 and the Kaibab National Forest Boundary; south along FR 8910 to the intersection with FR 3510; easterly along FR 3510 to the Kaibab National Forest Boundary at South Canyon; Northerly then west along the Kaibab National Forest Boundary back to the intersection with FR 8910.





2017 unit map of GMU 12A of where to hunt bison

AGE AND SEX IDENTIFICATION

Bull left, cow right. Notice the difference in horn thickness and the wooly face on the bull

Do not rely on a single identification characteristic when ageing or sexing bison. Instead, use multiple identifiers. The longer you are able to watch a particular bison the better your chances of gathering enough clues to properly determine sex and age. Be sure you have a clear unobstructed shot of the animal and ensure no other animals are behind it you don't see before shooting. Presented here are typical sex and age characteristics. As in any rule, there are exceptions. Some cows have individual characteristics usually seen on bulls and vice versa.

Typical Sex and Age Characteristics in Bison

Cow	Mature Bull	Yearling Bull
Penile sheath-missing	Penile sheath present	Penile sheath may not be visible
Horns at base-thin	Horns at base heavy	Horn at base medium
Horns curve inward	Horns typically don't have the inward curve (like ice cream cones)	Horns jut out at an angle (like goal posts)
Head-narrow & thin	Head-broad, triangular dark & wooly	Head-intermediate
Body smaller w/ less muscle	Body large, stocky and muscular	Body smaller less muscular than adult bulls
Neck noticeable	Shoulder and head seem to merge, no neck	Neck noticeable

Very important to remember there are exceptions to every characteristic, so use several characteristics to make your determination.

Foreground left to right: Cow, Calf, young cow, Cow. Notice the difference in horn curvature/ thickness; narrow face & lack of wooly appearance on face between cows in front and bulls in back.

Cow identifiers:

- Absence of a penile sheath
- Horns thin at the base
- Horns curving inward (some bulls have highly curved horns too)
- Narrow face and neck (lacking the wooly appearance compared to bulls)

Cow-Notice the narrow face, thin horn & lack of wooly hair on face

Cows- thin horns curve inward, no penile sheath, narrow face, lack of wooly appearance on head

Bull identifiers:

- Penile sheath usually obvious
- Horns at base are heavy or thick
- Horns with little or no inward curve, typical shape like goal posts
- Wooly hair appearance on face
- Broad triangular looking head

Young bulls and cows are the most difficult to identify correctly, so look for all identifiers. Young bull's horns are beginning to curve upward, the horn base circumference is similar to that of older cows, but the tips usually don't swing inward toward each other.

Bull-Notice wooly face, thick neck, broad head and penile sheath and overall shape

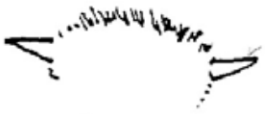
Young bull- wooly head, goal post horns, thicker at base & broader face

Mature cow- narrow face, horns point inward toward each other, thinner base of horn

Yearling Bull- Notice horn shape similar to a sideways ice cream cone, start of wooly appearance of head

Young Cow- Notice how thin the horns are at the bases & lack of wooly appearance

HORN GROWTH IN THE BUFFALO



CALF

YEARLING

2 YEARS

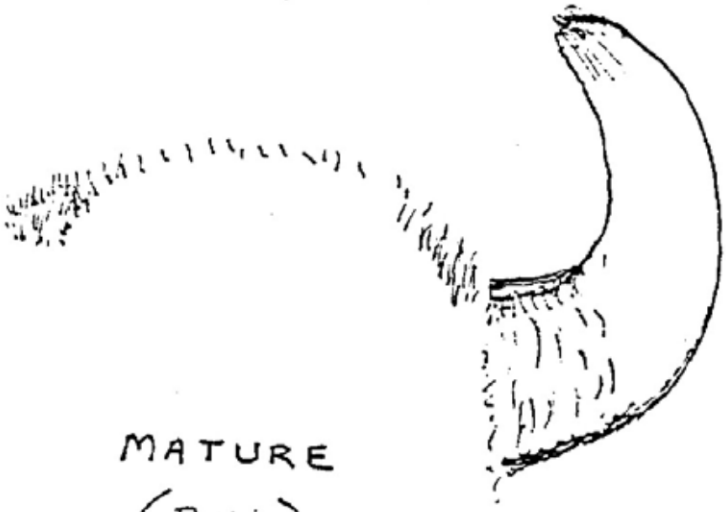
PRIME

Both sexes of buffalo start their horn growth soon after birth and the horns continue to grow throughout the life span. These sketches indicate what you may expect to see in the different age groups. The horns are fairly straight through the first year and begin curving up and in as age progesses.

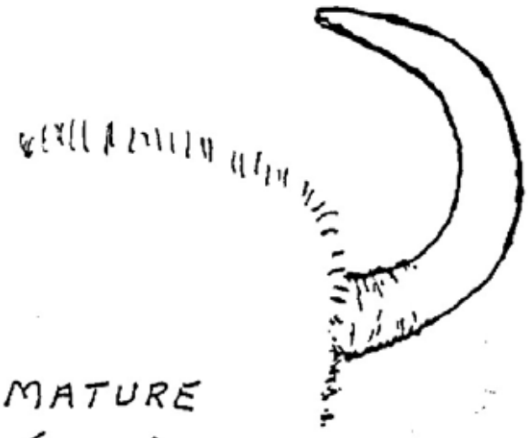
The horns of the bulls have a much larger base circumference than those of the cow with a general more massive appearance.

The cow's horns show less taper with a more constant circumference along the horn length. The cow will also show a sharper curve to the horn with some older cows making almost a half circle.

As the animals become older, the horns show a wrinkling and roughening near the horn base in a growth ring fashion. Old bulls horns will often be worn and split as a result of years of doing the things that a bull buffalo can do with these very effective tools.



MATURE
(BULL)



MATURE
(COW)

RJS

Sex? Mature or immature? Good Shot?

This is a mature cow, but notice the calf behind her- No shot

Typical herd you might encounter

Be patient, wait for legal animal to clear herd and study identifiers on individual animals. Note typical yearling bull w/ snow cone shape horns left of center. Also, looks like another yearling bull far left (note penile sheath & size difference)

Shot Placement

Best shot to quickly put a bison down is to hit it in the heart. Compared to other big game animals, the bison heart sits very low in the chest. The “hump” takes up the majority of space between the top of the back and the top of the lungs. **Best aim point is no higher than and slightly behind the front elbow (within 1-3 inches), but it depends on the angle of the front leg (forward, neutral or backward) facing you.** When the front facing leg is forward, more of the vitals are exposed. Conversely, when the front facing leg is back, more of the vitals are shielded by the front leg. If possible wait till the front leg is forward for better penetration and shock power to the heart/lungs area. To recap:

- The heart shot is best and will quickly put an animal down. A double lung shot is also lethal, but typically will not put a bison down as quickly. They can also travel several hundred yards or further even with a double lung hit. This may mean retrieving on KNF with a motor vehicle or cutting an animal up and packing it out of GCNP on your back!
- The heart in a bison sits extremely low in the chest and is approximately 6” in diameter. Aim no higher than and behind (approximately 2”) the front elbow.
- If a wounded bison rejoins the herd, do not shoot again until you are absolutely sure which animal you hit. Then, shoot only when there is no chance of hitting another animal. There may be no visible blood from the hit or only a small amount visible.

Bison skeleton showing “high hump” vertebra and heart area behind front elbow.

To further sharpen and improve your bison age and sex identification please visit the following websites:

Wyoming Game and Fish Department- Bison identification quiz
https://wgfoapps.wyo.gov/bisonid/default.aspx

Utah Division of Wildlife Resources- Bison Cow Hunt Orientation
https://wildlife.utah.gov/hunting/bison/bison_orientation.pdf