

Bison permits increased to 55

The number of hunters who will be given a shot at taking a bison from the Delta herd this fall has been increased from 10 to 55.

The change was announced by the Department of Fish and Game after a recent population survey revealed the herd is larger than earlier estimates indicated.

Surveys performed from January to April, while the herd scattered, indicated a population of 225 animals. Based on that, the department adopted a conservative approach to the hunt, and planned to allow hunters to take only 10 bulls from the herd.

However, a survey on May 26 -- after the herd began to concentrate on its calving grounds -- revealed an adult population of about 300 plus an excellent crop of new calves. Therefore, the department now plans to issue 55

permits for bison of either sex.

Delta bison hunt is by permit only, with permit-holders drawn at random from among all those who apply.

The hunting season officially opens Sept. 21, but some permittees may be allowed to hunt earlier if bison interfere with the grain harvest in the area.

To accommodate the increased number of permits without producing crowded hunting conditions, the season closure will be pushed back from October 18 to December 10.

The season will be divided into eight 10-day periods. During each of the first seven, only

seven hunters will be allowed in the field at once. Six hunters will be scheduled for the final period. The time periods will be assigned according to the order in which permittees are selected and are intended to reduce problems between hunters and landowners. Most of the hunting area is either military or private land.

The permit application deadline for the Delta hunt is June 26, and permittees will be selected in a computerized drawing on July 20. Hunters who have already applied for a bull permit need not reapply; their names will automatically be included in the drawing for either sex permits. Application forms and additional forms and additional information is available at all Department of Fish and Game offices.