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NBA Weekly Update
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NBA Weekly Update for February 26, 2021

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2021 Winter Conference A Huge Success

Despite the challenges presented by COVID-19, and the postponing of the 2021 National Western Stock Show in Denver, the National Bison Association pivoted to collaborate with the Dakota Territory Buffalo Association to pull off a 2021 winter conference in Rapid City, SD last Friday and Saturday that offered a wealth of valuable information and networking for over 250 in-person and 85 virtual attendees. Post conference surveys are out now and due on Monday, but the overall response to the conference has been overwhelmingly positive. If you did not receive the survey and attended, please email jim@bisoncentral.com to receive.

“Due to the relatively small size of our industry, the winter conference has always served as a vital event that brings together the bison community to learn, develop contacts, and build important relationships,” said Jim Matheson, NBA assistant director. “Even though we faced a series of challenges this year, we were able to organize a very successful hybrid event in partnership with the Dakota Territory Buffalo Association that offered both quality programming and solid networking opportunities”.

Following a Friday morning panel discussion featuring four commercial marketers, Saturday’s session included another panel addressing the challenges facing small meat processing plants.

The session was facilitated by Kristopher Kelley, NBA’s Region VIII director and a member of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition’s Small Meat Processor working group. Kelley also manages a very small USDA-inspected meat processing facility in Memphis, IN. Also participating in the roundtable were Rebecca Thistlethwaite, director of the Niche Meat Processors Assistance Network; and Chris Roper, a consultant who has overseen the development of two tribal-owned meat processing facilities.

All three panelists agreed that the bottleneck in processing capacity among small processors existed prior to COVID-19 but has been compounded when the pandemic forced several large processors to shut down. The urged NBA members to support several legislative initiatives aimed at bolstering small meat processing plants, including the *Strengthening Local Meat Processing Act*, which is being introduced in Congress (see related stories below).

Thistlethwaite and Roper both noted that expanding state meat inspection programs will also help expand the availability of processing for bison producers. Oregon and New Mexico are both in the process of developing state-inspection programs. Producers who process only a few head per year to sell to friends and family should consider using custom exempt processing facilities, Thistlethwaite added.

Prior to the processor panel, NBA Region III Director Kevin Leier provided an in-depth report on Managing the Young Guns Through Mycoplasma. For the past few years, the Leier family has hosted the DTBA’s performance tested Young Guns competition, in which consignors bring yearling bulls to one ranch to be raised in a uniform environment for a year. In July of last year, though, Mycoplasma bovis swept through the Young Guns, and 42 of the 90 animals consigned either died in the pasture or were required to be euthanized.

Leier, who describes himself as a data-driven” manager, shared with the conference extensive information gleaned from that experience.

Other key presentations during the conference included an overview on ruminant nutrition provided by Dr. Brad Johnson of Texas Tech University, a bison health overview delivered by South Dakota State Veterinarian Dr. Dusty Oedekoven and a Mentors’ Session featuring four experienced bison producers.

Drs. Kristi Cammack and Jeff Martin also updated the attendees on the progress being made by the newly established Center of Excellence for Bison studies at South Dakota State University. The Center’s board recently reviewed 36 letters of intent for research projects and has invited 16 of those applicants to submit full proposals.

Additionally, conference attendees donated over \$14,000 in support of the NBA and DTBA at the annual benefit auction, and \$3,100 through ticket sales for a beautiful hair-on bison hide donated by Buffalo Gold and Herd Wear companies.

Dave Carter, NBA executive director, said, "I want to thank everyone who worked hard to make this a successful conference, particularly Jim Matheson for his work in organizing the event; Karen Conley for coordinating the Gold Trophy Show and Sale logistics; Gregg Nott, and Pam Fromhertz for handling the live-streaming; and to all of the DTBA and NBA volunteers."

2J Bison Notches Producer of the Year at GTSS

2J Bison Ranch of Terreton, ID, earned the Producer of the Year Honors at the annual Gold Trophy Show last weekend in Rapid City, SD. The ranch, owned and operated by Joe and Bonnie Brown, and Walter Brown, captured the Grand Champion male trophy with their two-year old bull entry as well as the Reserve Grand Champion Female with their pen of five heifer calves, , and took home trophies for the first-place bull calf and the second-place pen of five heifer calves.

The Grand Champion female, a two-year-old bred heifer, was shown by Prairieland Bison, shown by GTSS newcomers Cole and Shelby Haubrich of Hodgeville, Saskatchewan. The Haubrichs' were also named Rookie of the Year, after their entries.

The Reserve Grand Champion male was shown by Beldon Bison Ranch, operated by Nathan and Amanda Scott of Nipawin Saskatchewan.

See the full GTSS results [here](#).

Baggett Re-Elected as NBA President

Donnis Baggett of Texas lead a slate of officers that were retained for another year as the head of the National Bison Association during elections held during the NBA winter conference in Rapid City last week. Members at the conference also retained Vice President Chad Kremer of South Dakota and Secretary-Treasurer Joe Graham of Oklahoma during the elections.

Robert Johnson of Fairlight, Saskatchewan, was re-elected as international director by unanimous ballot as well.

Challenge Grants Double Support for Bison Center of Excellence

People wanting to support the newly chartered Center of Excellence (COE) for Bison Studies now have an opportunity to double the value of their contribution, thanks to two generous donors committing challenge grants to support fundraising efforts last week.

The Center of Excellence was formally launched in September 2020 as a partnership between South Dakota State University, the National Bison Association and the National Buffalo Foundation. The Center of Excellence for Bison Studies is headquartered at SDSU's West River Research and Extension facility in Rapid City.

Following a presentation on the Center's activities at the National Bison Association Winter Conference last week, an anonymous donor offered to match up to \$50,000 in new donations in support of the Center. Immediately after that announcement, John Flocchini of the Durham Ranch in Wyoming announced that the ranch would match the \$50,000 commitment and would pledge an additional \$50,000 as a new challenge grant. Conference participants stepped up with pledges of \$23,000 toward that second \$50,000 challenge.

The next \$27,000 in pledges will continue to be matched by the Durham Ranch. Those

National Bison Association Executive Director Dave Carter said, “This grassroots commitment from individual bison producers demonstrates the strong commitment our members are making to support new research that will strengthen the health of our herds and the land, and that will help us continue to connect the public with deliciously healthy bison meat.”

COE Director Dr. Kristi Cammack said, “the commitment made by the bison community today will go a long way to supporting the type of research and outreach that will benefit everyone in our business, and the customers who rely on us for high quality, nutritious products.”

The 2018 U.S. Farm Bill authorizes the USDA’s National Institute for Food and Agriculture to recognize centers of excellence in research, extension and education in the food and agricultural sciences. The Center of Excellence for Bison Studies is coordinated through SDSU but will include active participation by researchers and extension officials from other land grant universities, including 1994 tribal land-grant colleges and universities.

The Center focuses on research activities to improve bison herd health and the economic viability of both private and tribal bison producers.

NBA members Urged to Enlist Support for Small Meat Processor Bill

U.S. REPRESENTATIVES AG AIDE CONTACTS

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VA		7 Abigail Spanberger	D	Samuel Wojcicki	sam.wojcicki@mail.house.gov	202 225-2815

National Bison members in California, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Montana, North Dakota and Virginia are being urged to reach out to U.S. House Committee members from their state to co-sponsor legislation being introduced to bolster small meat processing plants.

U.S. Reps. Chellie Pingree (D-ME) and Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE) are preparing to introduce H.R. 8431, the Strengthening Local Meat Processing Act. This legislation contains several provisions to support small, local meat processors. Reps. Pingree and Fortenberry are now trying to enlist co-sponsors, and are targeting their colleagues listed above.

Here's a sample email to send:

Dear Rep. _____
Attn.: _____(ag aide name)

I am a bison producer in your district (or state) who relies on small meat processing plants to connect me with my customers. The COVID-19 pandemic and other market forces have placed serious strain on these small plants that are vital to the economic survival of many livestock producers in this area.

That is why I am writing to urge you to sign on as a co-sponsor to H.R. 8431, The Strengthening Small Meat Processing Act, by Reps. Chellie Pingree (D-ME) and Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE). This legislation would implement a series of important provisions, including:

- Appropriating funds to establish the ability for FSIS to assist plants in developing the HACCP plans and food safety procedures;
- Expanding the cost-share amount for state meat and poultry inspection programs;
- Establishing a Small Plant Grant Program that will provide financial resources to assist small facilities in expanding and improving their infrastructure; and
- Expanding the Cooperative Interstate Shipment Program.

If you can co-sponsor this legislation, please contact Katie Bergh in Rep. Pingree's office

at katie.bergh@mail.house.gov or Alan Feyerherm in Rep. Fortenberry's office at alan.feyerherm@mail.house.gov.

I certainly hope that you will sign onto this important legislation to assist livestock producers throughout your district and our entire nation.

With Best Regards,
(Your Name)

NBA Board Endorses Strengthening Local Meat Processing Act Legislation

The National Bison Association Board of Directors on Wednesday threw their full support behind the Strengthening Local Meat Processing Act proposal, which was introduced this week in both the U.S. Senate and House.

The legislation would:

- Appropriate funds to establish the ability for FSIS to assist plants in developing the HACCP plans and food safety procedures;
- Expand the cost-share amount for state meat and poultry inspection programs;
- Establish a Small Plant Grant Program that will provide financial resources to assist small facilities in expanding and improving their infrastructure; and
- Expand the Cooperative Interstate Shipment Program.

The Senate Bill, S 5066, is being sponsored by U.S. Sens Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and John Thune (R-SD). The companion House bill, H.R. 8431, has been introduced by U.S. Reps. Chellie Pingree (D-ME) and Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE).



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Pingree, Fortenberry, Thune, Merkley Introduce Legislation to Expand & Strengthen Local Meat Processing Capabilities

WASHINGTON, D.C.— Congresswoman Chellie Pingree (D-Maine) and Congressman Jeff Fortenberry (R-Neb.), joined by Senators John Thune (R-S.D.) and Jeff Merkley (D-Wash.) today introduced bipartisan, bicameral legislation to support small meat and poultry processors. The [Strengthening Local Processing Act](#) will increase options for local livestock and poultry producers and assist smaller facilities as they adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic and expand to meet consumer demand. The legislation is also cosponsored by Rep. Ann McLane Kuster (D-N.H.) and Senators Susan Collins (R-Maine), Angus King (I-Maine), Mike Rounds (R-S.D.), Tina Smith (D-Minn.), Bob Casey (D-Penn.), and Kevin Cramer (R-ND).

“The lack of processing infrastructure is one of the top concerns I hear from Maine’s small livestock producers. Their livelihood depends on having somewhere to take their animals,” said Pingree. “The Strengthening Local Processing Act will support increased slaughter and processing capacity in Maine, enhance opportunities for local producers, help small slaughterhouses and butchers grow their businesses, and provide consumers with the locally-raised meat and poultry they are asking for.”

“There is a broadening concern over corporate concentration in the meatpacking industry. In a previous time, we had more local meat processing. This bill helps stimulate a return to that previous model, creating a robust market in local economies, linking the farm to the family,” said Congressman Jeff Fortenberry (NE-01), Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, and Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

The pandemic highlighted significant vulnerabilities in our nation’s food supply chain, especially when it comes to meat processing capacity,” said Thune. “South Dakota’s producers work hard to raise high-quality livestock, and we need to invest in expanding processing capacity to help meet consumer demand for their products. I’m proud to team up with Sen. Merkley and Reps. Pingree and Fortenberry on this bipartisan legislation to support to America’s small meat and poultry processors and help strengthen and streamline their operations.”

“Oregon’s family ranchers shouldn’t be at the mercy of giant conglomerates when they go to process their products,” said Merkley. “By strengthening local processors, we can ensure greater competition, help keep food local, and make it a little bit easier for family ranchers to thrive in a challenging market.”

The American Association of Meat Processors (AAMP) has voiced strong support for the bill, calling it a “game-changer” for small packers. “There has never been a more favorable piece of legislation for small processors,” AAMP said Wednesday in a press release.

Bison back: Waterton Park celebrates return of keystone creature

(From the Missoulian)

Bison have returned to Waterton Lakes National Park after getting evacuated during 2017's catastrophic Kenow wildfire.

The Canadian park bordering Glacier National Park received six plains bison on Feb. 19. Ten bison roamed Waterton's enclosed bison paddock before the fire burned over much of the fescue grasslands on its eastern quarter.

"All the animals that were moved out are not being returned," said Parks Canada Nature Legacy scientist Kim Pearson. "They've been amalgamated into other herds."

That includes one bull that evaded roundup during the fire and was seen demonstrating bison's adaptation to prairie conditions — it hunkered down in a pond as the flames blew through and then moved directly into the now-safe burned area.

The Kenow fire burned 47,700 acres, mostly in one four-hour burst on Sept. 11, 2017. While it spared the Waterton Township on the northwest shore of Waterton Lake, it cut access to more than three-quarters of the park's interior, including most of the rolling grasslands on its eastern fringe.

Read [more](#).

Committee Advances County Bison Authority, Votes Down Tribal Bills

(From the Helena Independent Record)

The Montana House Agriculture Committee advanced [a bill this week giving county commissions](#) authority to approve or deny wild bison transplants while also voting down [a pair of bills tribes said would better help them](#) bring bison to reservations.

Bison management in Montana has long been a challenge with management of domestic herds and wild bison that migrate from Yellowstone National Park. Due to the presence of the disease brucellosis in some wild bison, fears that it could spread to livestock has led to significant state and federal regulations and certifications before wild bison may be considered disease-free.

The committee voted along party lines with the Republican majority in favor of [House Bill 302](#) from Rep. Josh Kassmier, R-Fort Benton. The bill would require any state relocation of wild bison, except on Indian reservations, to first receive approval from the county commission of the county where the transplant would occur. Kassmier described issues that could arise with bison including destruction of fences and co-mingling with cattle.

"This is only giving power to the locals in areas that will be affected, not trying to usurp the authority of Fish, Wildlife & Parks to manage wildlife," Kassmier said in support of the bill. Rep. Andrea Olsen, D-Missoula, opposed the bill, saying it allowed projects to be stopped that included management plans developed by many people and entities outside of the county.

Republicans on the committee also voted down two bills from Rep. Marvin Weatherwax, D-Browning. [House Bill 311](#) sought to eliminate the requirement for state certification that bison are disease free if bison are being moved from one federal entity to a reservation. [House Bill 312](#) sought to allow tribes to quarantine Yellowstone bison if proper facilities are available.

Read [more](#).

Yellowstone Bison Beginning to Move Around

(From the Bozeman Chronicle)

Bison presence outside of Yellowstone National Park [remained low](#) during the last weeks of Montana's bison hunting season, but the herd's annual migration and hunter activity recently picked up.

Morgan Jacobsen, a spokesperson for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, said on Thursday that wildlife managers have seen some bison make their way out of the park over the last week. Two bison — a bull and a cow — were recently taken by tribal hunters, he said.

In the last week, park officials have observed a herd of approximately 250 animals gather around the Roosevelt Arch on the boundary of the park near Gardiner, Jacobsen said. A handful of animals were seen outside of the park.

Few bison were observed west of the park over the last seven days.

Buffalo Field Campaign, a conservation group that advocates for ending the annual bison cull, regularly tracks bison movements. The group reported on Thursday that at least three bison had been taken by hunters since the weekend, and another five were killed at Beattie Gulch on Wednesday.

"Most of the buffalo in the basin, however, have been dodging bullets and staying alive," group members wrote.

Read more [here](#).

USDA Proposes to Classify Canada as Level I for Bovine Tuberculosis and Brucellosis

USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) this week published a federal notice announcing that it would be accepting public comments through April 26th on a proposal to classify Canada as Level I for both bovine tuberculosis and brucellosis.

"This proposed recognition is based on evaluations we have prepared in connection with this action, which we are making available for review and comment," the agency noted in the notices published in Wednesday's Federal Register.

The notice states, "The Government of Canada has requested that APHIS evaluate and classify Canada for bovine tuberculosis and brucellosis. In response to Canada's request, we have prepared two evaluations, titled "APHIS Evaluation of Canada for Bovine Tuberculosis (*Mycobacterium bovis*) Classification" (April 2020) and "APHIS Evaluation of Canada for Bovine Brucellosis (*Brucella abortus*) Classification" (May 2020). The evaluations conclude that Canada meets the conditions to be classified as Level I for both bovine tuberculosis and brucellosis, which supports adding Canada to the web-based list of Level I regions for bovine tuberculosis and the web-based list of Level I regions for brucellosis."

Interested parties may submit comments by either of the following methods:

- Federal eRulemaking Portal: Go to www.regulations.gov. Enter APHIS– 2020–0071 in the Search field. Select the Documents tab, then select the Comment button in the list of documents.
 - Postal Mail/Commercial Delivery: Send your comment to Docket No. APHIS–2020–0071, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Station 3A–03.8, 4700 River Road, Unit 118, Riverdale, MD 20737–1238.
-

States Propose Compact to Boost Interstate Meat Commerce

(From Meatingplace.com)

Lawmakers in Montana and South Dakota have introduced bills in their states that would support the sale and transport of meat across state lines, according to local media reports. In South Dakota, Spencer Gosch, speaker of the house, recently introduced House Bill 1219 to set up the proposed Interstate Cooperative Meatpacking Compact aimed at removing state barriers to interstate commerce in meat products, the Argus Leader reported.

According to the article, similar legislation is being introduced in eight other Midwestern and Western states.

In Montana, House Bill 336 is being championed by House speaker Wylie Galt. However, the Northern Ag Network reports that not all meat processors in the state support the bill, fearing that it could result in reduced federal support or alter the status of state inspection programs.

Other efforts to support small processors are taking place at the federal level. The American Association of Meat Processors (AAMP) on Thursday announced its support for H.R. 8431 and S. 5066, the Strengthening Local Processing Act, which would provide funding to help small slaughter and processing operations expand.

The legislation was introduced in September by Rep. Chellie Pingree (D-Maine) and Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R-Neb.).

AAMP Executive Director Chris Young told Meatingplace on Friday that the bill is set to be reintroduced in the next several weeks.

"We are working to gain support for it among members of Congress. It contains some critical funding that we have been looking for small processors," Young said in an email.

Senate Overwhelmingly Confirms Vilsack To Lead USDA

(From Agri-Pulse)

Tom Vilsack is headed back to the Department of Agriculture.

The Senate on Tuesday voted 92-7 to confirm Vilsack as the nation's Secretary of Agriculture, giving the former Iowa governor a chance to make good on pledges to address racial equity, coronavirus recovery and the intersection of climate and farm policy in another term at the helm of USDA.

"American farmers, families, and rural communities need strong effective leadership now more than ever, and when it comes to strengthening our food and farm economy, I am very confident that soon-to-be-confirmed Secretary Tom Vilsack is more than up to the task," Senate Ag Committee Chair Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., said on the Senate floor in advance of the vote Tuesday. "He has a proven track record and will embrace new ideas in a new era at the department."

Sen. John Boozman, the top Republican on the Senate Ag Committee, voiced his support for Vilsack's nomination in a floor speech Tuesday that also highlighted the regional farm policy concerns that will face the new ag secretary.

"The Secretary must ensure that this administration works with producers of all regions and all commodities, and that the department does not make the hard work of farmers and ranchers more difficult by throwing up obstacles as opposed to opening doors of opportunity," Boozman, R-Ark. said.

Vilsack first served in the position during nearly all eight years of the Obama administration; he was confirmed on Inauguration Day in 2009 and resigned one week before the 2017 inauguration.

Vilsack's nomination for another term was met with disdain by many who were critical of USDA's civil rights record during his Obama administration tenure.

During his confirmation process, Vilsack was adamant that he would address any potential discriminatory practices by USDA, telling the Senate Ag Committee during his confirmation that it was time to "fully, deeply and completely address the long-standing inequities, unfairness and discrimination that has been the history of USDA programs for far too long."

House Ag Chair Opens Meeting with Viewing of "Kiss the Ground"

(From Agri-Pulse)

When the new House Agriculture Committee meets for the first time this Thursday, the new Chairman, Congressman David Scott (GA), will begin his first Hearing, "Climate Change and the US Agriculture and Forestry Sectors" not with debate, but with [a movie trailer for Kiss the Ground](#).

The award-winning documentary on regenerative agriculture so powerfully impacted the Chairman that, alongside the trailer, he also enlisted North Dakota regenerative rancher Gabe Brown, star of the aforementioned film, to [testify before Congress](#).

The film, now with 46 awards and over 5 million views, is being shared worldwide -- touching farming communities, environmentalists, and as we see in Washington, DC, even policymakers. The film examines how the soil's capacity to sequester carbon could be the key to reversing the effects of climate change.

Narrated by actor Woody Harrelson, added information from Giselle and Tom Brady and Farmer Brown are cogent and well-evidenced. The film includes footage shot on five continents, striking visuals from NASA and the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the opinions of leading scientists, ecologists and experts, including Nobel laureates and members of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. In addition to the documentary, Kiss the Ground is also an LA-based education and advocacy organization for regenerative farming.

Will Regenerative Agriculture Change the Way we Eat?

(From Food52)

Look for the word "regenerative" at your local grocery store. Chances are, you'll spot it on boxes of mac and cheese, cartons of milks, or even bags of chips. Regenerative agriculture, also called carbon farming, has become the latest darling of everyone from food companies to universities to [politicians](#). But what is regenerative agriculture? How do products made with these practices differ from others, and can buying them help consumers fight the climate crisis? Here's what you need to know about this farming philosophy.

Ask 10 different people to define regenerative agriculture, and you'll get 10 different answers. There is no one single definition, although several organizations are currently working to establish formal guidelines.

"The idea with regenerative agriculture is to make the land better than it was," says Dawn Pettinelli, associate cooperative extension educator at the University of Connecticut's Institute of the Environment.

In essence, regenerative agriculture is farming done in a way that helps build soil health, increase organic matter, store water more effectively, and draw carbon out of the atmosphere. This isn't exactly a new idea—farming with soil health in mind is a concept nearly as old as agriculture itself. It wasn't until the 1980s, however, that the Rodale Institute began using the term, and it's only more recently become a buzzword.

"There's a lot of power in words, and I think people are drawn to the term because it conveys something that is missing," says Jiff Martin, associate extension educator in sustainable food systems for the University of Connecticut's College of Agriculture, Health, and Natural Resources, adding she's noticed the term being used more frequently in the past five years.

The number of labels on our food and other products can be overwhelming, but there are some differences between organic, other labels, and those that denote products made with regenerative agriculture. Think of organic as the idea of "do no harm." Regenerative takes it a step beyond that: It's a farming philosophy focused on healing.

You may find this terminology on products under the Regenerative Organic Alliance label. Designed by Rodale Institute, Patagonia, and Dr. Bronner's, products certified by the Regenerative Organic Alliance are organic and made in a way that benefits farmers and promotes long-term soil health.

"It's soil health, animal welfare, and social fairness," says Birgit Cameron, head of Patagonia Provisions. "It goes together with organic. You can call it regenerative or not, but you can't have a truly regenerative system if organic isn't attached to it."

Patagonia Provisions partners with farmers and producers interested in regenerative agriculture that are already practicing organic farming, and the company has strong animal welfare and social fairness philosophies behind its line of shelf-stable packaged foods. While regenerative agriculture is something that many small farmers have long specialized in, that doesn't necessarily make the practice an easy one.

"It's hard because all of agriculture is hard, and you need to be viable," Martin says. "But people have different notions of what viable is, how much money you have to make to be successful, and ultimately if you can grow food in a way that meets your values while still being able to sell it."

Read more [here](#).



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- 3/08/2021 - Triple Cross Ranch Bison Webcast Auction - SD
- 3/12/2021 - Eastern Bison Association Annual Winter Conference - PA
- 3/20/2021 - Missouri Bison Association Spring Sale - MO
- 4/09/2021 - Minnesota Bison Association's Annual Education Conference - MN
- 6/27/2021 - National Bison Assn. Summer Conference - Cheyenne, WY

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