

Bison Breeding Stock Selection

Just what are Bison?

The bison is a member of the bovine family and is the largest mammal on the North American continent. There are two subspecies: *Plains Bison* (*Bison bison bison*) and *Wood Bison* (*Bison bison athabasca*).

The words *Bison* and *Buffalo* are both used in singular and plural sense.

Attending a judged bison auction will allow the opportunity to visit with the judges of the show animals and learn from their experience.

Often four categories are used for evaluation.

Condition: The condition of an animal can determine its ability to carry out life's functions in a normal process. When viewing the animal you can evaluate the management and husbandry of the producer.

Females in good condition give birth to calves with great vigor. The calves stand sooner and nurse more aggressively. Too much conditioning produces animals that may have calving problems and impaired mobility.

Other indications of good condition include hair luster, alertness, with minimal fat covering over ribs.

Quality: Well balanced and uniform nose to tail and top to bottom through the depth of the animal. Animal will have a pleasing appearance, alert but not overly aggressive.

Soundness: Animals should exhibit correct body features and skeletal structure. Body should be free from defects. An example would be a "bullish" head on a cow and narrow, cow-like face on a bull. More than likely that is a genetic trait that most would not want to continue.



Characteristics:

| | Female | Male |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Beard | Not pronounced; short | Lengthy on Plains bison; Less pronounced on Wood bison |
| Cape | Pelage less complete | Raised pelage, beard and leggings on Plains; less complete on Wood |
| Head | Elongated; feminine, more refined | Masculine; large muzzle |
| Horn | Smaller diameter; more proportionate | Massive with age; thick base |
| Hump | Less pronounced; narrower | Massive, angular; broad |

Plains Bison

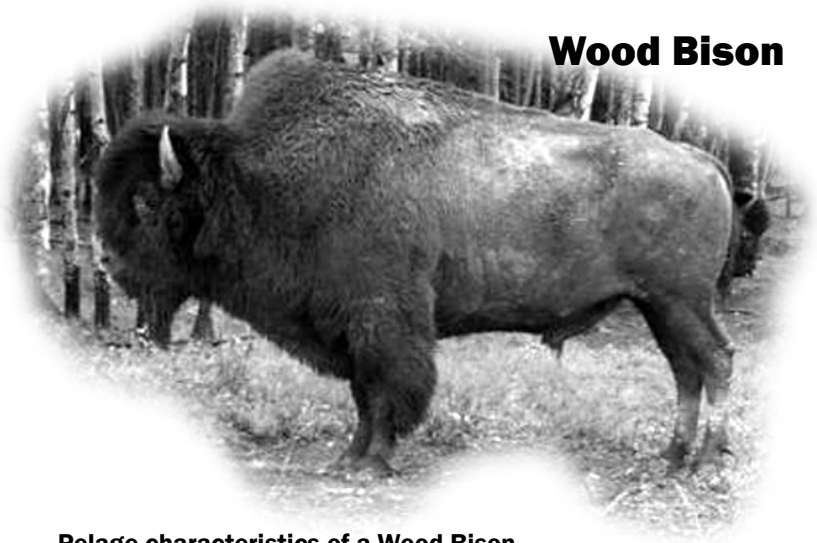


Pelage characteristics of a Plains Bison

- Dense woolly bonnet of hair between horns
- Thick beard and full throat mane, extending below rib cage
- Well-developed chaps
- Well-demarcated cape, lighter in color than wood bison

Structural Characteristics

- Highest point of the hump over front legs
- Horns rarely extend above bonnet
- Smaller and lighter than the Wood Bison (within similar age and sex classes)



Wood Bison

Pelage characteristics of a Wood Bison

- Forelock dark, hanging in strands over forehead
- Thin beard and rudimentary throat mane
- Reduced chaps
- No clear cape demarcation, hair usually darker than Plains Bison

Structural Characteristics

- Highest point of the hump forward of front legs
- Horns usually extend above forelock
- Larger and heavier than plains bison