



National Bison Association

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Weekly Update from the National Bison Association

A news and update service **exclusively** for members of the National Bison Association.
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April 27, 2018

Minnesota Conference Sparks Further Action

The Minnesota Buffalo Association met last weekend in Watertown, SD for their annual Spring Conference. The event, hosted by Kevin and Joan Stormo, Tatanka Hills, was well attended and included discussion on hot topics in the bison business. “It was my first time at this association’s events, and it won’t be my last,” said NBA President, Dick Gehring. “Kevin and Joan Stormo’s hospitality was outstanding. The amount of work that Dale Rengstorf, the board, and Executive Director, Jessica Spaeth, put into this year’s conference was evident. It’s great to see new folks building upon the strong foundation that Gail Griffin and other past leaders established.”

During the conference, two panel discussions sparked much conversation, both during the presentations and throughout the day. The panel on Grain-Fed Finishing Protocols was especially interesting, with six participants from various regions sharing their methodology regarding finishing bison and what works best for their operations and their animals. This presentation cracked open a door that, for the most part, has stayed closed and it was refreshing to have the conversation started. “It was especially exciting to see folks from all feeding regimen modalities coming together to learn from each other. I saw the grass/grain gap narrowing instead of getting wider,” commented Gehring.

The other panel discussion was one that continued a conversation that began earlier this fall. Mycoplasma has become the most talked about issue this past year. With numerous producers being affected and the disease showing no signs of letting up, conversations about symptoms, management and the aftermath have become common.

South Dakota State Veterinarian, Dustin Oedekoven, led the discussion and he was joined by Dr. Angela Pillatzki, a veterinary pathologist at South Dakota State University. Dr. Pillatzki has worked with researchers on the disease in cattle, but not in bison. She was impressed with the amount of information shared by producers who have been affected and noted how different the disease manifests itself in bison as opposed to cattle. She is eager to work with producers who send in samples and wants to assist in finding out more about the disease and how we can manage it and keep our animals healthy.

Capitalizing on the momentum from the Mycoplasma panel and those involved, the NBA will be revamping their Mycoplasma working group to include these researchers in the producer discussions and to assist in creating a way to centralize data collection and disseminate information about data collection, research findings and management information.

A Map of Bison Diet – Volunteers Needed

Sitting Bull College and Jonah Ventures are leading a survey of the diet of bison across the US with funding from the USDA. The Great American Bison Diet Survey is a project aimed at understanding the diets of bison herds across the Great Plains. The goal of the project is to take a snapshot of the plants that bison eat in 100 herds across North America. As the 100 herds will include public, tribal, and commercial herds, we are asking for 40 volunteers from the National Bison Association to help. Participating is easy and only requires collection of a few fecal samples in June, which are mailed to a central lab.

To determine what plants the bison ate, plant DNA in the fecals will be sequenced. The results of the study will be shared upon completion. If you're interested in participating (or learning more), visit whatbisonate.com. There, volunteers can sign up to participate and we will send you a kit and instructions. Any questions can be addressed to Tami Plechaty at tplechat@gmail.com.

Yellowstone, Tribes Moving Forward on Quarantine

(From the Bozeman Daily Chronicle)

Yellowstone National Park officials hope to send a group of brucellosis-free bison to the Fort Peck Indian Reservation by the end of this year, a move that would come more than two years after the park first proposed quarantining animals there.

Dan Wenk, Yellowstone's superintendent, said at a meeting here Wednesday that federal agriculture officials had given verbal approval to the park's quarantine corrals and that he expects a regional director of the National Park Service to sign off on the plans in early May.

The park is holding 98 bison in quarantine corrals at its Stephens Creek Capture Facility outside Gardiner, just inside the northern boundary of the park, and Wenk hopes at least some of those could be sent to Fort Peck this year after completing a brucellosis testing program.

"We believe this is one of the tools that we can use that will repatriate bison on a greater landscape across the West," Wenk said.

Wenk announced the progress at a meeting of the various government agencies involved in the Interagency Bison Management Plan. The plan, which was written in 2000, is meant to prevent the spread of brucellosis, which can cause animals to abort and is feared by the livestock industry. About half of Yellowstone's bison are believed to have been exposed to the disease, but there have been no documented cases of bison transmitting the disease to cattle.

Bison managers try to reduce the population primarily through hunting and ship to slaughter. More than 1,100 were culled this year, exceeding managers' goal of between 600 and 900. Park biologists believe that will lead to a post-calving population of about 4,200.

Quarantine is seen by some as a way to reduce the number of bison killed each year. Opponents argue that it domesticates a wild animal, but Yellowstone and tribal officials have been trying to establish a program for two years.

Read more. https://www.bozemandailychronicle.com/news/environment/yellowstone-tribes-moving-forward-on-quarantine/article_92d124e7-961b-5819-b123-8f8741f7894b.html

Baby Bison Are Being Flown To Siberia To Try To Save The Permafrost

(From Fast Company)

If you fly over part of eastern Siberia, you might see a massive crater nicknamed the doorway to hell—a gaping hole in the middle of the forest that is expanding as permafrost, the thick layer of usually-frozen soil, starts to melt.

Warming temperatures are beginning to melt the permafrost across the Arctic and sub-Arctic. And as the permafrost melts, it exacerbates climate change: The soil may hold as much as 1,500 billion tons of carbon. If it were released, it could have a bigger impact than burning all the world's remaining oil, gas, and coal.

It's a process that's hard to stop once it starts. But in a remote corner of northeastern Siberia near the Arctic Circle, researchers are experimenting with one potential solution: restoring pieces of a prehistoric ecosystem that could, in theory, keep the underground permafrost cold enough to stay intact.

“Permafrost is a huge carbon reserve,” says Nikita Zimov, director of Pleistocene Park, a reserve that is beginning to rebuild the landscape of the past. “We want permafrost to stay frozen in order for the carbon not to [be emitted] as greenhouse gases . . . we argue that with our park, with the ecosystem we want to create, it's possible to do that.”

Right now, you can drive hundreds of miles in Siberia without seeing any wildlife, he says. But 20,000 years ago, if you had walked around a piece of Siberia roughly the size of Central Park, you might have seen a few woolly mammoths, more than a dozen bison, around 30 horses, and 50 reindeer. Across the entire region, there might have been 30 million bison. This wildlife disappeared by the beginning of the Holocene epoch, possibly killed by prehistoric hunters. With the animals gone, so was the grassland—a landscape that Zimov, and his father and research partner Sergey Zimov, think is key to protecting the permafrost now. By bringing back the animals, they believe, the grass can also return.

Read more. <https://www.fastcompany.com/40561843/baby-bison-are-being-flow-to-siberia-to-try-to-save-the-permafrost>

Better Than Bottled: How A Dutch Company Uses Bison to Maintain Pure Drinking Water

(From Monga Bay)

Water companies in the Netherlands have introduced bison and other large grazers to the dunelands from which they draw water to serve more than 4 million customers.

The grazers keep tree and shrub growth in check and allow the dune ecosystem, home to 50 percent of the country's biodiversity, to reach optimal ecological health.

The reintroduction of the bison, which has been extinct in the Netherlands for thousands of years, also gives conservationists new insights into the management of the iconic species outside of forests.

A photographer and I have been walking for an hour through Zuid-Kennemerland National Park, which is sandwiched between the North Sea and the city of Haarlem in the Netherlands. You're either crazy or a cyclist to be out in the windswept coastal dunelands during the winter months. But we're here for a different activity in the most densely populated country in the European Union: bison watching.

Most of the Bison Trail is spent sloshing through sand that lies just below the surface all along the heavily developed western part of the Netherlands, also known as the Randstad megalopolis. Yellow-painted poles demarcate this sanctioned trail, which travels up and over the shoulders of shifting dunes as they struggle to hang on to their toupees of marram grass in the frigid wind.

Panting, bent double, I spot two official-looking chaps kitted out with waterproofs and binoculars the size of elephant tusks.

"Have you seen the bison?" I venture.

"They're sheltering in the woods over there," one of them replies through thick gray stubble, pointing over undulating dunes to the far side of the 330-hectare (740-acre) bison enclosure called the Kraansvlak. "But you're missing out — look," he continues, gesturing with his tusks toward a nearby stag that lifts up its trophy of antlers. It was lazily grazing just across the dune slack from us, almost annoyed we hadn't noticed it.

The thing that intrigues me, though, is not that my narrow-minded focus has blotted out a resplendent stag. No, it is that these volunteers have the letters PWN emblazoned on their dark-blue waterproofs: PWN is the partly state-owned water company supplying 1.7 million North Hollanders with piped water. It is the first time, but not the last, that I will ask representatives from a water company about wild animals.

PWN, it turns out, employs bison, semi-feral horses and hardy cattle as "large grazers": ungulates whose daily munch is vital to the conservation of nature and the production of clean water.

Read more. <https://news.mongabay.com/2018/04/better-than-bottled-how-a-dutch-company-uses-bison-to-maintain-pure-drinking-water/>

Conservation Group Buys Ranches, Replaces Cattle with Wild Bison and Glamping

(From Wyoming Public Radio)

This is about two very different visions of how we should use land in the American West. On the Great Plains of Montana, conservationists and tribes want to rewind the clock and return wild bison to the shortgrass prairie. But cowboys and ranchers say if that happens, their way of life — their very culture — will disappear.

Mark Azure is at his kitchen table on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in Montana. He's an Iraq War veteran with glasses and a pockmarked face.

"Around here, in Indian Country, I don't think anyone has had it tougher than we have," he said. Outside his window, the reservation sprawls across a cold, snow-covered prairie. It's home to a substandard health care center, a few stray dogs and a two-lane highway. Descendants of white settlers drive past in pickup trucks on their way to towns like Havre or Great Falls.

"I don't think they really stop and visit and want to understand," Azure said. "It's kind of like two different cultures trying to co-exist and it hasn't always turn out well."

Before those white settlers arrived, all that land out there was Nakoda, Gros Ventre and Blackfeet territory.

It was a sea of unplowed land with blue grama grasses, june grasses and massive herds of wild bison.

"Buffalo will go way out and use all of the land and then come back to wherever the water is," he said.

The tribes hunted bison, using the hide for coats, the stomach as a big pot and the meat to fuel their people. But then the U.S. Army and European settlers swept across the northern Great Plains in the 19th century.

They spilled indigenous and bison blood to take those lands, nearly eradicating the animal in a concerted effort to destroy the food source for tribes.

"Thank God they didn't," Azure said. "I think they tried both buffalo and Indians. Neither one was successful. We're both still here."

But a new vision of the land was born from those white settlers. One that saw the northern Great Plains as an engine for America. Molding the earth and fueling this country with oil, coal and cattle.

"We got to provide food for the world," said rancher Alex Bellmayer.

He's clad in a white cowboy hat with a wind-burnt face. His family has ran cattle on the shortgrass prairie near Malta, Montana for more than a century.

"It's a lot of work," he said. "Keeps us busy. But it's a good lifestyle."

Ranching is what makes Malta tick. Bellmayer said without it, this town would just be a brown smudge along the Amtrak line between Chicago and Seattle.

Full story and link to broadcast here: <http://wyomingpublicmedia.org/post/conservation-group-buys-ranches-replaces-cattle-wild-bison-and-glamping>

Klobuchar, Smith Join Bipartisan Push for Farm Disaster Response Program

(From Brainerd Dispatch)

U.S. Sens. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., and John Cornyn, R-Texas, led a bipartisan letter with 13 other senators to the Senate Agriculture Committee urging Chairman Pat Roberts, R-Kan. and Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich, to authorize an animal disease and disaster response program and a foot and mouth disease vaccine bank in the 2018 Farm Bill.

Recent animal disease outbreaks like Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza impacted hundreds of thousands of farms in the U.S. and resulted in hundreds of millions in damages. The recommended provisions in the letter would help to adequately address risks to animal health, livestock export markets, and industry economic stability.

"Foreign pests and diseases have the potential to devastate animal agriculture. It is critical that the next Farm Bill address these risks to animal health," the senators wrote. "We believe the inclusion in the next Farm Bill of a joint animal disease and disaster response program and a FMD vaccine bank would accomplish this goal."

Joining Klobuchar and Cornyn on the letter were U.S. Sens. Heidi Heitkamp, D-N.D., Thom Tillis, R-N.C., Joe Donnelly, D-Ind., John Thune, R-S.D., Tina Smith, D-Minn., John Hoeven R-N.D., Mark Warner D-Va., David Perdue R-Ga, Tim Kaine, D-Va., Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, Roy Blunt, R-Mo., Johnny Isakson, R-Ga. and Todd Young, R-Iowa.

Source: <http://tinyurl.com/y84yzh9a>

USDA Will Provide More Adequate and Timely Livestock Assistance for Ranchers Affected by Recent Storms

(From DRGNews.com)

WASHINGTON - U.S. Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.), a longtime member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, today applauded the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) decision to make administrative changes to the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP), which Thune requested on April 16, that would result in more accurate and timely assistance from LIP for livestock producers. USDA said Thune's requested LIP changes were made to ensure adequate indemnification is made for livestock losses that occurred in South Dakota and other states as a result of the wet and cold spring, including recent storm Xanto.

"I appreciate the quick turnaround regarding a letter I sent April 16 after winter storm Xanto pounded portions of South Dakota with record snowfall right before birthing season," said Thune to USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue in a hearing earlier today. "I received a response from [Farm Production and Conservation] Undersecretary [Bill] Northey informing me that FSA is announcing clarifications to the LIP policy based on my request. I'd like to say now that your timely response and sensitivity to this issue to assist our livestock industry is very much appreciated."

Specifically, USDA announced that Farm Service Agency (FSA) county committees will review LIP applications and determine if an eligible adverse weather event directly caused the death of eligible livestock. As part of that review, FSA will appropriately consider, at Thune's request, a signed certification statement from a licensed veterinarian ascertaining that the livestock deaths

were attributed to a major weather event and not otherwise avoidable or preventable using good animal management protocols and practices.

Source: <http://tinyurl.com/y8w2yhjk>

1,500 Cattle Die in Oklahoma Wildfires; Death Toll Could Increase

(From AgWeb)

An estimated 1,500 head of cattle have died following wildfires in Oklahoma that have burned for nearly two weeks, and that projection could increase.

Reports from the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture earlier in the week projected that 1,100 cattle had died from the Rhea and 34 Complex wildfires that have burned in northwest Oklahoma since April 12.

The first estimate was probably a little low, says Rod Hall, state veterinarian for Oklahoma, who helped put together the original projection. Hall believes at least 1,500 head of cattle died because of the fires after speaking with more ranchers in the area, and he thinks it could go up to 2,500 head.

Hall visited Dewey and Woodward County with a task force to assess damage from the fires. This region of Oklahoma has seen fires the past two years with the Starbuck and Anderson Creek fires both starting in the northwest part of the state.

Last year the Starbuck Fire was estimated to have killed more than 3,000 cattle in Oklahoma alone. It killed almost double that amount in Kansas. This year the losses shouldn't be as high.

"These fires burned almost as much land as the one did last year (in Oklahoma), but this area that the fires were in this year has a little more wheat pasture," Hall says.

Wheat pasture in the area has been exceptionally dry due to drought so many cattle were removed early in the grazing season. The Rhea and 34 Complex wildfires also started a month after the fires in previous years.

The Oklahoma Forestry Services' latest fire situation report indicates that both fires are nearly put out after burning almost 350,000 acres combined:

Wildfire containment has been aided by much needed rainfall in the area from April 20-21. The moisture was equal or more than what the region had seen in the past six months. More rain is expected Tuesday night through Wednesday.

Source: <https://www.agweb.com/article/1500-cattle-die-in-oklahoma-wildfires-death-toll-could-increase/>

Will A True Cattle Disease Traceability Program Please Stand Up?

(From Beef Magazine)

For the past 20 years, the subject of animal disease traceability has been raised, cussed and kick around the beef business with very little forward movement.

While the discussion about a useful traceability program has been going on for more than 20 years, I pick that timeframe because that's how long USDA has been trying to implement some sort of nationwide program. The current ADT program is a start, but it's incomplete.

Guess how many developed countries don't have a full nationwide system of animal disease traceability? The answer is two. Which are they? India and the United States.

That will very likely change in the next few years.

"We want to enhance partnerships and scientific tools necessary to prevent and mitigate, and where possible, eradicate pests and diseases. We also want to make a priority at USDA of safeguarding the domestic food supply and protecting animal health through modernizing the tools needed to bolster biosecurity, prevention, surveillance, emergency response and border security."

That's what Gregory Ibach, former Nebraska secretary of agriculture and now USDA under secretary for marketing and regulatory programs, told attendees at the recent National Institute of Animal Agriculture (NIAA) livestock traceability workshop.

According to Ibach, USDA is tackling that challenge from a three-legged stool approach. The first and most important leg is prevention, preparedness and response. And that, he told attendees, is where a robust animal disease traceability program comes into play.

"If we do have a disease occur, we need to identify that disease early and we need to take steps to rapidly respond and mitigate the impacts of that animal disease. You and I both know that disease traceability is a critical component in being able to do that."

But USDA is changing how it approaches accomplishing that goal. "We've come up with a vision for what we think USDA could do to facilitate some steps forward in animal disease traceability. What we're looking to do now is maybe get out of some of the mechanical discussions of how animal disease traceability works, get out of the technology discussions and turn that over to industry to decide what technologies are going to work and let industry develop either the current technologies that are preferred. Or maybe a whole new one that will work better."

Full text:

<http://www.beefmagazine.com/ranching/will-true-cattle-disease-traceability-program-please-stand>

Groups Try to Boost Brucellosis Reporting

(From the Casper Star-Tribune)

POWELL — Biologists at the Wyoming Game and Fish Department want fresh samples of blood from elk harvests to monitor brucellosis — and they're having a hard time getting them. Each year about 11,000 blood collection kits are mailed to recipients of limited quota elk tags. Less than a third are returned to the department. And of the 32 percent returned, only about 60 percent of those kits are deemed usable.

Now, the department is offering incentives. Partnering with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Vortex, Maven and the Wyoming chapter of the Wildlife Society, the Game and Fish is going to raffle off some sweet hunting gear.

It's part of an effort to "recognize hunter's contributions to brucellosis monitoring and encourage more participation in the program."

"The public can really help us just by harvesting elk and getting prevalence data from those animals," said Eric Maichak, Big Horn Basin brucellosis habitat biologist for the Wyoming Game and Fish department.

The effort is important: The prevalence of brucellosis is on the rise in Wyoming and, considering the expensive, decades-long efforts the U.S. made to rid the cattle industry of the disease, participation is in everybody's best interests.

Brucellosis was originally spread from domestic cattle to wildlife, Maichak said. The eradication effort, which began in the 1950s, cost incredible amounts of money to achieve.

Full story here. http://trib.com/news/groups-try-to-boost-brucellosis-reporting/article_cffc32a7-b355-5972-b14e-e27d49ca300c.html

France Outlaws Meaty Descriptors on Plant-Based Grocery Items

(From the San Diego Tribune)

Food makers in [France](#) will have to put their thinking caps on to brainstorm new names for plant-based products labeled with meaty descriptors. [According to the U.K.'s Independent](#), the French Parliament has voted in favor of banning phrases including "vegetarian sausage" and "vegan bacon" because it could mislead shoppers.

Other untouchable words for products made from tofu or soy include "burger," "steak," "sausage," "fillet," "ham," and "chicken." This rule also applies to dairy alternatives, meaning non-dairy products mustn't be branded "milk" or "butter." Producers who refuse to cooperate will be fined up to €300,000 (\$364,864).

Some people on [Twitter](#) are a little confused about the new rule.

"Did the French consumer think that a 'vegetarian sausage' was, in fact, a sausage made of vegetarians? Sausage is a shape, surely, bit a product," @SimonSneddon wrote.

"This is dumb. What's the difference? What's the worst thing that could happen? Oh no! I ate a vegetable instead of a slaughtered animal. Dear God!" @KingdomCatalyst exclaimed.

Others applaud the move to protect innocent omnivores from being victimized by plant-based fraud.

"France is the hero we need but we don't deserve," @SJisPunkRock said.

Full Story: <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sns-dailymeal-1910752-eat-france-meat-vegetable-ban-042618-20180426-story.html>

Revamped NAFTA Proposal Reportedly on The Horizon

(From Meatingplace.com)

Progress on reaching a new version of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is moving forward so well that negotiators could have a preliminary agreement in the next two weeks, according to several media reports.

Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland told reporters last week that negotiators are “in a more intense period” and are making “good progress” on specifically troublesome aspects like auto rules of origin and settlement mechanisms, according to reports in Politico and [Reuters](#). Freeland, Mexican Economy Minister Ildefonso Guajardo and U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer spent the weekend in Washington, D.C., and are scheduled to meet again Tuesday to eventually reach what Freeland called “a great win-win deal.”

Lighthizer has said he hopes to have an agreement in principle approved before Congress recesses on Dec. 13, although Guajardo is stressing that Mexico’s legislative schedule calls for approval of a final NAFTA package before its current session ends Aug. 31.

The optimism on the part of the negotiators echoed statements last week by Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue, who told a farmers association in Tennessee that “we do want NAFTA” and that farmers “will not be the only soldiers in the (trade) battle,” according to the [Delta Farm Press](#).

CAST Report Calls for More Research on Animal Welfare

(From AgriPulse)

More research and better communication with consumers are needed on animal welfare issues, the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology concluded in a recent report.

A lack of sufficient funding for research is a challenge, said Candace Croney, director of the Center for Animal Welfare Science in Purdue’s College of Veterinary Medicine, at an event held in Washington, D.C., yesterday to release the report.

Issues identified in the report as needing more attention are pain mitigation for animals; housing; the economics of animal welfare; and consumer attitudes.