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From the President

Greetings from my back porch watching buffalo TV, again!

Howdy Texas Bison Association members and fellow bison enthusiasts!

As I write this letter to you, I am once again sitting on my back patio watching my small bison herd graze on fast growing green grass. Probably like you, I am anxiously waiting for calving season to begin. It is rewarding to watch the bison herd grow in numbers and watch the calves run and play. Just a few days after being born they figure out they can run, and they act like they are faster than all the other bison in the pasture. Protective, and vocal, mothers watch as their calves begin to wander off and explore their new world. By the time you are reading this, calving season is upon us.

As the sun is beginning to set, I am taking in the cool air, with a fire burning behind me as I enjoy a glass of Eagle Rare. I am so thankful for those that helped me achieve my dream of becoming a bison rancher. The reason I joined the TBA board was to pay it forward by trying to help others achieve their goal of becoming a bison rancher. Perhaps my most rewarding moments of serving on the TBA board has been welcoming new bison ranchers to our TBA community.

As the sun sets on this great day, soon so does the sun set on my tenure as TBA president. For almost 4 years now I have been extremely honored to serve as TBA president. However, it is time for me to move on to my next adventure and let another person, passionate about the TBA, lead this great organization. I appreciate the trust you, and the board members I served with, placed in me. I hope you feel I have served you well.

In this edition of the Texas Bison Journal, you will see a wide variety of topics we think you will find interesting. If you are thinking about processing a bison so you can have the world's best meat in your freezer, be sure to check out the article by John Rhodes of Apache Spirit Bison. John provides some great tips on having a successful processing experience. Whether you are new to bison ranching or been doing it for 20 years, everyone should read

Jerry Sinapius' article title, 'Never Let Your Guard Down'. We thank the National Bison Association for giving us permission to reprint this informative article. Publishing this Journal would not be possible without the financial help of our sponsors and the people that placed Ads. We thank you for your support!

Our 2024 spring conference is quickly approaching, and we continue to listen to your feedback on conference topics. For the past 3 years we discussed raising healthy bison, tax implications of ranching, requirements of selling meat from your ranch, toured 2 meat processors, discussed bison DNA, visited 4 different bison ranches, and most recently focused on pasture health. During this time, we also focused on growing our relationships with Texas A&M University, West Texas A&M University, and Tarleton State University. It is important that we continue to partner with these great universities as their students will be critical to the success of agriculture in Texas. The 2024 conference will continue to build on learning more about pasture health. This conference will be a little unique as we will be in the pasture all day Saturday focusing primarily on grass and water health. We are very excited to be spending the day at Roam Ranch for this educational conference.

We greatly appreciate Taylor and Katie Collins for opening their beautiful ranch for us to gather. You can read Taylor's article in this edition of the Journal to learn more about Roam Ranch. Other topics will also be discussed at the conference.

The TBA member only portion of the 2024 Spring Conference will take place Friday afternoon and we will be discussing the recent TBA bison auction. What worked well and where there are potential areas of improvement, as well as should we hold a bison auction in 2025. The board has also updated the TBA bylaws, and we are soliciting your feedback and potential approval of the changes. We will be seeking nominations for the 3 board positions up for election this year and holding the board elections. If you have

Continued on page 33



The Texas Bison Association works to promote and preserve Texas bison through leadership, education and building public awareness for the bison ranching and meat industry. Founded in 1994, the Texas Bison Association provides assistance in raising and producing bison among our membership. TBA also promotes the

nutritional health aspects of the North American Bison to consumers. The TBA welcomes anyone with an interest in the preservation, promotion and production of the North American Bison.

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- Vice President..... Tom Stamp
- Secretary Tina Valdez
- Treasurer Lauren Dobson
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- TBA Bison Journal..... Ed Mountain,
- National Bison Association Liaison... Jim Matheson

For membership information, visit www.TexasBison.org

We want your feedback! For information and other requests, please contact us at TXBisonAssoc@gmail.com or via our website at www.texasbison.org

TEXAS BISON JOURNAL

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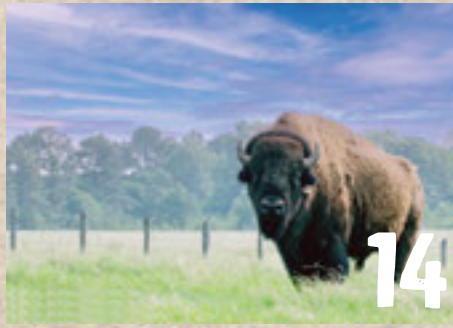
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NEVER LET YOUR GUARD DOWN

*By Jerry Sinapius, Sinapius Buffalo Reserve,
Newfield Maine*

Even before I owned bison, everyone told me the same thing: “Never trust a bison. They’re never domesticated. They always keep their wild tendencies.” And I never forgot that--except maybe for thirty seconds last August. This is a story about what can happen in thirty seconds.

I bought my first four bison in the summer of 1992. I joined the National Bison Association, attended meetings, and talked with bison owners from all over the country, learning about how to handle my animals and any problems that might arise.

As I increased my herd and worked on my fences over the next few years, I had few problems. Once, I came home to find two bulls had torn apart a gate and were grazing peacefully on my front lawn. But I handled the situation, chaining and boarding up the smashed gate, then baiting the animals back into their pen with grain. They proved that they were wild, but I was careful, and I still wanted to increase my herd.

So, when I heard that a girl needed a home for her young bull, I was interested. He was a woods/plains cross that she’d bottle-fed and hand-raised, and he’d grown up with horses, so that he was tame enough to touch and even brush. This was Geronimo, and he seemed like a good, new animal for me, so I bought him. As he grew to his full size and sexual maturity, I didn’t regret it. I had plenty of contact with him, so I didn’t fear him. I respected him, but I didn’t fear him.

Then came the afternoon of August 19, 2002. I had just returned from an anniversary trip with my wife. That afternoon, I went out to begin cleaning the bison pens. The rest of my herd was in the lower field, but Geronimo was walking through the field towards the pen. He wasn’t paying any attention to me, and I thought he was going to the feeder to eat. But even then I was careful. I watched him as he passed me, and he gave no sign of alarm.

Then, within an instant, he turned and charged me. It was he on one side and the barn on the other. I had nowhere to go, and he slammed me with everything he had. He pinned me against the barn with such force that his horns went through the wall and he broke all twenty four of my ribs. I literally felt my body break.

But Geronimo wasn’t done. He came at me again.

As I lay there, he hooked me between my legs almost tearing my right leg off. He threw me in the air and I flopped onto the ground, trying to protect myself by curling into a ball. Even then he kept goring me, as I lapsed in and out of consciousness.

It was about ten minutes before my daughter discovered me, and she didn’t know what to do. She was screaming as she hit Geronimo on the head with a shovel, but I had enough wits about me to tell her to get away from him, go grab a bag of grain, and dump it at the other end of the pen. Fortunately, Geronimo went for the grain, and not knowing how badly I was hurt, I walked out of the pen supported by my daughter and a neighbor.

I was still in shock when, on the way to the local hospital, the EMTs recognized how severe my injuries were and rerouted the ambulance to the trauma center at Maine Medical Center. There, I was taken directly to the operating room where seven surgeons worked on me for six hours. Because Geronimo’s horn had severed the femoral artery of my right leg, they harvested veins from my left leg to repair the damage. They removed a blood clot that endangered my life. They re-inflated my two collapsed lungs. They performed the first of two vascular surgeries to repair the gash in my right leg. They worried about my lacerated liver and feared that my neck was fractured. At least that fear proved groundless.

When I finally came out of surgery, every inch of my body was bruised and I was in excruciating pain. One tube was feeding me antibiotics, while another delivered a morphine drip; two more drained my lungs and helped me breathe, while another drained my stomach. By the end of the first day, I also had an epidural so that I could administer more morphine to curb my pain. And that’s the way I stayed until I had a serious relapse a week later.


Lying in my private room, talking to my wife and daughter, I suddenly had trouble breathing. My lungs were collapsing, filling with liquid. Immediately, I was rushed to the ICU and put into a medically induced coma for the next three weeks! During that time, I had a respirator down my throat to let me breathe without pain caused by my broken ribs, and doctors fought to overcome an infection that was spreading throughout my body. So bad was the

infection that my body swelled to three times its normal size and burst open the staples in my leg. Several times the doctors felt sure I would die, as they shifted the position of tubes to drain pockets of puss from my lungs.

When they were finally satisfied that they had beaten the infection, they brought me out of the coma slowly, administering a cocktail of drugs to keep me from going into withdrawal from the strong sedatives that had kept me unconscious for so long. I had utterly lost three weeks of my life, and six had passed since those thirty seconds in the pen with Geronimo. But through the grace of God, the power of prayer, and the wonderful skills of the doctors and nurses at Maine Med, I am now at home and still recovering.

After all I have been through I just would like to say to fellow bison producers:

We tend to get too comfortable around our animals and when we let our guard down, that's when accidents happen. Which goes back to what I heard so many times before---“NEVER TRUST A BISON”.

I still have my bison herd. Geronimo, however, is in the freezer. 

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2023 TBA Spring Conference Summary

by Ed Mountain and Tom Stamp

The Texas Bison Association (TBA) Spring Conference was held June 9 & 10 in Waco and based on the written surveys and verbal feedback we received; it was a huge success. It was the largest gathering of TBA members and bison enthusiasts in recent memory, perhaps the largest in the TBA's 29-year history.

We on the TBA Board do not take credit for the success of this conference. It was the active participation of the conference attendees that made it so special. We loved how the attendees interacted with the presenters, with each other, and with the board members.

The survey evaluated the Friday events, speaker presentations, registration process, fundraising auction, and meals; with scoring opportunities ranging from 1 for poor to 5 for great, the conference received an overall score of 4.58. Attendees shared positive feedback about holding the event in Waco, due to its central location in Texas.

The conference kicked off Friday afternoon at Bill & Peggy Johnson's beautiful bison ranch and where we were joined by faculty and students from Tarleton State University. While it was a very hot afternoon, the event was well attended. Guests had time to visit with Tarleton students to learn more about the benefits of native prairies. We had the pleasure of listening to Holly Tucker, an outstanding singer/song writer who participated in season 4 of the tv show The Voice. You can listen to some of Holly's music here - <https://www.hollytucker.com/> [QR code below] We are very thankful to Bill & Peggy for opening up their home and ranch to the TBA. Special shoutout to Teresa Parker, who helped Bill and the TBA put the Friday afternoon event together!



2023 Spring Conference Survey Results Scoring based on 1 to 5, 5 being the best

<u>Presentations / Topics</u>	<u>Average</u>
Bill Johnson Ranch Visit	4.47
Coach's BBQ Social	4.11
Conference Check-in	4.55
Welcome Open Remarks	4.57
Creating a Website	4.00
Getting Live Bison to Market	4.83
Lunch	4.78
Bison Health Update	4.70
NBA Update	4.70
Pasture Management	4.09
TBA Update & Elections	5.00
Dinner	5.00
TBA Fundraiser	4.75
Total	4.58

Friday evening, we continued great conversations over brisket, pulled pork and turkey at Coach's BBQ in downtown Waco. Many attendees enjoyed some of the finest Texas BBQ and the atmosphere offered at Coach's. Much fun was had by all.

The Saturday portion of the conference was an action-packed day. Presentations included 'Why and How to Have a Ranch Website', 'TBA Hosting a Live Bison Auction', 'Bison Health Update', 'National Bison Association Update', and 'Pasture Management and Health'.

After the presentations, the TBA held its annual board elections. Stepping down from the board were Ron Miskin (VP), Tony Braddock, Steve Unger and Joe Adams. We would like to thank each of these individuals for the time, energy, wisdom, and commitment they demonstrated during their time on the board. We look forward to seeing each of them at future TBA events. While attending future events, please take the time to seek them out and thank them for their dedication and service.

We would like to welcome to the TBA Board of Directors, Tina Valdez, of Tesoro Ranch in Talco, who will serve as Secretary. Also serving is Chris & Theda



Pogue of GP Ranch located in Sulphur Springs, both will serve as Directors. Last and far from least is Jeff Williams of Blackacre Ranch in Jacksonville. Jeff will also serve as a Director. Jeff and his wife Sharla have an awesome YouTube channel that keeps viewers updated on the progress they are making on their bison ranch. I encourage you to check it out here: <https://www.youtube.com/@BlackacreRanch/featured> [QR code below] Ed Mountain will continue to serve as President, Tom Stamp will now serve as Vice President, and Lauren Davis will continue to serve as Treasurer. Lauren is the glue that holds the board together and we thank her for her passion.

After the board elections we moved onto a wonderful dinner where conference attendees were served bison filets and fresh seasonal vegetables. We would like to recognize the Hilton kitchen staff for doing a great job preparing and serving the bison filets – it was their first time working with bison. We also received a lot of feedback from the attendees that they really enjoyed the bison lasagna for lunch. Special thank you to Apache Spirit Bison for providing the bison ground and bison filets for the conference meals. It takes a lot of bison to provide 100 8oz filets.

Post dinner, we began the annual TBA Fundraising Auction & Raffle. The conference attendees did a tremendous job of providing many special and unique items for the auction. Perhaps it was this creativity, along with the extreme generosity of the conference attendees, that the auction produced a record amount of revenue, slightly over \$25,000. Wow! Thank you to all of those that donated items and spent a record amount of money to support the TBA's efforts of attracting and educating new and established bison ranchers, keeping membership dues low, as well as keeping conference fees affordable. The TBA Board will be wise stewards of the organizations money and

plan to use it to help TBA bison ranchers more easily get their bison meat and live bison to market.

One of the ways we can offer valuable events at affordable rates, like our annual spring and fall conferences, is through our wonderful sponsorship partners: Harper Cattle, John Deere, PNEU-DART, Gail Ahnert of Albracht Harwood, Eric Seemann of Victors Group Real Estate, Purina and Vital Wildlife.

We hope by the time you are reading this article you have already registered to join us at the 2024 Spring Conference. We promise to do our best to make this conference an educational, fun, and beneficial event. A good investment of your time and money. We look forward to seeing you there! 🐾

2023 TBA Spring Conference June 9 & 10 - Waco, TX

June 9, 2023

4:00pm – 7:00pm

Friday Afternoon & Evening Events

Bill Johnson Ranch Visit – 1897 S Old Robinson Road Waco, TX 76706

Spend time with Tarleton University Ag students and help identify grasses, weeds, stocking requirements. View bison handling equipment and corrals.

6:00pm – 10:00pm

Coach's BBQ Social Event – 330 Austin Ave Waco, TX 76701

Spend time with other TBA members enjoying great BBQ & soft drinks. Adult beverages are available at attendee's own expense.

June 10, 2023

Hilton Hotel (Presentations, Auction, and Meals)

113 S University Parks Dr, Waco, TX 76701

8:15 – 9:00am

Conference check-in and social (coffee served)

9:00 – 9:15am

Welcome & Open Remarks

9:15 – 10:15am

Creating a Website - Promoting Your Ranch, Bison & Meat

10:15 – 10:30am

Break

10:30 – 12:00pm

Getting Live Bison To Market - TBA Bison Auction Working Session

12:00 – 1:00pm

Lunch

1:00 – 2:00pm

Bison Health Update

2:00 – 2:30pm

National Bison Association Update

2:30 – 2:45pm

Break

2:45 – 5:15pm

Pasture Management & Health

5:15 – 5:25pm

Break

5:25 – 5:45pm

TBA Update & TBA Board Elections

5:45 – 6:00pm

Break For Attendees / Meeting Of New Board Members

6:00 – 7:30pm

Dinner & Socialization

7:30 – 9:00pm

TBA FUNDRAISER Auction

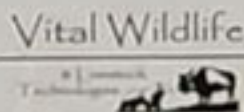






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Follow that Dream

By Steve Unger, 310 Bison Ranch



Owning a bison ranch was a dream I had since somewhere around the age of 10. Honestly, even with a powerful desire to do so, I never thought it would happen. I did not grow up on a ranch, so I didn't have any basics of farm & ranch management. I was a member of FFA in high school, and I raised one angus steer every year as my class project. After that, the largest animal I had was a dog.

Time moves on, as it does for all of us, and as retirement loomed, it became decision time. Will I buy a ranch somewhere and finally have some bison or quit pretending and remain in my comfortable surroundings. I hit the internet to search for a ranch.

I looked at Montana and Wyoming, but finally selected the East Texas area. Green, pretty, some rolling hills, and a reasonable number of properties available, I did not miss a day of online hunting. While searching for farms and bison ranches, I ran across the Texas Bison Association. By chance there was an annual meeting coming up, so I made my reservations. That was a good move!

Not knowing anyone when I arrived, I found a chair and took a seat as the meeting began. Within minutes I had a new circle of friends around the table, and I was introduced to many more as the meeting progressed. Bison people are good folks.

When the meeting concluded I returned home (California) with a new level of energy, and I was 100% committed to fulfilling my dream. Yup, I'm going to raise bison in Texas.

It took some time (close to 2 years), but I finally found a ranch in Jacksonville that was just what I had in mind. With another stroke of luck there was a TBA meeting in Ft Worth at the same time as I planned to see the ranch, so off I went. A few days into the meeting I received word that my offer I made on a ranch had been accepted. Wow, what an incredible feeling it was to see a dream come to fulfillment. I will admit that I was filled with both excitement and fear as well. What-the-heck, I thought, I have done dumber things.

Following the close of escrow, I arranged for a consultant I met during my first TBA meeting to visit and tell me what was needed to do to be ready for bison. Fencing improvements, pasture mowing, and handling equipment were on the list, along with a tractor, trailer, mower, and much more.





Fencing and pasture management were first, while handling equipment and design could be done after the livestock arrives. I hit it vigorously, and while it felt like a long time to complete, it was only a few months. Finally, it was time to acquire some bison.

The animals began arriving and my dream of a cow/calf operation was on. I spent hours every day sitting and admiring them in the pasture, something I continue doing to this day. My desire to raise these magnificent animals, coupled with the contacts made through the Texas Bison Association have been priceless. Everything I wanted and every question I needed answered was available from the TBA and its members. I trusted products that were advertised in the TBA journal, and those recommended by tried-and-true members.

Eight years have quickly passed since I bought this ranch, and I am still close friends with several members I met at the first TBA meeting I attended. I graduated from knowing nothing about bison, to being able to help others with their questions. I have had the honor of serving on the Board of Directors for 2 years, and I recommend every member take some time to give back to this organization. The TBA will continue to grow and thrive with the help of new members offering thoughts and ideas which will benefit the majority.

I absolutely doubt that I would have been able to accomplish my dream of being a bison rancher without the help of the TBA membership from my first




meeting, about 10 years ago, and every event since. Pasture and parasite management, winter crops and many more of my current practices are a direct result of TBA meetings and knowledge gained from them.

I began tourism about 5 years ago to introduce people to the American Bison. Since then, I have given hundreds of free tours to individuals, families, church and school groups, 4-H and FFA members, Native American groups, and even some senior citizen establishments. Always extremely rewarding.

The 2024 meeting will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the TBA, and with my greatest admiration and appreciation to the founding members who built the road for our position today, thank you. Little did you know how badly a life-long California resident needed you.

Finally, we are a chosen few, the lucky ones overseeing the majestic American Bison. Their future depends on what we do today, and what we pass along to others. We welcome and support prospective and new ranchers, and we support our own membership. Bison are not just an animal thrown in a pasture for 3 months and sent to auction, they are a way of life. Ask any Native American what the buffalo means to them; most of us have similar feelings.

I have said this before, and I will continue to repeat this thought: I need these animals far more than they need me. 



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National Bison Association Expands its Annual Summer Conference to Regions, including Texas in May!

By Lydia Whitman, NBA Program Manager

Standing beside wagons, a crowd of over 100 watched a peaceful herd of bison grazing in a rolling pasture surrounded by waving grasses as far as the eye could see. Bison stakeholders of all stripes came to the property on a brilliant summer day in Hermosa, South Dakota, for the first-ever National Bison Association Regional Summer Conference at 777 Bison Ranch in June of 2023.

This scene was repeated on working bison operations in Idaho, Minnesota, Ohio, Oregon, Wisconsin, and West Virginia last year where attendees took in region-specific presentations on pasture management, agritourism, marketing, parasite mitigation, and more all the while learning in real-time how to utilize bison as a regenerative tool in your pastures. These get-togethers also offered top-notch bison networking with the NBA partnering with the region's local bison association to bring as many local producers together as possible, and it worked great.

The move from one national summer conference to this regional approach was the result of NBA member feedback, which indicated that they wanted summer events closer to the farm or ranch during the busy months, a shorter event, more local information, and events on working bison operations. The NBA responded to these member concerns with this model, which offers a less expensive, shorter NBA conference experience on beautiful bison operations literally across the nation.

Based on the success of last year's inaugural regional conferences, we are planning four more regional events this summer with the first to take place in Fredericksburg, TX. By the end of this summer's run, the NBA will have hosted a summer conference in all member regions of the United States!

Don't miss out on the southern NBA Summer Conference this May 3rd and 4th in Fredericksburg, Texas which kicks off Friday evening with a welcome reception at the Fredericksburg Brewing Company, then spend Saturday at the renowned ROAM Ranch

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2023 Eastern Regional Conference Attendees viewing Riffle Farms Bison in West Virginia.



2023 Western Regional Conference attendees on the ranch tour with Chase Shoemaker

just down the road where we'll conduct a field harvest, provide herd and pasture tours, hear from experts on holistic management, herd health, meat marketing and more, all concluding with a bison-themed ranch dinner! Register and see a full agenda at <https://bisoncentral.com/nba-conferences/>.

The National Bison Association would like to thank the Texas Bison Association and ROAM Ranch for hosting this summer event and kicking off our summer outreach season, and we sure hope that you will join us for this great bison event! 🐃



2023 Northern Regional Conference attendees listening to herd manager Moritz Espy field questions on the 777 Bison Ranch.

Help Preserve the Legend!

JOIN THE HERD



Whether you raise bison, or just love the magnificence of the animal. If your interest is to help promote bison conservation, stewardship and keep the herd building, and you just want to hang around people that are involved with bison, there is a membership for you in the Texas Bison Association. Whether you are young or not so young, we encourage you to join with us in the camaraderie, education and furtherance of our mission. It is a decision you will not regret.

New TBA Basic members receive a one-year subscription to *Texas Bison Journal*, TBA cap, our bi-weekly eNewsletter, *Bison Briefs* and a TBA key ring to proudly display that you are helping to preserve a true American icon — the American Bison

Sign up for a TBA Basic Membership for only \$50 per year.

Or, sign up as an Active Member for \$100 per year and receive advertising discounts in the *Texas Bison Journal*.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

YES, I want to join the Texas Bison Association

Friend of the Herd Membership \$50
Basic Membership per calendar year

(Package includes annual *Texas Bison Journal*, TBA cap and key ring, invitation to all TBA events and participation in email announcements effecting the bison industry).

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(Package includes all of the basic membership, plus voting rights in TBA elections along with a discount on TBJ advertising.)

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The Texas State Bison Herd Annual Working Update

*By Donald Beard | Park Superintendent, Caprock
Canyons State Park*

This past December, state park employees, regional state park employees, official state park volunteers and veterinarians all came together to perform the annual Texas State Bison Herd roundup and working. There were approximately 175 bison that were processed through the massive working facility over a two-day period.

The original design for the working pens was overseen by the brilliant animal behavioralist, Dr.

Temple Grandin back in the mid-nineties and was built with the intent of lowering the stress of the animals as they proceed through the facility.

The North American bison is a very hearty and resilient animal but is prone to stress from both warm temperatures and over stimulation during working. The animals were monitored for their stress levels and the staff, over the last decade, has really honed their ability to move these animals with minimal stress.

This year's working was completed without incident to animal or human, and the display of





teamwork between the workers was unparalleled. It is amazing to watch each individual perform their task and see how the relation between assignments comes together and flows throughout the working. It is a well-choreographed symphony of moving parts that produce a quality finished product where we are able to work 175 or so animals in less than a day and a half.

The purpose for the working is to keep track of the bison numbers in the park and manage them in an appropriate number. Each animal that comes through the facility will receive a couple of vaccinations to protect against diseases and parasites, every adult female is checked to see if they are pregnant, and every new calf is given an electronic ID for tracking and genetic samples are taken to determine parentage.


Every animal that has been through the working over the years has been parentage tested and a record of the entire herd is kept for historical and genetic evaluation purposes.

This year we processed 51 new calves and had about a 90% pregnancy rate. 175 animals came in for the working but there are dozens of animals left in the park that did not come in for one reason or another. Sometimes, a family group of cows, yearlings and calves will outsmart us and we are not able to bring them in, plus we typically don't work the older males because of their "attitude" (Although we did work a couple that were around the 1400-pound range this year).

We will be performing an aerial survey in the next few weeks, but a rough population estimate within the park would be between 225 -250 total animals.

As the Park Superintendent of Caprock Canyons

State Park, I can't tell you how impressed I am with the abilities of our team. The level of professionalism is outstanding, and the comradery is awesome.

The annual working is a very stressful event on not only the animals, but also the workers. It is an amazing experience for the staff and at the same time, it is a great responsibility to care for these animals, not only a true Texas treasure, but the National Mammal of the United States of America. 



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Thinking About Processing Your Own Bison? Here are 8 Things You Should Consider

By John Rhodes of Apache Spirit Bison

If you enjoy bison meat you may wish to consider purchasing a whole live bison or going in on a share with friends and family. The economics will most likely work in your favor. For example, if you purchase a bison for \$2,250 (prices will vary based on the condition, age, etc. of the bison) and it costs you \$750 to get it processed (prices will vary on processor, cuts, etc.), you will be in for \$3,000. Your bison could yield you 300lbs of meat (it varies based on the condition of the bison and the skill of the

processor). That would make all your meat equal to \$10 per pound. Ground bison can range from \$10 - \$15 per pound and steak cuts range from \$25 - \$50 per pound. Before moving forward with purchasing your own bison and having it processed, you may wish to consider the following:

1. Interview your processor. *How many bison have they processed? How long do they recommend for the aging process? Will your meat be vacuum sealed or wrapped in butcher paper? A processor that harvests bison often is going to yield precision in*



your cuts, and a refined taste from aging properly. We recommend 7-10 days for 2.5 - 3-year-old bison, and vacuum sealed packages last longer and offer better preservation.

2. Location: Where is your processor located from your ranch? *Keep in mind that bison are not like cattle, stressing your animals that are soon to be harvested affects the taste of the product you will receive. The shorter the distance, the better. Find a happy medium between the distance you travel and the quality you receive from your processor. Your local processor that is 10 minutes away from your ranch might be convenient, but the quality you receive from them could fall below your standards.*

3. USDA vs. State Inspection: *Bison are considered exotic per the state and federal government. In the state of Texas, USDA or Texas Inspected facilities are required to process your bison under voluntary slaughter in order to sell in retail or wholesale markets. USDA is very complex with extensive rules and regulations. The constraints from USDA will often prohibit the producer from receiving certain items such as tongue, cheek, tripe, and other*

potentially contaminated or hazardous products. State Inspected facilities offer more flexibility with less oversight allowing more variation and customization. Whichever facility you decide to use USDA or Texas Inspected both allow for out of state sales when processing bison for retail or wholesale transactions. If you are harvesting for personal consumption, any processor will do, even your local deer processor that handles all your wild game needs.

4. Animal Selection: *When selecting your bison for harvest, you will want to ensure the animal has not received any vaccines or dewormers within 90 days. If the bison has been grass-fed, the marbling will be yellow instead of white like you typically see in grocery stores or steakhouses. Grass Fed bison offers a delicious flavor profile, while maintaining a healthier protein compared to beef.*

5. Demand: *Are you processing for yourself, or for sales to the public? Think about your household, what do you find yourself eating often? Are you eating steaks a couple nights a week? Are you a BBQ every weekend family? For your first harvest, start simple. All steaks: Ribeyes, New York Strip, Sirloins, and*





Tenderloins/ Filets. Your processor will ask you if you would like bone in or boneless, thickness, and how many per package. The previous questions are all at your discretion, whatever your heart, well stomach really desires. Chuck Roasts, Tri Tip Roasts, Skirt Steak,

and Flank Steak cuts are a must have. Shank/Osso Buco, Arm Roasts, Shoulder Roasts, Cutlets, Hanger Steaks, and other cuts that will be offered. For your first harvest, I would recommend the simple cuts and ending up with quite a bit of ground. Family and friends will happily take ground off your hands, but will be more hesitant with some unique options they aren't quite familiar with.

6. Scheduling: *More often than not, processors are booked 6-12 months out when asking about multiple animals being harvested at the same time. Reach out to your prospective processor in advance to*



ensure they are able to meet your timeline. They will offer more flexibility when bringing in a single animal. If you are planning to process your animal and sell it to the public, you will need to advise them that you would like it private or custom labeled for resale.

7. Storage: *A 2.5 - 3-year-old bison that weighs around 1,000 pounds live weight will typically yield 10-14 cubic feet of freezer space. Making sure you have adequate storage space is essential, and if you are skeptical you will not have enough storage space make sure to secure additional. You can always ask your processor how much they anticipate your final product weight to be in preparation.*

8. Dried Products: *Your processor will ask if you would like to do any snack sticks, sausage, or jerky? The answer to that question is YES! These products are great for road trips, small gatherings, and other events. These are great products especially if you are trying to recoup some of the processing costs through meat sales. Having dried, smoked, and cured products add diversity to your frozen cuts and are customer favorites at farmers markets.*

We hope you have found this article informative and most importantly we hope you enjoy your bison meat. Remember, we need to eat bison in order to restore bison.

ABOUT JOHN RHODES AND APACHE SPIRIT BISON

John is the co-owner of Apache Spirit Bison located in Mountain Home, Texas. Apache Spirit sells bison meat online, local farmers markets, and food clubs. They also sell bulk options including quarters, halves, and whole bison.

The Apache Spirit bison herd has flourished, consisting of 250 magnificent bison that roam freely across 5,500 acres of breathtaking hills in Mountain Home, Texas. The sprawling landscape provides them with an optimal environment, allowing them to graze on lush grasses, drink from pristine water sources, and thrive in their natural habitat.

To learn more about Apache Spirit Bison, you can visit online at www.apachespiritbison.com. 



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TBA Bison Auction Review

By Russell Hevenor

During last June's TBA Spring Conference in Waco, the membership discussed the possibility of a TBA-sponsored bison auction. Jud Seaman of Quality Auction Services in Rapid City, SD was invited to speak. He auctions bison throughout the United States and thought Texas, with so many bison and the fact there was no auction in the state, had the potential for a worthwhile event. Liquidity, specifically the lack thereof, has been a topic among Texas producers for many years. Compared with states North of us, it is more difficult for Texas producers to sell animals. With the potential of an avenue to sell animals, members supported the idea.

The TBA board of directors voted unanimously to sponsor an auction and named a committee of Russell Hevenor, Donnis Baggett, Joe Graham, and Donald Beard to develop the sale. Working with Jud Seaman, the committee decided on a completely online auction rather than animals in a central location. All ages could be sold. Health requirements, classes of

animals, descriptions, pictures, and delivery options were discussed to create a Consignor's Agreement. Buyers had the option, if seller agreed, to pick up at seller's facility or have animals delivered to a central location to be picked up one week after the sale. For this sale, no animals were shipped to the facility. All were picked up at various ranches.

The auction was held February 12. Results were:

- 6 Consignors
 - 5 Texas, 1 out-of-state
- 69 Animals Sold
 - 6 Bull Calves Avg \$638
 - 10 Heifer Calves Avg \$860
 - 9 Yrlg Bulls Avg \$1300
 - 11 Yrlg Heifers Avg \$1100
 - 25 Exposed Cows Avg \$1289
 - 7 2-3 Yr-Old Bulls Avg \$1850



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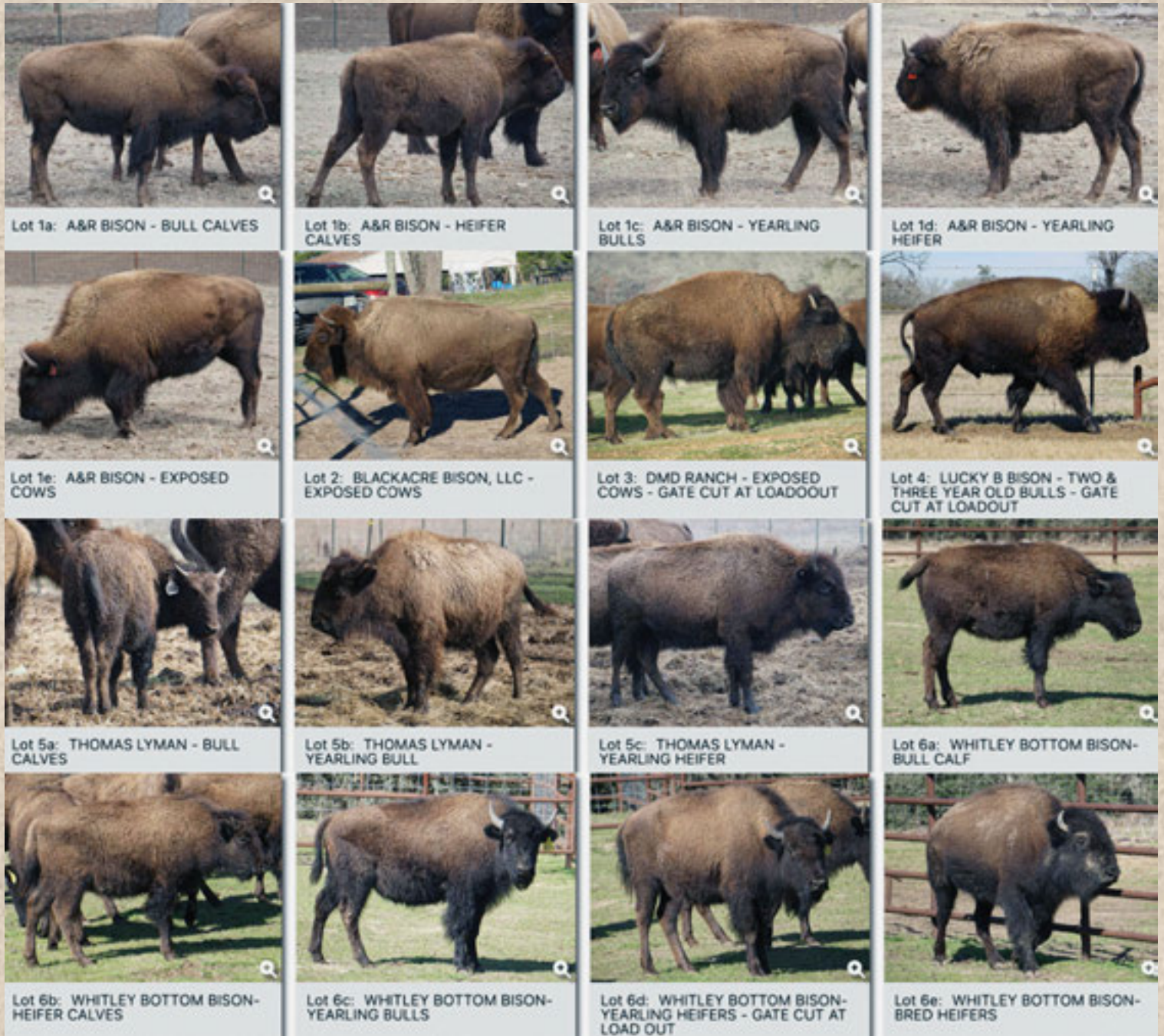
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- 20 Bidders
- 7 Buyers
- 69 Head Avg \$1212
- Total Revenue \$83,628
- TBA Dollars Received \$2508.84


Surveys and feedback indicated positive responses from buyers, sellers, and Quality Auction Services, particularly considering this was the first bison auction in Texas. Taking lessons learned, we intend to have another sale next year. We have a chance to

grow the sale and provide a great avenue for Texas bison producers to sell their animals. I encourage all members to consider next year's sale.

As auction chairman, I want to give my sincere and deep appreciation to the TBA board for supporting this event. Also, Jud Seaman, a bison industry expert. His professionalism, experience, and advice ensured we had the best possible sale. I believe he is the best in the business, and I thank him. Finally, I owe a deep gratitude to Donnis Baggett, Joe Graham, and Donald Beard. This auction would never have happened without their wisdom and counsel. Over



eight months, each spent many hours putting this auction together, researching sale requirements, reviewing contracts, and countless emails and phone calls to ensure the best for our membership. They also spent hours of road time to Hamilton, TX to inspect a handling facility as well as a trip to Salina, KS to observe and learn from Dick Gehring and the Kansas Bison Auction. Donnis, Joe, and Donald were the backbone of the sale, and I cannot thank them enough.

We look forward to discussing this auction at the TBA spring conference in Fredericksburg and making plans for a successful 2025 auction. 



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Our first bison was a bottle-fed heifer, Beasy Girl. She was 23 years old when she gave birth to her last calf, a bull. Tick has been passing on his mamma's hardy genes for more than a decade. Like the Texas Bison Association, he's still going strong.

Attaboy, Tick. And Happy 30th Anniversary, TBA!


-Lucky B Bison-
Beverly Brown and Donnis Baggett
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Co Creating with Bison at ROAM Ranch

By Taylor Collins

Hello, my name is Taylor Collins, and I am a Land Steward and Co-Founder of ROAM Ranch. We are pleased to be the host ranch for the upcoming 2024 TBA & NBA joint spring conference in Fredericksburg TX. With y'all joining us at Roam Ranch on May 4th, we thought we would provide you with some of our history as well as some insights into our experience co-creating with bison.

In 2017, my wife and I first stood upon the hallowed grounds which would become ROAM Ranch. As we took in our surroundings it was abundantly clear that our topsoil had eroded away, our biodiversity eliminated, and the productive potential of our pastures lost. As an unintended consequence of

over 80 years of industrialized agricultural practices, our ecosystem had collapsed. In its current state, the only way to produce food on this land was through chemical fertility and farm bill subsidies. While mentors advised us that this land was unsalvageable, we dared to reimagine a future of abundance.

Upon assuming the management of the ranch, we designated ourselves not as ranchers, but rather "land stewards" with the primary goal of healing and regenerating the ecosystem. Our first "tool" in kickstarting the ecology back towards function was the introduction of our native keystone species, the North American Bison. With the primary goal of covering over 450 acres of bare soil caused by factory farming, we used our first herd of 60 yearling bison to set the cycles of nature back in place.





Because the surface of our old farmed fields were hardened and capped, we were unable to effectively capture rainfall and the land was in a state of chronic drought. Through the spade shaped anatomy of a bison hoof, we used these animals to break apart the hardened soil surface one step at a time. This eventually allowed the soil to breathe and rainfall to more effectively infiltrate. To our amazement, seeds that had been dormant for decades began to express themselves through germination.

In our first year of management, the bison were grazing on fields that were 95% bare soil. To overcome this challenge, the herd depended on supplemental hay (stored carbon energy) which through the magic of their rumen, converted it to a perfect biological fertilizer that expanded the potential for life. The bison manure represented the inoculation of life for a soil food web that would expand over the seasons.

Over the next few years, our primary focus continued to reduce bare soil so that the energy, water, and mineral cycles could further develop. We planted warm season and cool season cover crops to not only feed our herd, but also feed the soil. As


we learned how to properly graze our herd in a way that complimented our promotion of grasses, we looked into nature for the brilliant architecture of how bison herds once dominated our landscape in a synergistic and complimentary way. Our grazing plan soon took the form of biomimicking the wild herds that once roamed our landscapes for millenia while simultaneously creating the most fertile ecosystems this continent had ever seen. We built smaller paddocks to achieve high density grazing (targeting around 30,000 pounds of bison per acre) for short durations (1-3 days) and always accounted for adequate recovery before returning (sometimes 6- 12 months).

As bare soil became less problematic, we next asked our animals to express their innate potential to promote biodiversity in the form of grasses, legumes, forbes, and brassicas. Through their instinct to wallow, the herd constantly transported seeds across the property. As the animals moved in their herd formation, inevitably their hooves would compress these seeds into the soil. As the soil fertility was continuing to improve, the vulnerable seeds had a greater chance at germinating. These animals are an



immaculate expression of nature's brilliance as well as a gift from a higher source of creation. I am confident that there is no man made technology that could ever replicate the design of a bison.

As we settle into year 8 of co-creating alongside bison, it is abundantly clear that Mother Nature's capacity for healing is greater than our species capacity for destruction. We find our purpose on this ranch is to continue restoring the broken cycles of nature, and once in place, standing back in admiration while nature self organizes and self heals. When asked why we decided to raise bison, we do our best to

explain that these regenerative beings have potential to create a disproportionate net positive return to their environment. When asked why we decided to raise animals, we do our best to explain the high calling of creating abundance for land, our animals, and our community. As we look into the future, we recognize that we will never experience the fullest expression of regeneration on this land, for the limits of regeneration are seemingly endless. We hope to leave behind a beacon of hope for our children and future generations that inspire others to co create with a loving Mother Nature to which we belong. 


Continued from page 3

a passion for the TBA, serving its members, providing value to our sponsors, being an advocate for bison, and you have time to invest, please consider serving on the board. The TBA board must remain focused on our members, our sponsors, and of course the well-being of the American Bison.

After the conclusion of the TBA member only meeting, we will begin the joint TBA / NBA social event. This will be a great time of getting to know other bison ranchers and build new friendships with NBA members.

Please join us May 3 and 4 in Fredericksburg, TX for the TBA / NBA joint conference. It will be one and half days of fun and learning as we celebrate the TBA's 30th anniversary.

We will be listening to you about ways to improve the TBA and which topics you want discussed at future conferences. Until then, we are all blessed to live in the United States of America, the last hope of freedom in the world. For those of us that live in Texas, we represent the last hope of freedom in America.

Cheers,
Ed Mountain
President, Texas Bison Association 

Happy 30th Anniversary



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Looking back...and forward

Two TBA veterans share memories and vision

As we celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Texas Bison Association, we thought it would be informative to reflect on the early days of the TBA.

A small group of Texas bison enthusiasts gathered in San Antonio in 1994 to form the Texas Bison Association. Among the founding members were Cecil Miskin and Beverly Brown. Recently the two veteran members graciously agreed to share memories of the association over the past three decades.

WHAT'S YOUR RECOLLECTION OF HOW TBA GOT ITS START?

Beverly: Several bison producers met in San Antonio to visit, share and form a statewide organization to connect bison breeders. Alvin Jones was instrumental in pulling those few folks together. Cecil and Vicki Miskin; the De Los Santos (husband and wife), Alvin Jones and his wife; and Ed Bauer, Clifford Dorn and myself were the ones I remember that were in attendance.

Cecil: It was at and after the American Bison Association convention in San Antonio, Texas. Vicky and I were completely new to bison, having purchased our first—a pair of calves—from a guy in Grapevine Texas, and having no experience. All Texans attending the national convention in San Antonio were invited to stay afterward and discuss setting up a Texas Bison Association, so we came in and sat down.

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN BISON ASSOCIATION ACTIVITIES?

Beverly: When I was trying to learn about bison and connect with other Texans in the early 90's, there was nobody in my immediate area raising bison. I had no resources, no direction and there weren't many bison to be found. I took a trip to Missouri and visited with Alyce Kanoth, who was working the Missouri Buffalo Association booth at the Missouri State Fair. During that trip I visited Bob Fry's bison ranch and saw firsthand his operation. Also, I had joined the National Buffalo Association (now the National Bison

Association) to connect with other bison folks. It was a small group at that time. They would have folks introduce themselves and tell how many bison they owned. I stood up and proudly told them I was from TEXAS and had a herd of "ONE."

Cecil: How did we get involved? We stayed in the room too long.

HOW MANY BISON DID YOU HAVE WHEN THE TEXAS BISON ASSOCIATION WAS BORN?

Beverly: Only a few animals. I started with one bottle-fed heifer calf that my parents gave me as a gift. We bought one or two animals from other ranchers as we could. Once we purchased two bison cows sight unseen after seeing a Thrifty Nickel ad from Fort Stockton, and they hauled them all the way to us in Brazos County.

Cecil: Just that pair of calves; we'd had them about a year when we went to San Antonio.

WHAT WERE YOUR PRIVATE THOUGHTS WHEN THE IDEA WAS SUGGESTED TO YOU?

Beverly: I was so excited to think that Texas could have an organization dedicated to the bison, and that we could connect and share with other like-minded folks. It was encouraging. I'd had so much negative pushback from others outside the bison community at that time. Many people would say, "They will go through your fence; they are mean!" Cattle were and have remained king in Texas. The sentiment was, "What in the world was I thinking raising bison?"

Cecil: I thought it sounded good. Groups can be a good thing.

HOW MANY MEMBERS WERE THERE INITIALLY? HOW QUICKLY DID MEMBERSHIP GROW?

Beverly: I'm not sure of the numbers, but I believe Ronny and Sharla Wenzel from Hamilton were the first members to sign up after they heard about the

association being formed. They've been faithful, active, hard-working members ever since. They've sold the bison meat product in jerky and sticks for years at their Flying Dutchman store north of Hamilton.

Cecil: It seemed like maybe eight to 12 folks. The growth wasn't really fast in the beginning, but it seemed steady. More members stayed in than left, as I recall. We did a number of social/educational projects and always had a good time between us when we did. That was the glue that kept folks coming back and trying whatever we thought might work.

WHAT WERE YOUR IMPRESSIONS OF THE PEOPLE INVOLVED WITH TBA THEN? WHAT ABOUT NOW?

Beverly: My impression of Texas bison folks then AND now: Salt of the earth, willing to listen, willing to learn and to tweak their operations—and then to share their experiences. They're folks willing to do something different and do it differently, then help others to get started. We had to do that, because formal research has been very limited until the past decade or so. Today, I'm so glad North Dakota State University has its Center of Excellence in Bison Studies up and running, Texas A&M Parasitology is focused on bison, A&M's Genetic Department under the leadership of Dr. Jim Derr mapped the bison genome, and Ted Turner's ranches have conducted numerous scientific bison studies. Meanwhile our state, regional and national bison organizations have grown to meet the organizational challenges of sharing new techniques. The result: TBA members now are more educated than ever, and we're all experiencing this adventure with more solid information and direction.

Cecil: Back then it seemed like most everyone was like us—new or with just a few head of animals. Everyone seemed welcoming. As time went on and new members came in, it grew to be more like family. Instrumental to that were Ronny and Sharla Wenzel and Pat and Karen Bierschwale, just to name a few. Good folks just trying to help other good folk with the critters.

WHAT HAS BEEN TBA'S BIGGEST CHALLENGE OVER THE YEARS?

Beverly: Our biggest challenge is having enough folks involved in giving their time and energy to the association—to help with the conferences and the magazine, or to serve on the TBA board. The TBA

can only be as strong as its members make it, and that takes time and work.

Cecil: The big task is establishing a local market for small quantities of bison. We are too far away from the major gathering points up north, and our bison producers generally have only a few to a few dozen head. And the perception, possibly the reality, is that southern animals do not grow as large or as quickly as northern bison. So, we raise some and then have to find buyers looking for just a few. With a larger organization today, and a pretty good history of sales, I think things are getting better, but it's still a challenge.

WHAT'S TBA'S BIGGEST VICTORY IN THE PAST 30 YEARS?

Beverly: The TBA was instrumental in getting the Texas Legislature to change the Texas estray law. Until then, stray bison weren't protected under state law like stray cattle, horses or sheep were. Bison were classified as dangerous wildlife and could be shot on sight if a tree fell on your fence and your animals got into the neighbor's pasture. TBA members pushed their legislators to change that. Donnis Baggett drafted the legislation and lobbied in Austin, and TBA members Tim Frazier and I testified in the Capitol hearing. It took two sessions to get it passed, but now bison are covered under the Texas estray law.

Also, the TBA has hosted many successful conferences that were both informational and fun. And then there's the Texas Bison Journal, an exceptional yearly magazine, and our weekly email bison briefs. The TBA "ROCKS!"

Cecil: A major and ongoing success is building friendships and gathering recognition from other bison ranchers nationally. Texans have become integral to the success of the National Bison Association, with two members of our TBA family rising in the ranks to serve as NBA president. We've also had Texans serve on The National Buffalo Foundation board.

THIRTY YEARS AGO BISON DIDN'T ENJOY THE PUBLIC RELATIONS "COOL FACTOR" OR "SIZZLE" THAT THEY DO NOW. HAS THAT AFFECTED THE VITALITY OF THE TBA?

Beverly: I call it the "WOW" factor. The general public is mesmerized by the American buffalo. They are in awe of bison and are drawn to it. With the meat being superior nutritionally, bison are a win-win. This

has definitely affected the vitality of the TBA and its outreach for all things bison.

Cecil: Well, I think bison has always had that awe-inspiring emotion. But the perception has been the evolution from endangered and/or extinct species to an unparalleled ecological success. Thirty years ago, the slogan “You need to eat them to save them” would have been met with pitchforks and wooden stakes through the heart. But one by one, one burger and one meal at a time, the perception of bison—and those responsible for the success of bison recovery—has moved in the correct direction .

WHAT SHOULD TBA HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY IN THE PAST 30 YEARS? IF WE COULD DO JUST ONE THING OVER AGAIN, WHAT WOULD YOU RECOMMEND?

Beverly: NOTHING! Hindsight might be 20/20 but all in all, the TBA has evolved as a competent and effective state organization.

Cecil: I never look back. Second guessing only leads to regret, in my way of thinking. We might well have made larger mistakes the second time. To steal from a popular song, “the path to heaven is full of sinners and believers.” We did what we collectively thought right. I would never change that and would do it again. History is the teacher and we are here today because of what we collectively and individually did along the way.

WHO ARE SOME OF THE MOST IMPACTFUL FOLKS YOU RECALL IN THE HISTORY OF THE TEXAS BISON ASSOCIATION?

Beverly: I’m not answering that question directly, but I want to say hats off to Charlie and Mary Ann Goodnight, proud pioneer Texans who were instrumental in saving our beloved bison. Without the Goodnights, we very well may not have had any bison in Texas today, much less a Texas Bison Association. I think we should name them both posthumous honorary members.

As for the most impactful TBA folks over the past three decades, I don’t want to name names for fear I’d forget someone, and that would not be my intent. I’d just like to thank all TBA members who have given their time and energy to making the association a success. HIGH FIVE and then some!!

Cecil: We’ve already mentioned most of them. If I had to pick one, it would be Ronny Wenzel. Then there’s Bev in her quiet and positive way. Tim Frazier

was also impactful, getting calves sold to cutting horse folk when no one else was buying. Pat Bierschwale served faithfully as treasurer for decades. Frankly, everyone played a part. Everyone was an example. Some have been examples of what to do, and some have been examples of what not to do.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AHEAD FOR TBA? IF YOU COULD MAKE ONE WISH FOR THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE NEXT 30 YEARS, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Beverly: Always work together for the good of the bison and their caretakers. Don’t think you know it all as a board member or member. Always be willing to learn, and study what the other state and regional associations are doing. Share and remember the golden rule: ALWAYS, ALWAYS keep the best interest of the bison at the heart of the TBA.

Cecil: I think the TBA will continue to grow and broaden interest in bison—whether folks are raising, cooking, or just admiring them. My wish is continued inclusivity—possibly broadening out as the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers did a century ago. Maybe the Texas and Southwest Bison Association. Larger is more difficult sometimes, but if you can keep centrist officers to help rein in extreme views, it can work. Stay focused on both individual and collective goals. This kind of work is never easy, and it requires constant effort.

WHAT’S THE MOST IMPORTANT PIECE OF ADVICE YOU OFFER TO NEW BISON PRODUCERS/TBA MEMBERS?

Beverly: Research, ask questions, visit other bison operations. Join the TBA and the National Bison Association and attend their conferences. Get involved with the work of the associations.

On the ranch level, be willing to change. Never stop studying ways to improve animal handling and safety by tweaking pens, fencing, etc. And be willing to help others!

Cecil: Love thy critter as thyself. And respect thy fellow members, regardless if you think them lunatics. Accomplish great things by not worrying about who gets the credit.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU’D LIKE TO SAY?

Beverly: It’s truly an honor to raise this awesome animal. God had a wonderful day when he designed

the bison, American buffalo, Tatanka, whatever name you call it. Not only do we honor the bison as our National Mammal, but in return the animal continues to give us joy, nourishment, spiritual awareness and

pride in our country. And finally, thanks to you, Cecil, for everything you do for the TBA.

Cecil: Thanks to you, Bev, and to everyone else who's made the TBA the success it is today. 🐾



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NEW GENOMIC TOOLS FOR NORTH AMERICAN BISON

James Derr and Sam Stroupe, Department of Veterinary Pathobiology, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843

Pioneers of American plains bison salvation in the late 1800s, including James McKay, William Alloway, Frederick Dupree, Walking Coyote, Charles Goodnight, and Charles Jones observed breeding among their animals and then surmised how animals in their herds were related. In their time, no molecular genetic resources were available to help them manage their bison. Each of these men saved wild bison in their local regions, and to some degree, domesticated them into the production animals we have today. To successfully accomplish this, new animal husbandry ideas were required, and the learning curve necessary to establish productive captive breeding populations of this wildlife species had to be steep. Some of their original ideas turned out to be successful (retaining family groups and acknowledging bison have important social structure) and some were not (forced hybridization with beef cattle). Nevertheless, these early bison ranchers' adapted management programs from cattle operations to successfully produce new captive bison herds that have become the foundation of the successful bison industry today.

However, human management of a former free-ranging wildlife species present multiple challenges that impact long-term health and productivity of these captive populations. For example, restricting movement with fences, manipulation of herd structure by highly altering sex ratios, and the practice of artificial selection for certain traits, represent profound changes in bison breeding from the free roaming populations before the 1870s. Human intervention in bison populations comes with responsibilities for ensuring the preservation of genetic diversity and genetic health in managed bison populations.

Traditional livestock producers realized the importance of understanding breeding structure in their herds and reached out to researchers in land-grant Universities and biotechnology companies to develop genetic tools to help manage their animal resources. Around 50 years ago, blood group marker technology adapted from domestic cattle parentage testing became available and a few bison producers used these technologies to determine which bulls had sired their calves. Blood group markers are difficult to interpret, costly to produce, and have limited practical applications for bison parentage. The industry was not overly interested in embracing this technology to any large extent. Then, about 25 years ago, a more modern DNA based parentage test became available that employed genetic markers called microsatellites, the same type of genetic markers used in human parentage testing (Schnabel, Ward, and Derr 2000). Microsatellite markers are more dependable and more powerful than the older blood group marker techniques, but they do have limitations. Microsatellites markers are very labor intensive in the laboratory, difficult to automate, costly to develop and produce, and have resolution difficulties especially when comparing closely related potential sires such as half and full sibling brothers.

The next generation of genetic tools for bison (and all other mammals) are based on our ability to sequence entire genomes rapidly and economically. This technology allows researchers to develop reference genomes to provide fundamental information on the genetic material contained in the species of interest. Information from reference genomes include how DNA sequences are organized into chromosomes and the precise locations of potentially all protein-coding genes that constitute that species. Additionally, reference



F1 bison cattle hybrid “Midnight” and bison dam “Molly” that were used to develop the new bison reference genome. Photo credit: Sam Stroupe.

genomes provide a uniform way to compare the DNA of many different individuals. This allows scientists to identify similarities and differences in DNA sequences that could lead to the discovery of variation that produces virtually any genetic trait of interest.

Most modern genomic data are produced by sequencing highly fragmented DNA sequences of around 150-300 base pairs. While this method provides highly accurate data, it is difficult to decipher straight off a next generation DNA sequencer. Therefore, reference genomes are needed to provide a standardized way to evaluate and compare data generated from multiple individuals. Think of it like this, when you buy a jigsaw puzzle, it comes in hundreds of pieces. It is not until you put it together that you see the bigger picture. The same is true in genomic research using modern whole genome sequencing technologies. Much like a reference picture helps you put together a jigsaw puzzle,

reference genomes provide a template to align the short-read DNA sequences into complete genomes. Then, comparisons between individuals become possible since you can see what sections vary including regions that are missing, added, duplicated, or altogether different.

Our recently published bison reference genome is an important development because it surpasses previous versions in both accuracy and contiguity (Stroupe et.al 2023). Previous versions of bison genome assemblies were highly fragmented, meaning that DNA sequences from the same chromosome were not able to be placed together, or missing substantial portions of the genome, such as the X chromosome that has many vital genes. This new bison reference genome solves these problems and provides a reference bison genome of the same quality as other, more traditional, livestock species.

This new bison reference genome was developed using long-read DNA sequencing, up to 20,000



Albino bison “White Cloud”. Note the lack of pigmentation in her coat, eyes, and skin particularly on the nose. Photo courtesy of the National Buffalo Museum and Searle Swedlund of Jamestown, ND.

base pairs, and a method that takes advantage of hybridization between two closely related species. In this case, a bison-domestic cattle hybrid (beefalo or cattalo) that just “happened” on a ranch in the Texas Panhandle between a bison cow and an angus-crossed domestic bull. This hybrid’s genome is composed of a single copy of each species chromosomes as opposed to containing two copies of each chromosome in a typical (non-hybrid) bison. So, by taking advantage of the genetic differences between the two species, we were able to separate the maternal bison chromosomes from the paternal cattle chromosomes in cells from this first-generation hybrid based on their genomic sequences. Then we assembled the bison genome using computer algorithms in a more straightforward and less complicated fashion. Imagine that the ease and accuracy is greater when putting together a single puzzle compared to two similar puzzles with mixed

pieces. Additional computational methods were used to further combine sequences and reconstruct each bison chromosome. These methods are described in our scientific paper.

One important reason to develop these genome assemblies is to use them as genetic maps to find genes of interest. For a proof-of-concept study, we chose an obvious and culturally significant trait, albinism in bison (Stroupe et.al. 2023). We compiled a database of genetic variation in forty-seven bison based on whole genome sequence data including three true albino individuals (all white coat, pink skin with red eyes). This database was then analyzed to identify genomic variation unique to the three albino bison. Of nearly 4,000 genetic variants specific to the three albino bison, one mutation stood out. A single base pair change in a gene called tyrosinase. The mutation we found causes an amino acid replacement in the

tyrosinase protein and in turn causes a physical change in the folding of this molecule which results in a loss of function in this important protein.

Tyrosinase, abbreviated as *TYR*, plays a vital role in melanin production. A loss-of-function mutation in this gene causes the absence of pigmentation and therefore, albinism in these individuals. Mutations in tyrosinase, such as this are classified as oculocutaneous albinism type 1. Mutations in tyrosinase, that cause albinism, have been documented across many species such as mice, rabbits, cats, and cattle. Interestingly, humans have over four hundred characterized genetic variants in tyrosinase, one of which is the exact same change in the protein-coding DNA sequence as the one discovered in these albino bison.

It is important to note that while there are many other genetic causes for white coat color, albinism

has additional associated traits. Albinos have a severe lack of melanin that reduces overall pigmentation, including in the skin and eyes. In bison, this can be particularly seen on the nose, which is usually black, appears a pinkish color. In contrast to true albino bison, most white bison today are due to crossing bison with white cattle such as Charolais. When crossed back to bison, they can retain the genetic variation from cattle that causes their coat to be white while looking more bison-like. This is due to variation in a completely different gene called premelanosome protein 17 (*PMEL17*) that causes the coat color to be diluted from its normal color appearing white when two copies of the allele are present. The quickest and easiest way to identify the difference is that these Charolais crosses have black noses and darker eyes.

Whole genome sequencing is essential for advancements in genetic research, but practical



Bison cows with young calves. Parentage testing provides documentation of genetic relatedness. While dam / calf pairs are seldom in question, sire success is always guesswork if more than one male is available during breeding season. SNP based parentage testing will clearly identify successful dams and sires and provide a powerful herd management tool. Photo credit: Diane Hargreaves.

limitations such as cost generally restrict its use to research endeavors. Whole genome sequencing using next generation platforms cost hundreds of dollars per individual, so it is necessary to carefully select individuals as representatives for populations, traits of interest, or other merit. However, the insights gained from these representative sequences can be distilled into cost efficient genetic tests and genotyping platforms for routine use. These can then be made available as management tools for individual producers.

For example, as a part of this study, we developed a genetic test to identify bison that are carriers of this albino mutation. A total of 283 bison from twenty-nine populations were tested to verify this identified mutation. All seven albino bison included in this study were confirmed to have two copies of this genetic mutation. Of the bison with normal coloration, only the dams of two albino calves were heterozygous carriers of this mutation, meaning they have one normal copy and one albino copy of this gene. The dams, though, did not have albinism and therefore this form of albinism shows a recessive pattern of inheritance.

Another example of how our new bison reference genome can be used is our recently published single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) panel for bison management and conservation, detailed in the publication “Development and evaluation of a novel single nucleotide polymorphism panel for North American bison” (Stroupe and Derr 2023). This newly developed panel of genetic markers uses SNPs which are single base pair changes in the DNA sequence. SNPs are widely dispersed across the genome and provide many benefits over previously used microsatellite markers. One such benefit is the increase of scale and power SNPs can provide as well as the ability to automate this genotyping platform in a modern molecular biology laboratory. This newly developed bison SNP panel includes over eight hundred individual genetic markers specific to both nuclear and mitochondrial regions bison. Across all livestock species, SNPs are now the method of choice for evaluating measures of genetic health and variation, comparing populations, identifying individual animals, and assigning parents.

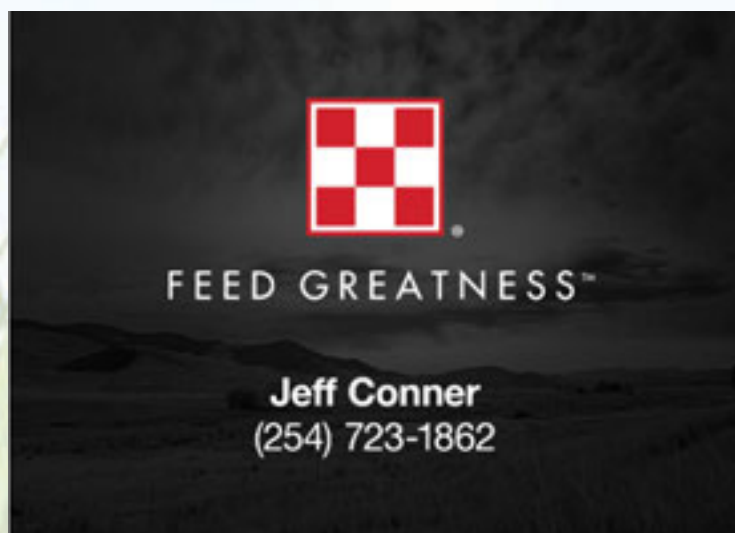
This new resource is not only beneficial for research purposes, but also provides new and exciting opportunities for bison managers and producers. This SNP-based platform offers a streamlined approach

to substantially increase genetic testing productivity and provide higher resolution for parentage testing, individual identification, mitochondrial DNA status, genetic diversity, and ancestry for animals in your bison herd. The application of these technologies will provide new insights that will improve your herd productivity and stewardship.

For more information on how you can use these new SNP based marker system to better manage your bison herd, please visit our website at <https://vetmed.tamu.edu/dnacore/> or contact us at: DNA Technologies Core Laboratory, College of Veterinary Medicine, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843 or at j-derr@tamu.edu

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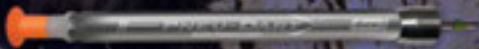
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