



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
JANUARY 21, 2020

Contact: Beth Saboe
Senior Media & Government Relations Manager
Phone: 406-600-4906
Email: beth@americanprairie.org

COLLABORATIVE AGREEMENT RESOLVES BISON GRAZING DISPUTE
American Prairie Reserve finds common ground with livestock producers

American Prairie Reserve, in collaboration with the Phillips County Conservation District, has announced the resolution of a dispute over a local bison grazing ordinance. This agreement represents a new milestone in American Prairie's efforts to find common ground with local livestock producers.

In October 2016, American Prairie requested a variance from Sections 7(1)(b) and 7(1)(e) of a Phillips County Bison Grazing ordinance, citing great practical difficulties and unnecessary hardship, as the conservation organization was already meeting all state disease testing requirements.

The Montana-based non-profit has spent the past several years working with the Phillips County Conservation District and livestock industry representatives to craft a more collaborative disease management agreement agreeable to all parties. The resulting agreement was accepted today by the Hearing Examiner in charge of the 2016 variance request case.

"We are pleased we were able to reach a mutually-acceptable agreement and consider this an important step toward finding more common ground in the future," said Damien Austin, Vice President and Reserve Superintendent.

"We look forward to building a more constructive relationship with the Conservation District through regular meetings to share information on our science-based approach to disease testing that ensures the safety of our neighbors' livestock and the entire livestock industry in Phillips County," said Austin. Austin lives on

AMERICAN PRAIRIE RESERVE

the Reserve's Dry Fork property and has been a member of the Malta community for the past decade.

The approved agreement grants American Prairie a 10-year variance from the Phillips County Bison Grazing Ordinance, while establishing several new disease management protocols to augment APR's existing disease management program. Those include new science-based disease identification, vaccination, and testing protocols, and more collaborative information sharing with the Phillips County Conservation District and other livestock producers.

"It took almost a year to work out a settlement but we are happy with what we've been able to achieve and I think it's a good resolution and we would ask the board to adopt it," said attorney Jack Connors, representing the Phillips County Livestock District and the Montana Livestock Association.

American Prairie's bison herd currently numbers approximately 800 and is spread across three management units, Sun Prairie, Dry Fork, and White Rock. The organization's future bison expansion is limited to properties that are a minimum of 40,000 acres in size and are capable of conservatively providing forage for a minimum of 400 animals. In addition, American Prairie provides grass for local ranchers by leasing grazing for approximately 13,000 head of cattle on its properties in Phillips, Valley, Fergus, Blaine, and Petroleum counties.

"Respecting our neighbor's property rights and ensuring herd health is a top organizational priority," said Scott Heidebrink, Senior Bison Restoration Manager for American Prairie. "We want bison to be able to fulfill their essential role as 'ecosystem engineers' and stock our bison pastures using guidance from the National Resource and Conservation Service and the Bureau of Land Management." Heidebrink also lives on the Reserve's Dry Fork property and is a member of the Montana Bison Association.

"I think this settlement agreement certainly shows a lot of hard work by the parties involved in this," said Jay Bodner, the presiding officer for the Board of Adjustment meeting. "I would agree also that it does lay out a regimented system for disease traceability, testing, and also that transparency aspect. I would commend each one of the parties for the work you put into this and I know that it was a difficult situation but there was a lot of good work that was done by each one of you."

###

AMERICAN PRAIRIE RESERVE

About American Prairie Reserve

American Prairie Reserve's vision is to create a vast and collaboratively-managed prairie destination that serves as a fully functioning ecosystem for wildlife, and offers visitors permanent access to the landscape that shaped our nation's character. When complete, the Reserve will be larger than Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks combined, and will support wildlife species that historically called the Great Plains home. Already open to the public for recreation including camping and hunting, the Reserve offers visitors an opportunity to connect with nature on a truly grand scale. Learn more at americanprairie.org.