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AMERICAN PRAIRIE DISTRIBUTES MORE BISON TO TRIBAL NATIONS
45 Bison Transferred to Tribes in Montana and Washington State

American Prairie is pleased to announce it has relocated 45 bison from its conservation herd in north central Montana to Native Nations in Montana and Washington State. As part of the nonprofit's ongoing work to return bison to their native lands, it has now distributed more than 500 bison to tribal and conservation herds around the country.

In the past two weeks, the Montana-based non-profit has distributed 10 bison to the Chippewa Cree Tribe in Rocky Boy, Montana, and 35 bison to the Kalispel Tribe in Cusick, Washington. The animals were successfully transferred after undergoing extensive disease-testing and receiving a clean bill of health.

American Prairie distributes or exchanges bison annually to enhance the genetic health of conservation and tribal herds. Of the hundreds of bison distributed since 2005, over 350 have been sent to Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes, Blackfeet Nation, Fort Belknap Indian Community, and Chippewa Cree Tribe of Rocky Boy.

"Bison are integral to the lands, lives and economies of Native Nations and we are happy to play a positive role in returning bison to tribal lands," said Alison Fox, CEO of American Prairie. "We will continue to seek out more partnerships with Indigenous communities because bison can be such a positive force for conservation, food sovereignty, and cultural revitalization."

More Bison Strengthens Newly Established Chippewa Cree Herd

For the second year in a row, American Prairie has prioritized supporting bison restoration in partnership with the Chippewa Cree Tribe in north central Montana.

The Chippewa Cree Indigenous community established their bison herd last year after welcoming 11 bison to Rocky Boy land for the first time in more than 30 years. The initial herd was sourced with six bison from American Prairie and five bison from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.

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According to Jason Belcourt, Rocky Boy Sustainability Coordinator, this year's distribution of 10 additional bison from American Prairie will further strengthen the herd and maintain positive momentum for their new bison management program.

"We've come so far in such a short time with our bison program," said Belcourt. "Every donation continues to strengthen our herd and helps revitalize our culture. As our herd continues to grow, we look forward to using these bison for food, shelter, clothing and cultural education."

Bison Receive Clean Bill of Health

Prior to being transferred, American Prairie tested the bison for a wide range of diseases, including brucellosis. American Prairie only sources bison from certified brucellosis-free herds and routinely conducts bison handlings to maintain herd health.

"We work hard to ensure the bison we donate to Native Nations represent the gold-standard for genetic health and the gold-standard in clinical health," said Scott Heidebrink, Director of Bison Restoration for American Prairie. "One of the best parts of my job is helping to return healthy and strong animals to Native tribes where they have often been absent for generations."

The bison handling was accomplished in mid-November, using expanded protocols from a 2021 disease management agreement with the Phillips County Conservation District and local livestock groups.

The handling consisted of moving 73 animals through a carefully designed facility, consisting of a series of corrals and chutes. Fifty-three bison were disease tested, 17 hair samples were taken for DNA testing, and 50 GPS ear tags and collars were deployed by our partners at Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute to further scientific research. All bison that were tested received a clean bill of health with no evidence of clinical disease. In addition, four students and interns from Aaniiih Nakoda College's ᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭ/Tataᑭᑭ Buffalo Research and Education Center took part by shadowing different positions in the facility in an effort to gain hands-on experience handling bison.

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About American Prairie

American Prairie'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. Already open to the public for recreation including camping and hunting, American Prairie offers visitors an opportunity to connect with nature on a truly grand scale. Learn more at americanprairie.org.

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