



AMERICAN PRAIRIE

FACTS

Land

Rangeland health: Conserving, restoring, and maintaining healthy landscapes is key to the American Prairie mission. Scientists and land managers across the US have demonstrated that rangeland health can be maintained and even improved with year-round grazing at low to moderate stocking levels. American Prairie has been doing it with success for a decade. A 2016 Rangeland Health Assessment by the BLM determined land health on American Prairie's Sun Prairie property improved over the course of a decade after year-round bison grazing was deployed. Smithsonian scientists study land across the region and have provided updated analysis of rangeland health, including a paper released in 2022, pointing out the positive impacts of our approach to bison management.

The rising cost of land: Land prices are increasing across the United States, including ranch and farmland in the state of Montana. The 2022 USDA Land Values Summary states that the value of pasture land in Montana rose by 10.7% per acre between 2021 and 2022, a little less than the nationwide average increase of 11.5%. Data like this indicates that American Prairie is not driving the cost of land.



By the Numbers

126,101 : 336,702

Total Deeded Acres to Leased Acres

82,551

Total acres enrolled in Block Management

7,001 : 909

Current Cattle to bison numbers

Note: All numbers contained in this document are current as of the version date listed at the bottom of the page.

Facts: Land

Working lands: American Prairie leases nearly all of its private acreage and public land grazing privileges to local cattle ranchers. In 2023, 89% of the total land base was leased to ranchers. On lands where bison are grazed, American Prairie pays higher grazing fees than those with cattle because the cost to graze bison is more than 2.7 times per animal compared to cattle fees.

Paying Taxes: American Prairie pays property taxes for land, vehicles, and equipment. Staff and lessees living on American Prairie land or in nearby communities pay into their local tax bases. American Prairie also contributes to increased revenue from lodging taxes as we continue to promote visitation in the region. In the last four years, American Prairie has paid more than \$573,000 in taxes (real, personal, use, etc.) to the counties where we own property.



Grazing Laws and the Taylor Grazing Act: American Prairie follows the same laws, regulations, and processes that all public land grazers follow. The Taylor Grazing Act authorizes any species of livestock to utilize federal grazing privileges as long as basic rangeland health requirements are maintained. The Act is supported by legal analysis and precedent, and has been confirmed by case law and federal regulations. American Prairie is not establishing any new precedents by grazing bison on public land, as the BLM has already approved bison grazing on more than forty BLM allotments in six western states.

Role of the Bureau of Land Management: The Bureau of Land Management determines and enforces stocking rates of the public lands under their jurisdiction. Any public land grazer can submit a request to the BLM to modify the class of livestock or alter grazing management plans. Requests of this nature are not uncommon and trigger the BLM to conduct a review process that allows for public comment and confirms rangeland health is maintained even with modification. Ultimately, BLM processes and analysis support American Prairie's top priorities of rangeland health and the animals that graze here.



Fences on public land: American Prairie provides the funding to modify interior fences on public land, remove obsolete fences, and to reconstruct exterior fences to meet wildlife friendly guidelines. American Prairie pays for and performs all fence maintenance of exterior fences for bison pastures, rather than expecting neighbors to contribute 50%, which is standard practice in Montana. Staff or local contractors complete this fence work.



Wildlife

Bison and cattle: American Prairie bison do not pose a threat to the region's successful and important ranching industry. In the seven-county region where American Prairie owns land, it is estimated that there are approximately 460,000 head of cattle. As of October 2023, that number compares to approximately 900 bison in the American Prairie herd. That ratio equals around 500 times more cattle than bison. American Prairie has worked for years with local ranchers to graze more than 7,000 cattle on our public grazing allotments, and to manage the range sustainably for fewer animals during drought.

Bison and disease: Montana state law categorizes bison as livestock. We follow all Montana Department of Livestock regulations, and exceed the state and federal requirements for testing, marking, and monitoring. We have worked over the years to address neighbors' concerns, including increasing the frequency of handling and testing our bison, and sharing the results of testing. Since being introduced in 2005, American Prairie bison have never been diagnosed with brucellosis, and are sourced from brucellosis free herds.

In 2020, American Prairie reached a ten-year agreement with the Phillips County Conservation District on its Bison Grazing Ordinance. This agreement expanded disease testing beyond what the Montana Department of Livestock requires and expands upon American Prairie's already existing testing, marking, and vaccination protocols.

Managing bison: American Prairie has been using a peer-reviewed management plan to guide bison restoration since 2004. In 2018, American Prairie published an updated and extensive Bison Management Plan to guide stocking rates, disease management, and response plans for drought, flood, and wildfire for the next decade. We continue to update this plan on a regular basis to keep it up-to-date, and to reflect and maintain the use of best practices.





Keeping bison contained: American Prairie has a long track record of containing bison. On the occasion bison do escape, our field team follows an action plan that is supported by funding, which ensures resources are available to execute a response appropriate to the situation. Bison are returned as quickly as possible and the team communicates extensively with neighbors to keep them apprised of the situation. American Prairie fixes any damage to infrastructure or fences, and offers to compensate landowners for any costs incurred by the escaped bison. To date, no neighbors have requested compensation and no compensation has been needed. There are no known instances where American Prairie bison have harmed or attempted to breed with cattle.

Free-roaming bison: American Prairie bison are classified as livestock in accordance with Montana State law. We work diligently to contain and be responsible stewards of our herd, and to be good neighbors. The decision to establish a free-roaming bison herd lies with the State of Montana or the Federal Government, and will only advance through proposals that demonstrate broad community and public input and undergo a full environmental analysis.

Bison and public safety: When treated respectfully, bison do not represent a risk to public safety. American Prairie recommends visitors stay a distance of 100 yards away from bison, whereas the National Park Service requires a distance of 25 yards. The highest injury rate reported in recent years by Yellowstone National Park – where visitors frequently encounter bison – was in 2015 when five individuals out of more than 4 million total visitors (.00012%) experienced a bison injury. In all five cases it was reported that the individuals were closer than the Park’s required distance from the bison. With much lower visitor numbers than Yellowstone and fewer bison dispersed across a larger landscape, American Prairie anticipates far fewer instances of close human-wildlife encounters.

Carnivores on the prairie: While American Prairie envisions a fully-restored prairie ecosystem, we have no authority to reintroduce grizzly bears and wolves. The authority to reintroduce federally listed wildlife lies with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and could only be accomplished through extensive consultation with the State, other land managers, and the public. American Prairie can and does seek to lay the groundwork for healthy habitat for such species, and to work with our neighbors to offset the cost and help manage the challenges of the presence of carnivores.



Elk numbers: The population and distribution of Elk is a statewide concern. We have long recognized that private landowners often bear the economic costs of wildlife, a public resource. Through our Wild Sky programs, we work with our neighbors to find sustainable, economically viable solutions and are committed to listening and working together to ensure that human and wildlife communities can thrive alongside one another.



People

Coexistence and collaboration: American Prairie leases its private acres and public lands grazing allotments to ranchers and offers economic incentives for ranchers who participate in our Wild Sky programs. American Prairie hosts educational forums for landowners and wildlife conservationists to come together. We actively seek input and communication with our neighbors, and contribute to the local agricultural economy by purchasing supplies at local ranch supply stores, using local meat processors, employing local contractors, and paying taxes in the counties in which we operate.



Long-term agriculture outlook: There are more than 58 million acres of farms and ranches in Montana, with around 62% of state land in agriculture (Source: 2017 U.S. Census of Agriculture). Agriculture and ranching aren't going anywhere, and we don't want them to. In fact, the best outcome for American Prairie is that conservation-minded, wildlife-tolerant ranches border our properties and collaborate with us in perpetuity. The growth of American Prairie, including our associated land purchases, have little influence on the long-term trends and market fluctuations that have had a much larger impact on the agricultural economy.

Tourism and growth: Even as American Prairie works to welcome tourists and visitors to the region, we do not imagine that tourism will ever replace agriculture. We believe tourism, conservation efforts, and agriculture can complement one another and create more and diverse opportunities for our region. All three can successfully contribute to the region's cultural and economic prosperity and resilience.





Public access and hunting: American Prairie's mission incorporates increased public opportunities for all types of outdoor recreation. We provide free and open access to our private lands, as well as to previously-blocked public lands, and we encourage visitors to explore the landscape to hike, bike, camp, hunt, stargaze, etc. Hunting not only is popular among our visitor base, but it also plays a key role in the responsible management and growth of species on large landscapes. American Prairie offers annual public bison harvests and opportunities to hunt elk and other game on our private lands, and have expanded hunting opportunities by enrolling more than 82,000 acres into FWP's Block Management hunter access program – putting us in the state's top ten BMA participants by acre.

Welcoming for all: More than 50% of the bookings at our facilities were from Montanans during the 2022 visitation season. As places like Yellowstone and Glacier become increasingly crowded, American Prairie is happy to welcome visitors looking for a more off the beaten path adventure. Entry is free to all American Prairie properties and to the National Discovery Center in Lewistown. American Prairie offers lodging options that will accommodate visitors of all ages and abilities. Rates in 2023 ranged from \$12 per night for tent camping sites to \$165 per night for a hut that sleeps nine. Visitors are also welcome to enjoy free dispersed camping.

The majority of land managed by American Prairie is open to all. Public access is a core part of our mission, and we are committed to sharing the land in perpetuity.



Founders and supporters: American Prairie was founded and is operated in Montana by Montanans. Our Board of Directors includes several Montanans, and our Advisory Board launched in 2023 is made up exclusively of neighbors and leaders from Montana as well as the Fort Belknap Indian Community. Approximately 50 staff members live in Montana, and are dispersed among Gallatin, Phillips, and Fergus counties. The American Prairie mission is of local, regional, and global significance, and, as such, receives donations from people around the world. Since its founding in 2001, more than 98% of donations came from the United States.

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