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A big bull bison can weigh as much as a ton and stand six feet tall yet run 30 miles an hour, spin on a dime, and jump a six foot fence.

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Pure Strain Bison Returning to Fort Peck

JACK MCNEEL | 3/16/12

If all goes to schedule, the Fort Peck Reservation in northeastern Montana will be receiving 68 bison from Yellowstone National Park on Tuesday, March 20. The governor of Montana and some attorneys still need to sign off on final papers but Robert Magnan,

Fish and Game Director on the reservation, is hoping March 20 will be the day.

"I'm overwhelmed that the bison will be back home again, Magnan commented. "It started in 2007. It's been a long six-year struggle."

Fort Peck already has a buffalo herd of some 200 animals but there is a small but significant difference in these Yellowstone animals. These are the only remaining genetically pure and free ranging wild bison in the U.S., the same animals which covered the western plains two hundred years ago and numbered in the millions.

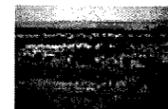
These animals have been in quarantine since 2004 to guarantee all are free of brucellosis and other diseases. The tribe will continue the testing program for several more years. The Fort Peck reservation has a 4800 acre area fenced to contain these bison and to keep them separate from others already on the reservation. Wildlife officials estimate the carrying capacity of these 4800 acres at about 150 bison.

Fort Peck is home to two Indian Nations, Assiniboine and Sioux, and several bands and divisions. Fort Belknap, home to both Assiniboine and Gros Ventre Nations, is slightly west of Fort Peck and also has a small buffalo herd. It will later receive half these Fort Peck bison provided that adequate fencing can provide the assurance that the pure strain animals have no opportunity to join with the existing animals. Their ultimate goal would be to have a herd numbering 1,000 genetically pure bison.

Fewer than 50 free ranging bison still existed in Yellowstone in 1902. Today that number stands closer to 4,000 which stretches the park's carrying capacity and causes animals to leave the park boundaries where hunters kill some and ranchers get concerned about the possibility of cattle herds being infected with brucellosis. Over 3700 have been killed in the past 15 years alone. On the good side, it does provide a source for some Indian tribes, once they are considered free of disease.



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Many tribes have a long cultural and spiritual connection to bison dating back thousands of years. The plains tribes in particular were very dependent on bison for survival and the opportunity to return these pure strain bison to lands they once roamed in tremendous herds is an exciting possibility about to become reality.

It's been described as a "win-win proposition for the tribes, the state of Montana, and the millions of Americans nationwide who want bison back where they belong," in a recent news release from the National Wildlife Federation (NWF). Despite that, there has been heated opposition from livestock groups and others to confine bison within Yellowstone with the fear that brucellosis from bison could infect cattle operations outside Yellowstone's boundaries. While a significant percentage of bison would test positive to brucellosis, indicating it had been in contact with brucellosis but not meaning it is infectious. Rich Day, director of the NWF office in Missoula said in a recent release, "Not a single documented case of brucellosis transmission to cattle has ever occurred in the wild."

A big bull bison can weigh as much as a ton and stand six feet tall yet run 30 miles an hour, spin on a dime, and jump a six foot fence. Cows weigh about half that of a bull but are still impressive.

Robert Magnan added, "I'm very happy we get to see them come home, back to the plains. I think it's the start of a new beginning for our people to see these genetically pure bison back on the plains again."

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nancythompson

This is so cool, finally bringing back the buffalo. The U.S. has managed to nearly wipe out all of the buffalo, except for the few that managed to escape death. They have also done the same thing to the wolf, grizzly, burro and wild horse. Removing all the wild horses for the big cattle companies to raise cattle to ship overseas that is. We don't even get to eat any. Somehow the numbers added up for the buffalo to be expanded but they say the few thousand horses left out there is still too many. We need to quit playing God and leave the wild animals to themselves.

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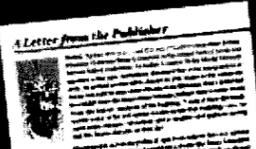


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