

Re: Economic Affairs Interim Committee Meeting

Wednesday 6/22/16 – 11:00 am

Attendees: Aaron Paulson

Outline:

- I. Aaron Paulson Introduction: Aaron and Alisha Paulson manage a ranch in Southwest MT located in the Ruby Valley owned by Turner Enterprises. The Ranch is located approximately 45 miles South of Twin Bridges and was purchased in 1993. Runs 1000+ head of bison on 40,000 acres. Cow/ calf and yearling operation. Bison are sold to a commercial slaughter facility and through on-ranch harvest.

- II. Purpose of the Montana Bison Association (MBA): Founded in 1999
To promote buffalo (also known as bison, hereinafter referred to as “buffalo”) and buffalo products, namely breeding stock, meat and by-products.
To seek fair and equitable regulations in the control of disease and in the movements of buffalo and buffalo products, for intrastate, interstate and international purposes.
To perpetuate buffalo as a great North American native animal and to study, sponsor research, collect and disseminate pertinent information pertaining to buffalo.
The Association shall be known as a non-profit organization, with the monies accumulated being used to carry out functions of the Association and the promotion and welfare of the buffalo

Thank you to MBA Board Members: Roland Kroos, VP (Bozeman), Julia Arnold, Sec/Treas (Conrad), Steve Kroon (Manhattan), Craig Denney (Park City), Tim Gardipee (Missoula)

- III. As bison ranchers and producers we believe that management of the land through grazing, land planning, good animal health practices and monitoring will help ensure bison producers in our organization are sustainable and able to provide a high quality source of red meat and by- products that will help fulfill the market demands. This can be achieved by managing our bison herds in a way to promote healthy land and livestock.
- IV. Bison Market/ Production: Commercial slaughter in the US is typically around 60,000-65,000 bison annually and this is 99% of the bison marketed for meat. US Beef slaughter is typically around 125,000 head per day. The bison business is a niche market in contrast.
- V. Bison Prices: Current prices on market bulls are around \$3.00 per pound live weight/ \$4.50 per pound hot hanging weight for bulls ready to finish or kill.
- VI. Meat marketers say they could easily handle an additional 30% more volume in the retail market.
- VII. Number of commercially raised bison in MT: In 2015 the MTDOL reported 8,118 head of bison paid per capita fees totaling over \$50,000 in revenue to the MTDOL. The per capita fee in 2016 is \$6.38 per head (cattle per capita fees are \$2.29, sheep per capita is \$0.54) The National Bison Association has a voluntary checkoff program for producers. Bison numbers in MT by head count rank above goats, alternative livestock, llamas, and alpacas. Bison

numbers by revenue collected by MTDOL from per capita fees rank 5th. The head count from 2014 to 2015 only varied by 32 bison, sign of a stable industry.

VIII. Market Options:

1. Commercial Slaughter: (Rocky Mountain Natural Meats, Brush, CO), Western Buffalo (Rapid City, SD), Golden Valley Natural Meats (Idaho Falls, ID), many small USDA Inspected Plants throughout the region. This meat is marketed commercially through many restaurants, grocery stores, farmers markets, direct marketing, and supply chains.
2. Ranch Harvest: Many producers market through on-ranch harvests where the consumer comes and picks up their bison to take to a local processor or to package themselves. This meat is not for resale.
3. Field Slaughter: Travelling slaughter facilities approved and permitted by the MT Board of Livestock to come to the ranch and field harvest bison under USDA Inspection. This meat is marketed commercially.

IX. DOL Regulations: Bison ranchers follow the regulations set forth by the MTDOL. This includes brucellosis vaccination for all female bison 4 months of age or older and by January 1 of every calendar year. These animals are identified by a metal brucellosis tag in their ear. Bison ranchers also adhere to testing requirements when shipping animals as necessary for intrastate and interstate movement. This often includes brucellosis testing, tuberculosis testing, trichomoniasis testing, certified veterinary inspections prior to movement, and online bison shipping permits required by the MTDOL. The requirements are more stringent for ranchers located in the Designated Surveillance Area (DSA) or moving bison in/ out of the DSA. This includes herd plans administered by the MTDOL. Several bison producers are also beginning to booster vaccinate for brucellosis.

X. Annual Processing and Vaccinating: Most bison producers annually process their herds and perform several management tasks while in the chute including: pregnancy testing (ultrasound or palpation), deworming, booster vaccination of (5, 6, or 7 way vaccines), mycoplasma vaccination, anthrax vaccination, brucellosis vaccination, tagging and replacing lost tags, weighing, general blood health screening, bull fertility testing, blood testing for brucellosis, and weaning calves among other needs for annual herd health. Tagging for most herds consists of at least one form of identification in the form of an ear tag. Often there are 2 or 3 forms including an RFID.

XI. MBA currently has 34 active members, of these active members there are approximately 25 members producing bison with the common herd size of less than 100 bison.

XII. MBA annual winter meetings for education, annual summer meetings for ranch tours – open to anyone interested in attending.

XIII. Low Stress Livestock Handling Principles as taught by Bud Williams, Temple Grandin and others work very well on bison when implemented.

XIV. Conservation District Ordinances: Fergus, Valley, McCone, Phillips counties have all passed ordinances within their counties that make it difficult for our current producers and unintentionally aim to prevent current producers for commercially raised bison. The ordinances do not clearly differentiate between commercially raised ranched bison and free roaming wild bison.

XV. Closing: We ask that if there are questions, concerns, or you would like to visit or tour a bison ranch of a producer; or you are interested in learning more, please visit our website

and search the member director. There is a member in your area that will gladly show you how they manage their commercial bison herd. And we also ask that with the upcoming 2017 Legislative Session and Conservation District ordinances, please remember the vibrant commercial bison ranching business within the state of MT and the nation and unintended effects that could be detrimental to this sector of agriculture.

XVI. Contact the MBA:

- 1. Website: montanabison.org**
- 2. Facebook: Search “Montana Bison Association”**
- 3. Contact a board member or a member in your area (contact information is all on website)**
- 4. National Bison Association – bisoncentral.com (over 1000 members, all 50 states and 10 countries, represent over 250,000 head of bison)**