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

AMERICAN PRAIRIE RESERVE BISON HERD GIVEN CLEAN BILL OF HEALTH
*Montana-based nonprofit shares test results with Phillips County Conservation District
as part of new bison settlement protocols*

American Prairie is pleased to announce that once again no evidence of clinical disease was found in its bison herd. The animals were tested under the expanded protocols agreed to earlier this year with the Phillips County Conservation District, and as part of the agreement, the Montana-based nonprofit also shared the full results with the Conservation District board prior to its March 9, 2021 meeting.

In January 2021, an adjustment board appointed by the state Department of Natural Resources and Conservation unanimously approved a new bison grazing and disease management agreement between American Prairie and the Phillips County Conservation District. The agreement gives American Prairie a 10-year variance from the Phillips County bison grazing ordinance. Under the agreement, American Prairie is expanding its already-robust disease management program to test more animals, as well as sharing herd information more frequently with the Conservation District. This most recent clinical testing was done as part of the agreement.

“This bison management agreement is the hard-won result of constructive talks with American Prairie, the Phillips County Conservation District, and livestock industry representatives,” said Alison Fox, CEO of American Prairie. “We are dedicated to continuing to build stronger relationships with these parties through the terms of the agreement, which is why we shared these test results without delay.”

Following the approval of the agreement, American Prairie conducted a bison handling where samples were collected from 97 bison from the herd and tested for a wide range of diseases. The samples were tested by the Montana Department of Livestock Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (MVDL) in Bozeman, MT, and one test was forwarded and conducted by the National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL).

The results show that all 97 bison are negative for brucellosis, Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis (IBR), Bovine Viral Diarrhea (BVD), and Johne's disease. The bison samples did carry antibodies for several less-significant diseases, including Bluetongue, Parainfluenza 3 (PI-3) and Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD). According to the veterinarian conducting the examinations, all three diseases are known to be prevalent or endemic in livestock and wildlife across Montana, and exposure was not a surprise or a concern.

As the bison samples were being drawn in January, the veterinarian examined all tested bison and reported that they appeared to be healthy and showed no clinical signs of disease. The animals were re-examined in mid-February, and again there was no evidence of clinical disease found.

"Herd health is just as important to us as it is to our neighbors," said Scott Heidebrink, Senior Bison Restoration Manager for American Prairie. "Our bison have been sourced from herds that have been brucellosis-free for several decades. We carefully follow all of the guidelines set by the Montana Department of Livestock, and are very glad to be working with the Phillips County Conservation District to fulfill the terms of our bison agreement with them."

Testing more animals to meet the Phillips County agreement was just one of several accomplishments that occurred during the organization's winter bison handling. A team made up of American Prairie employees and volunteers moved 136 animals through a carefully-designed series of corrals and chutes. Of that total, 97 bison were disease tested, 42 hair samples were taken for DNA testing, 94 LORa Tags were deployed, and 3 GPS tracking collars were deployed. After each of the 136 animals were examined and sorted, 39 bison were sent to South Dakota, with 35 distributed to the Wolakota Project and four to One Spirit. The remainder were distributed across American Prairie properties.

"Through the good work of our skilled employees and dedicated volunteers, we executed another successful bison handling that included disease testing of more animals," said Damien Austin, Reserve Superintendent. "These animals play a vital role in the ecosystem, and, thanks to years of careful management, we are able to contribute to bison research and conservation programs across the country."

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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.