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BLM ADVANCES AMERICAN PRAIRIE'S BISON GRAZING APPLICATION

Federal agency issues initial approval with finding of no significant impact

On July 1, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) advanced American Prairie's modest request to graze bison on some public lands in Phillips County where they hold priority grazing privileges. The BLM's [initial findings](#) conclude that the proposed action will not have a significant environmental impact on the land and "will benefit local wildlife, improve land and water quality, and create new local jobs, all without impacting the value of the ranching economy."

The BLM can issue grazing permits or leases and modify existing permits to substitute many different types of livestock for cattle, including bison. It has done this for decades in several states across the West and in the case of American Prairie, the BLM has approved similar grazing modifications twice before.

Alison Fox, CEO of American Prairie, says the proposed action is consistent with past BLM decisions and in this instance, approval will create opportunities to collaborate with local officials and neighbors in Phillips County, while the Montana-based organization advances species and habitat restoration efforts.

"We've grazed bison on public lands for more than a decade and the proposed action is consistent with our successful track record," said Fox. "We view this as an opportunity to collaborate with public land managers and local officials to ensure the long-term health of the land, our herd, and of the Phillips County livestock industry."

The BLM's [Environmental Assessment](#) also concludes that the proposed action will have numerous positive effects for local industry. The Assessment states:

"Implementation of the proposed change in use would result in a gain of the equivalent of four full-time jobs at the county level (up from 24 jobs under Alternative A to 28 jobs under Alternative B), while labor income, value added, and total output would all see increases at the county level. The modest job gains

would occur in the industry categories of veterinary services, crop farming, and non-cattle animal production.”

The proposed action would modestly expand bison grazing on public lands in Phillips County. It would authorize American Prairie to graze bison seasonally, and behind fences, on five BLM grazing allotments and five state leases totaling approximately 48,000 acres. It would also authorize year-long grazing for a single BLM allotment and one state lease covering 12,000 acres in an area previously approved for bison grazing.

The proposed action originates from a larger grazing application submitted to the BLM in 2018. That application was scaled back in 2019 as part of an effort by American Prairie to establish more common ground, share more information, and build longer-term constructive relationships with cattle producers in the region.

Any new bison grazing in Phillips County will be thoroughly tested and comply with a disease management agreement unanimously approved by Phillips County officials and American Prairie earlier this year. The agreement gives American Prairie a 10-year variance to the County’s Bison Grazing Ordinance, and in return, the non-profit has expanded its already-robust disease management program and will routinely share management information with the Conservation District and livestock producers.

“We believe our revised grazing application, in addition to our recent agreement with the Phillips County Conservation District, will facilitate new opportunities to collaborate, share information, and demonstrate our commitment to being good neighbors,” said Damien Austin, American Prairie Vice President & Reserve Superintendent. “This is about striking the right balance with our neighbors to conserve one of the world’s last functioning grasslands for the next generation to use, explore, and enjoy.”

The BLM is now entering a [60-day public comment](#) period before moving forward with a final decision. During the 2018 scoping period, American Prairie’s grazing proposal received robust public support from hunting and public access groups, wildlife scientists, local residents, former land and wildlife managers, economists, private property advocates, and supporters of grasslands from all around Montana and the country.

The BLM is asking the public to submit comments [online](#) by August 29, 2021. More information about the application is available on the [BLM website](#) or on [American Prairie’s website](#).



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.