

THOUGHTS ON BISON

For Intertribal Bison Cooperative

By Bob Jackson ©

August 15, 2000

- If Bison don't have social order it is the only herd animal in the world without it...
- Grazing patterns - and ecological impacts - are entirely different for bison with social order than those with modern day bison "herds."
- A group of individuals does not make a herd.
- A herd of bison with social order, even with individual characteristics that man perceives as "just average" will outperform ecologically and economically all assembled individuals from supposedly trophy characteristics.
- If we want to caretaker bison in a manner consistent with a "diet for the soul" then we need to respect bisons' requirements for social and family order.
- Domestication of wild animals was done out of man's necessity to provide a stable food source. The trade off was humans had to provide tremendous amounts of labor. Today's technology allows herds to maintain themselves and still be available for food.
- If one wants to learn about Bisons way of life (social order and family groupings) I suggest reading up on herd animal studies done in Africa.
- Dysfunctional adults and misfit children is how I would characterize today's cattle and bison herds makeup.
- Any method other than using natural systems basically means exploitation of one or more parts of that system.
- Psychologists will tell us, even with the most conscientious people, it takes a minimum of 3 years for those principals in a new business to act efficiently.
- If someone asked me what to take in college to prepare for raising bison I would say to study human behavior and population dynamics.
- Many biologists abhor anthropomorphism – ascribing human characteristics to nonhuman animals. My reply is, "would they rather assign animal characteristics to humans?"
- What's **inside** an animal – or human – is just as important as characteristics seen on the outside. The extent of what is on the "inside" is proportionate to the amount of training (direct and observational) that animal is exposed to.
- ❖ If a person adheres to natural system principles, and also to recognition of bison in the wild as having complex social structure, then it becomes logical to assume most present day bison management deals only with the **shell** of an animal.

- The difference I see between wild and domestic animals is that the former can take care of themselves. They show this with the ability to attack or run away. A domestic animal generally can't afford to run away.
- We have the ability to control bison's environment. Leaving them the ability to control themselves within our suitable environments just might be the best way to "manage" them.
- By cattleizing bison (fragmenting family groups) we have to consider we are supporting a "welfare state" similar to what the U.S. Government did in creating Indian reservations-- and then sending the children to forced boarding school attendance.
- For Indians to say they are "one with the buffalo" they need to look back to their ancestor's knowledge of buffalo to understand the **depth** of that statement. They then will be able to pass this along to their grandchildren with the same conviction their grandparents relayed this statement to their relatives.
- It is counter to all logic that social order is not necessary for specie development and evolution.
- ❖ The single most important aspect of herd management improvement would be to bring women into major decision-making roles. We as men cannot come close to understanding what any mother needs or feels. Care taking cow-calf herds has to include women's understanding of that process.
- Intelligence in animals and humans is specific to importance of their needs. Certain aspects of bison needs may dictate superior intelligence by them in those categories.
- While the beef industry strives for uniform animals "like peas in a pod" – natural systems have to have diversity of size, temperament and age. This allows for diversity in roles and niches. All "chiefs" means disorder.
- A family is more important than an individual because; it allows for division of work; provides for support and stimulation of mental activities; familiarity with responses to given situations; and protection by group for its individuals to a level unattainable by the sum of its individuals.
- "Lead cows" are not singular in numbers for family groups.
- Bull to cow ratios is irrelevant when raising bison with social order.
- Producing meat is different than producing calves. If the meat industry continues to dictate types of animals by saying what kind of meat they want---results in cow calf production will always be flawed.
- The real question in modern day bison care-taking is not what rations or grazing rotations are appropriate, but rather, "how do we maintain bisons **will to live?**"