

4-14-2021- Call with Janet Camel and Tom McDonald about Bison

Bison numbers- what is the estimated number of yearly culls?

- 400 buffalo
- 200 elk
- 200 whitetail, 200 mule deer
- Herd is operated based on the grazing carrying capacity, not to feed them and not to have to provide food is the goal
- Range condition assessments will happen, consistent problem with invasive weeds which effects carrying capacity, drought impacts, deer and elk compete as well.
- Last year they didn't cull any animals, it's a bigger heard than normal.
- Goal is 350, next year remove at least 50. Depends on the reproduction rate of annually, bison are resilient and productive as animals. Maybe 50 per year.
- Goal for elk is 125, and elk will be culled by 50 each year because they are very prolific in these conditions.
- The buffalo also could be sold live and their gene pool is sought after, and the money raised might be used to contribute to buffalo conservation. And they could also make revenue by selling them on a silent auction bidding process for going to private herds. It likely wouldn't be all of them. They also could sell the stock to cattle ranchers who want to switch to buffalo ranching. The buffalo is cheaper to raised, more resilient in the face of climate change. Electric fencing works well, but they don't necessarily need high fencing, buffalo can be held with cattle fence. A stampede would blow right through fence.

When does the cull happen?

- Historically in the fall in October, during the co-management with the feds.
- It's not a rodeo round up anymore, passive movement and capture now used.
- Ideally and traditionally, they would like to put them down out in the field. They want to know every buffalo, identify them as a calf, put a PIT tag in them. Helps understand diversity and genetics and age. They can take the exact ones that make sense for genetics.
- Any time in the year as needed, wherever they happen to be will now be how the cull happens.
- After a kill it will take 2-3 hours for the other buffalo to move on, the other buffalos are very concerned about their lost family member.
- Quality of meat improves with humane slaughter, you don't want to stress them if you want the highest quality.
- Once killed they will transport it to wherever they set up the slaughter unit.
- There actually is a very old slaughterhouse out there that has not been used in nearly 40 years. It's a remote station, good water, the electrical service is very antique, remote aluminum line that only has limited capacity for electrical and for processing. You'd want something more central.
- Having the freezer space, having the storage space. That will be key. Can use MMFEC or they have cold storage at the commodity store in Polson.
- Inspection- USDA inspection would be ideal if it's going to be sold, or go into a food distributions or schools.

How does it happen?

How would a mobile slaughter unit be useful for culling the herd?

- The quicker that you can get them to the facility, the quicker you can gut them, then there is less waste of meat. You want to take the hide off as soon as you can because it holds heat and there can be a lot of waste of meat, quality goes way up with an MSU and there's no waste, which is very important traditionally.
- Kill in field- load it into a truck (how in the heck do you load a 3500 lb. bison into a pick up)- to MSU, it might be 10 miles away- rendering truck for the offal, when does the rendering truck come out of Spokane. Don't want to attract other predators with the offal. Want to do it within a day that the truck comes.
- At the ranch they'd go to a concrete slab for the slaughter unit

What will the tribes do with the meat? Distribute some, sell some, what about value added products that could be sold at the Bison Range- ie- "Eat the Range"

- Whether they sell or distribute they still need a MSU
- Food sovereignty is a big issue for the tribal council and some of it will likely go for distribution (not all live sale)
- Cut and wrap for some of this meat, how much would the schools and head start buy- would need USDA inspection, how much the elder's program would buy or take, college could get some but they give it away to their students so again don't need USDA inspection there.
- White's has a USDA inspector. Or our USDA inspection for cutting.
- They need to generate \$1 million of revenue per year to maintain the buffalo conservation and there is currently no federal funding that goes with the bison range transfer. They need to seek out revenue sources, commercial sale of live or processed buffalo.
- Meat cutting program as a workforce training program in MMFEC's meat room, could be sold at the bison range, or online almost like Omaha meats and their steaks, bison, elk meat are very marketable.
- Chronic wasting disease is an issue potentially with elk and deer. Test every animal before meat is sold.
- Elk can be USDA inspected. It has been done.
- Old walk-in freezers at the old commodity office in Polson (they're just not hooked up. Can be taken down and put up elsewhere too).
- Feasibility of the mobile slaughter unit and also looking at the end products and what the profitability of various products would be even hide and horns, whole animal slaughter is very traditionally important.

MMFEC could be the facility for cut and wrap, with a workforce training component on cutting meat. Could process for value added markets + already USDA inspected.

Animals for local subsistence will be a very important element.

Letter of support- write a template and sent to:

Tom.mcdonald@cslt.org

Ask Heather- can Elk and deer be part of the application? Deer are currently killed and hauled to meat locker then distributed

- Elk and deer- can they be part of the application? Or are they wild game?

Ask Jan how that impacts the slaughter uni? Can the do buffalo (which are livestock) with elk (which can be considered wild game)?

Need a draft of the RFP for the grant.