

## **The Bison Are Out – Some Helpful Hints – Prepared by Terry Kremeniuk** Based On Information Developed by the Members of the Minnesota Buffalo Association

Although bison tend to respect fences provided they have adequate pasture and water. Sometimes a “battle of the bulls”, a gate inadvertently left open or they may be spooked may cause them to escape their enclosure. The Minnesota Buffalo Association members have developed a list of helpful hints by first focusing on prevention followed by some helpful hits to get them back in their enclosure.

### **Prevention**

- Be a good neighbour and put up good fences to keep them in to begin with.
- Check and recheck every time you are in and out of a gate to ensure that it is closed securely. An unintentionally left open gate is possibly the primary cause of bison “escapes”. Avoid the habit of thinking that you will just be a minute and it will close it on your way out. Sure enough you get distracted and go out another way.
- Prior to rotating pastures take a quick spin around the perimeter fence. Repair any problems prior to movement of the animals.
- Consider locks on gates, particularly those that have public access. (In some instances exploration and oil companies may have access to pastures. Make certain they are diligent in entry and exit from the property).
- If its an all-male group (feeders) some have found it successful to keep an elderly cow (non-pregnant/cull) or two with them. It creates a herd-like atmosphere. Some have also found that this atmosphere minimizes male fence-pacing.
- Plan ahead. Give thought and make arrangements in advance of ever having to contend with a call telling you “There are bison out.”
- Learn which animals are herd leaders. Knowing this will assist in getting their attention on where you want them to lead others.
- Get to know who might help before you are in the situation. People who are familiar with you bison are the best bet.
- Get animals to know positively some specific noise including something motorized. (Truck, tractor, ATV, skid steer, etc.). A familiar sound will often bring them home or at least some of them. Something as simple as a chain rattling that they assimilate to being moved to a fresh pasture initiates their inherent curiosity.
- Be a good livestock caretaker and make sufficient space, nutrition and fresh water. If they have a good home they may visit the neighbours but will probably mosey back on their own where they know they have it good.
- Connect with neighbours and authorities requesting that they contact you first in the unlikelyhood that your bison have wandered away from home.

### **The Bison Are Out**

What do you do? Well that depends as each herd has its own personality. You will fare better if you have an action plan in place prior to such a situation. Here are some considerations.

- Don't panic (Okay, we realize that this is easier said than done).
- Slow and easy. Patient mode is essential. Use their curiosity to your advantage.
- Avoid any strangers being involved. The best place for strangers is putting them where you do not want the bison to go. Make the path home non-threatening.
- They will stop sooner if not pursued. Let them calm down and stop before you start anything. Try and lead them back home. If they are accustomed to treats or feed, use that to your advantage. Do not “drive” them. They will want to go back exactly where they came from so in this instance do not repair the fence where they got out until the animals have returned.

- Limit your help to people who know bison. Do not attempt to “cowboy” them. Loud yelling, waving hats, strangers on horseback charging them all sum up to disaster.
- Their pecking order will dictate who leads. Getting the leader(s) to go in the direction you want will bring the followers. Forcing those low “on the totem pole” to get in front of the leaders will result in scattering, thus creating a whole new set of challenges.
- Call the local authorities. Ask for their assistance in crowd control particularly if the episode has hit the media. You need to be focused on the animals. The authorities are skillful at keeping everyone else away as they are not beneficial to rounding up the animals.
- If they are far from home consider setting up temporary panels (the tallest you can find). Add good hay and place it up wind, and water. Stand back and get ready to close the gate when they enter. Then back up the livestock trailer and take them home. Where they got out is repaired prior to unloading.... Right?
- The same plan that is successful today may not work tomorrow. They have good memories. Handling equipment and corrals must be strong and manageable.
- Avoid moving them at night. Their night vision acuity is questionable. They easily get spooked in darkness. If you must move them at night have spotlights on the area ahead of them so they can see where they are going.
- Use horses to assist only if the bison and horses are familiar with each other. Otherwise it is a guarantee that a bad situation will become worse.

Producers may have other helpful hints to dealing with situations where bison have escaped. Please share them with the Canadian Bison Association office and we will add to this valuable list prepared by the Minnesota Bison Association Members.