

Bison Conservation And Treaty Hunting

Gordon Vaadeland, CPAWS























BISON TRACKING

Prince Albert National Park, Sask.



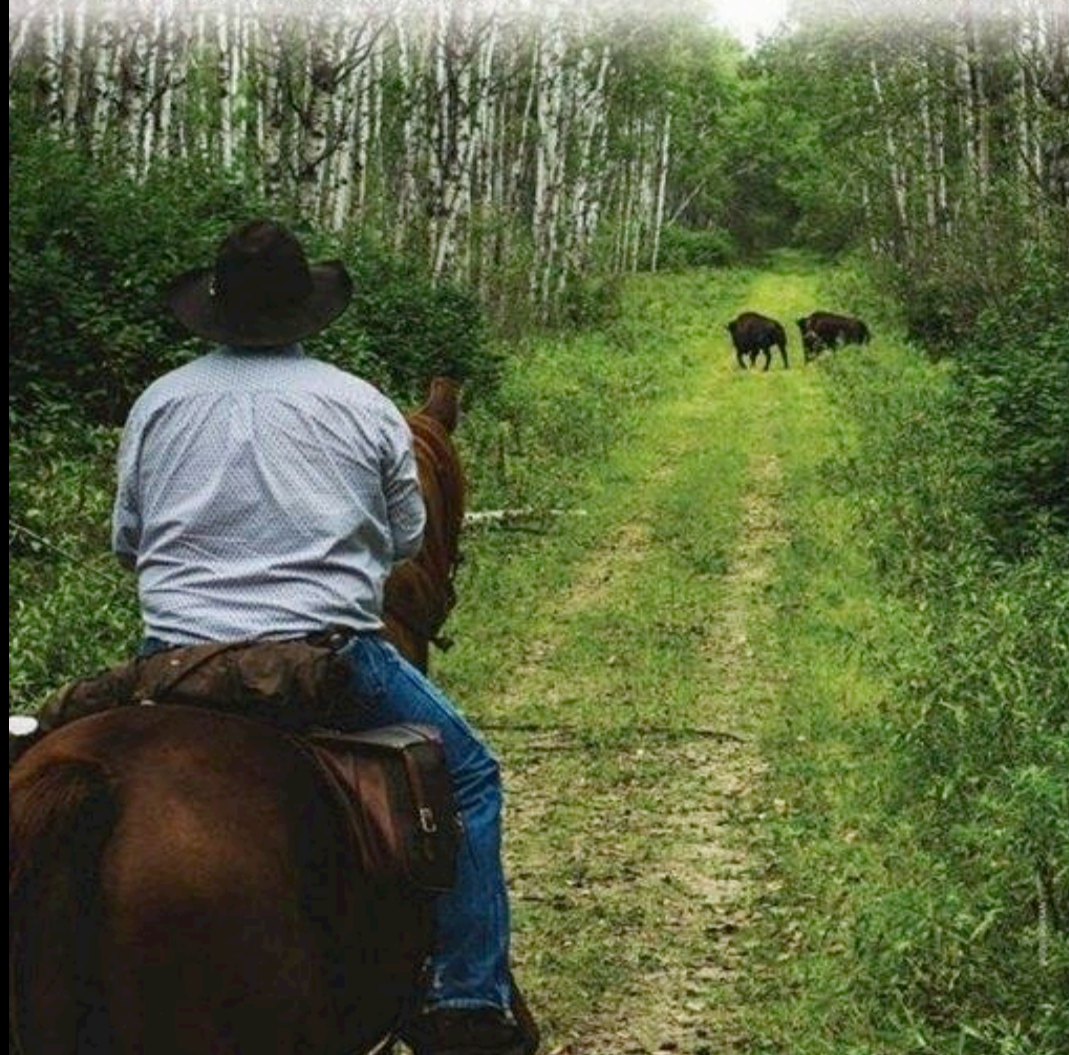
Even sitting up high on your horse, you'll feel small when a plains bison looks you in the eye. There are more than 200 of these massive ruminants rambling in and out of the southwest end of Saskatchewan's Prince Albert National Park — a green outback of aspen parkland, grasslands and boreal forest 200 kilometres north of Saskatoon — and Sturgeon River Ranch owner Gord Vaadeland can get you close enough to see the texture in their shaggy hair or feel them rumbling over the land.

"This is the only place left where plains bison live wild in their

historic range," says Vaadeland. "It's quite an experience when you've ridden for part of a day and all of a sudden there's a huge bull staring you down. Unlike tame bison, though, these respect you. They're hunted by wolves and outside of the park by aboriginal hunters, so they are elusive and vigilant."

Sturgeon River Ranch trail guides lead as your horse carries you deep into Prince Albert, where for four days you'll eat hearty, well-earned meals cooked on the trail and sleep in a teepee under huge Prairie skies famous for their brilliant stars and northern lights.

—Nick Walker







COMMUNITY

Halloween night fundraiser to make the best of a bad situation

TYLER CLARKE
DAILY HERALD

There aren't many places bison grazing freely on their historic ranges anymore.

In fact, there are only about 200 of them, all herding just north of us around Prince Albert National Park.

There were about 500 eight years ago. When five of them were illegally killed on the west side of the park during Thanksgiving weekend, Gerd Vaadeland took notice.

Executive director of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society's Saskatchewan chapter, Vaadeland clarified that at their present rate of population decent, this herd only has about five years left in them.

About 90 are harvested per year through treaty hunting and about 20 calves are born per year.

Disease and other factors also chip away at their population.

The Thanksgiving weekend bison harvesters are currently before our legal system, during which the live bison are being kept in cold storage as evidence.

As soon as they are no longer needed as evidence, Vaadeland wants to see something positive come of this very negative situation.

"We want to make sure that meat goes to the (Prince Albert) Food Bank,



and in order for that to happen an organization has to come forward to pay for the cutting and wrapping," Vaadeland explained.

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society stepped up to take on the effort and anticipate it costing a couple thousand dollars to hire a professional

butcher. That's where the Halloween Stomp for the Bison fundraiser comes into play.

During the event, local musical groups The Gnats and One Bridge Town, the latter of which Vaadeland is a member of, will perform at the Rock

Trout Café alongside various Halloween-related activities, such as a costume contest.

Admission is \$10 in advance and \$15 at the door, with the event beginning at 8 p.m.

The Prince Albert Food Bank has not had red meat on their selves for about



Left: Bison (Jared Merkle photo) Right, Musicians Shayne Lazarovich, Ryan Spracklin and Gerd Vaadeland, from left (Tyler Clarke/Daily Herald)

six months, Vaadeland said, noting that the bison meat they plan on offering the organization is of a particular cultural importance.

About 80 to 90 per cent of the people

the Prince Albert Food Bank supports is of First Nations background, and one doesn't need to know much about Canadian history to recognize the significance of these large mammals.

The event is raising awareness about a worthy ecological cause, is raising money for a local non-profit, boosts local music and supports a relatively new downtown business, One Bridge

Town, member Shayne Lazarovich noted.

"How many birds do you have to kill with one stone?" he asked with a shrug.

"I think it's great for the community

Get ready for the

The Prince Albert & District Chapter of Community Protein













POACHED Poached bison will feed the hungry

Five bison, illegally shot over the Thanksgiving weekend, were cut into family-sized portions by students at Sask Polytechnic



Students in the Retail Meat Specialist program at Sask Polytech process bison for the food bank

ARTHUR WHITE-CRUMMEY/DAILY HERALD

ARTHUR WHITE-CRUMMEY
DAILY HERALD

When Kerry Ramsdell and her team at the Prince Albert Food Bank heard they'd get a big haul of bison, they were ecstatic. The food bank had already gone through its weekly shipment of ground beef and sandwich meat from Wal-Mart. Until Wednesday, they were handing out canned meat from their fallback supply.

Now, with the first delivery of about 1,500 pounds of bison, no one will go away without a serving of lean, fresh, healthy protein.

"It's great when we get meat like this," she said. "It's not something we can give out because we don't have it and we can't afford to purchase it."

It's a happy ending to a sad story. Over the Thanksgiving weekend by Prince Albert National Park, five plains bison were illegally shot and killed. The carcasses, from two calves and three adults, fell into the hands of conservation officers.

That's when Gord Vaadeland of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society stepped in. Vaadeland didn't want the animals to go to waste, so he tried to raise enough money to get the carcasses ready for donation.

Cutting into the giant beasts isn't easy. But Don Cyr and his meat processing class at Prince Albert's

Saskatchewan Polytechnic were up for the challenge. When they heard about Vaadeland's quest, they donated their time and expertise.

"Really it was they students. The students were the ones to decide because they're doing all the work, but they didn't bat an eye," he said. "We ran into challenges - It is hunted animal, so the carcasses aren't as clean, but it's nothing that we can't overcome."

The carcasses arrived last Thursday, still in deep freeze, and it took three days just for them to defrost. This Wednesday afternoon, his seven students were cleaning three animals. That meant clearing out blood clots from the gunshot wounds they'd sustained.

"We'll remove any clots, any dried material, anything that's not fit for eating, any hair," he said. "Just like any game hunter would do. From there we'll be breaking it down into smaller pieces and then down into the retail cuts."

Their hard work isn't completely selfless of course. As they saw through the bison bones and flesh, the students are learning valuable skills they'll take to their future careers in butcher shops and grocery store meat counters.

In fact, Cyr said, a bison isn't that different from a cow, anatomically speaking.

"It's very similar, other than having one extra rib and the big hump on the back," he said. "Other than that, the skeletal structure and the muscle struc-



Students cut into the bison to process for the food bank

ARTHUR WHITE-CRUMMEY/DAILY HERALD

ture is the same."

But even if they're basically big lumpy cows, these bison were special. There are only 2,200 plains bison left in Canada, said Sarah Schmid, an intern with the parks and wilderness society. Sent by Vaadeland to represent the group, she stopped by to watch the students work.

"These particular animals are part of a population called the Sturgeon River Plains Bison," she said. "In 2008, there were approximately 500 individuals, but right now there is estimated to be 200 or less."

Schmid said that the bison have been the victims of overhunting, as well as occasional outbreaks of anthrax infec-

tion. The decline of the herd is slow, but steady. And the two calves killed over Thanksgiving are an especially grave loss.

"There are approximately 20 calves born each year and about 30 harvested animals," she said. "So you can do the math, that's minus 10 every year."

It's tragic that the two calves splayed out on a stainless steel table at Saskatchewan Polytechnic couldn't live on to replenish the herd. But, for Cyr, they'll at least help fill the bellies of needy people across Prince Albert.

"Getting a good rich source of lean protein, especially healthy meat like this, is going to be a really boost for a lot of people nutritionally," he said.

MAY 2008









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