



December 2017

The Buffalo Rancher

Official Newsletter of the Rocky Mountain Buffalo Association

Important Dates:

2018

January 17-20

NBA Winter Conference
Gold Trophy Show & Sale

April

RMBA Spring Conference
Dates yet to be determined.
Information will be posted on
our web site and through our
next newsletter.

In This Issue:

Page 2 — President's Message

Page 4 — RMBA booth at Colo.
State Fair

Page 5 — High Point Prairie

Page 7 — We Know a Few
Things; Upcoming Events

Page 8 — NBA Update
Classified Ads

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RMBA Fall Tour Review Big Heart Bison Ranch and PRPA

By Debbie Thieman

The Rocky Mountain Buffalo Association held their annual Fall Ranch Tour on August 16 and 17th, 2017. The tour began on a beautiful summer evening at the Big Heart Bison Ranch in Carr, Colorado. The ranch is owned and operated by Greg and Tami Nott and their sons, Graham and Andrew. Tami registered the attendees as they arrived and introduced everyone to her sister Debbie who

Notts have gained a lot of valuable information by being members of the RMBA, NBA and DTBA. While still managing their full time day jobs, they keep busy learning and trying to grow their operation and their knowledge.



prepared snow cones and cotton candy for everyone to enjoy. Debbie Thieman welcomed everyone to the two-day tour and members and visitors introduced themselves and shared information about their own ranches or their interest in the buffalo business.

Greg and Tami greeted the group and explained how they had become involved in the buffalo business 2 years prior, as everyone relaxed in lawn chairs. Greg then led the group to view their herd and explained how they had planned and designed their fences, pastures, and facilities.

Being a new and small operation, the

Greg discussed their involvement in Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), future plans for expansion, and their busy farmers' market schedule where they sell their bison meat under the Memphis Ranch label. Their first year went well being newbies to the Broomfield and Greeley Farmer's Markets. Their bison rib eyes were the most requested and there was a lot of time spent in educating the general public about bison.



photos courtesy of Greg Nott

Continued on page 3



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**All RMBA meeting minutes
and financials are available from
Secretary-Jennifer Graves**

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Buffalo ranchers across the Rocky Mountain Region are getting ready for their annual round ups and analyzing their herds. Many of you have heard about the NBA's push for 1 million head of buffalo in North America by 2027. This is an obtainable goal, but hard work is needed to reach this goal. The only way to increase the North American herd size is to hold back heifer's for breeding. This will have an impact on the supply of meat for an already high consumer demand. Meat prices are very high which makes it very tempting to sell females for finishing and slaughter to allow a ranch to continue to make a profit. However, sale prices of live animals to other producers are high as well.

Right now the biggest limiting factor in increasing the total buffalo population is the number of breeding age females, but land will soon become another limiting factor. Some producers are already at maximum stocking density for their ranch. Of course, purchasing or leasing more land is an option to allow for more buffalo to be run by one producer. Another solution is to sell your extra females to other producers and new producers as well. RMBA is working hard with the NBA to help find and educate new buffalo producers to have them help us reach the 1 million head goal.

I have heard from some producers that are worried that if we increase the buffalo population too much, that buffalo meat will move from a niche market to a commodity market and we will see meat prices suffer as a result. Buffalo will always remain a niche market. The supply of buffalo will never be close to that of beef. Consumers will continue to purchase a large portion of total buffalo meat sold from farmer's markets and directly from ranchers.

Many RMBA member's will also be

looking at which of their animals they will bring to this year's GTSS.

RMBA has always had many mem-

bers bring very high quality buffalo to the sale and placed well in judging. I expect this year will not be any different. If RMBA can help you market your animals for this year's show and sale please let us know, we wish to help support all of our members.

RMBA had three members run for the Board of Director position for the NBA to represent Region 2, Colorado and Wyoming. Debbie Thieman, Greg Nott, and I all ran. We want to congratulate Debbie for being elected to represent our area on the NBA Board. It was great that so many people wanted to serve on the Board for the NBA and represent our region. Having so many people interested just shows how strong the buffalo industry is, and that there are people willing to keep the industry strong and the organizations supporting the industry running well.

The RMBA Board is currently planning our 2018 Spring Conference. We hope to offer a strong lineup of conference speakers to educate everyone about buffalo and to help promote our industry even more. Look for more information in the coming months.

Stay safe while working your herds this year, and we will see you all at the NBA Winter Conference.

John Graves



Fall Tour, *cont. from page 1*

An interesting part of the Nott's facility was the portable loadout system that was brought in by Dave Hayes. This showed everyone how to do a simple loadout system with 30 foot panels chained together. It took about 1 hour to setup and tear



erial view of facility set up - taken from a drone

d o w n using a Bobcat to do the heavy lifting.

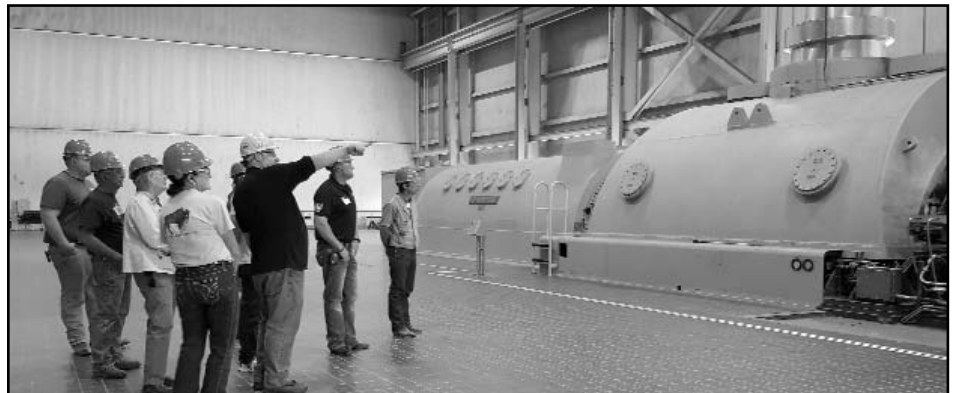
Both Tami and Greg have jumped in with both feet, not only making the commitment to raising bison, but to learning as much as possible from as many as possible and to give back to those that have helped them. Tami serves as RMBA Treasurer and Greg serves on the NBA Education and Outreach committee. They are committed to the bison industry.

Lots of questions were asked and many shared their own experiences with various types of facilities and raising buffalo.

Tami called for everyone to head back to the canopy where tables were filled with a bison taco bar feast. The Notts had prepared bison meat for tacos with all the toppings, several tasty salsa, beans, rice, and a wonderful peach cobbler with a caramel sauce for dessert. The group dined around picnic tables with fellow bison ranchers as they enjoyed the delicious meal.

The rest of the evening was spent getting to know our visitors and visiting with our RMBA friends. It was a fun and enjoyable beginning to our ranch tour and we appreciate all the Nott family did to make it a memorable event!

On Saturday, RMBA kicked off day



two at the Platte River Power Authority (PRPA) Rawhide Energy Station. Located near north of Wellington, Colorado, if you are travelling on I-25, the plant's single smoke stack is visible to the west, between Fort Collins, Colo. and the Wyoming border. This location has approximately 42 bison and utilizes their herd to holistically manage the land that surrounds the power plant.



Bison is definitely the theme of the PRPA's internal decor. With bookcases full of trophies, many appearing to be from the Gold Trophy Show & Sale, and artwork specially commissioned for their conference room, it is not a surprise that their herd is a prized possession.

Tom Chaffin, Bison Manager at Rawhide Energy Station, organized activities for the day. RMBA members were briefed on the different types of energy generated on-site and treated to a tour of the coal-burning area of the plant, seeing their HUGE generator and even peaking in to see

the coal incinerator.

After touring the plant, Debbie Thieman provided a tasty lunch of bison hamburgers and a variety of different side salads (and requests for her recipes poured in).

Originally, bison were brought to the land in an effort to demonstrate the safety of the plant. The company believed the buffalo would leave if they felt the area was not safe, so



Fall Tour, cont. from pg 3

their presence was reassuring that the environment was safe.



After lunch, a caravan of trucks headed out to meet up with the bison herds. The location has two herds north and south of the main plant. Tom circled each herd with his



"cake" truck, spreading treats and bringing the group closer. The station has about 40 mother cows and 2 bulls.

Finally, the group toured the handling facilities just southwest of the main plant. Tom described the recent



reconfiguration of these facilities based on research and expert advice, as members looked on from the recently built deck surrounding the area.



Thanks to Tom & Platte River Power Authority for another great day of our spring tour! For more information on Platte River Power Authority, visit www.prapa.org.

RMBA at Colorado State Fair

by Debbie Thieman

Each year the Rocky Mountain Buffalo Association participates at the Colorado State Fair by setting up an educational booth in the Agricultural Pavilion.

The Pavilion is the Colorado State Fair's family-oriented educational building. It houses a petting zoo, other farm animals, a kid's roping area, and all types of educational activities and displays for roughly 500,000 kids and families who come to the fair.

The building is hosted by the Colorado Department of Agriculture. About forty agricultural and other agencies, groups, and organizations provide booths and displays to educate the public.

RMBA's booth gave the attendees an opportunity to learn about bison. Kids also threw bean bags in our Bison Toss game and were able to take home a dot-to-dot bison page to complete. Participating each year at the



Colorado State Fair gives our organization a prime opportunity to help educate the public about bison's important role in agriculture while promoting RMBA's role of promotion and marketing for its members.

A Special Thank You to Ray and Debbie for their continued support and making this event a great success for the RMBA.



Welcome to High Point Prairie

By David Easton



High Point Prairie, LLC was formed in the spring of 2013 by myself and Pete Ferrell in the Kansas Flint Hills east of Wichita with the goal of building a quality breeding herd of bison and cattle. The area is part of the last remaining stand of tall grass prairie in the United States. Like every ranch, the area has its challenges and rewards.

The Flint Hills are very rocky terrain which has, for the most part made it unsuitable for plowing and tillage. The upside being there is a lot of grass and prairie. High Point Prairie operates on about 3000 acres an hour east of Wichita on what happens to be one of the highest locations in the area. By Colorado standards, nothing noteworthy as the elevation varies from about 1300 to 1600 feet on the ranch. There are some nice flat uplands where the wind is always blowing and some steep rock covered hillsides that can't be ridden on a four wheeler. Sometimes the wind can be a blessing and a nice refreshing breeze. In the winter, not so much.

One of the main challenges on the ranch is water, like many other places. The rock formations and geological layers do not lend themselves to water storage very well here. Also because the ranch is just slightly higher than the neighbors, water is typically running off the property, not on. In fact I can only think of one location where water is running



onto the ranch but at that point it's in the creek and just continues down the creek. We have several ponds that provide nearly all of the drinking water for the animals. In other places there is water in a draw. Fortunately, we can get pretty good rains to help fill the ponds, but

as often happens, we get a big rain after everything is already soaked and watch most of it head down to the neighbors.

In the spring of 2013 we started off by purchasing about 20 bred heifers, 20 yearling heifers, 100 heifer calves and a few bulls. Later that fall we purchased another 80 yearling



David, his wife Stephanie, his older son Tyler and younger son Nick

heifers followed by several more bulls the next spring. While we got great genetics in our animals, they all came from Colorado, Wyoming or South Dakota and needed time to adjust to the new terrain, climate, forages and management. The herd breed-up was not great for the first couple of years. In 2016 we made some management changes, mineral program changes and supplement feed changes and finally got over a 90% breed up. Keep in mind that most of the breeding females were born in year 2012 and were raising their first calves in 2015 and that also contributed to a less than stellar breed-up that year. Now, including the cows, two year old heifers, yearling heifers and bulls we have almost 300 animals.



We also have about 250 breeding age cattle. Why both bison and cattle? One reason is for financial diversification as a person can purchase many more beef cows than bison cows in today's market which results in more saleable calves. But that greater number of beef cows will take up more pasture so they won't generate the same profit per acre as bison. Another reason is they graze a little differently and prefer different plant species to some extent or at different stages. We can also manage the cattle as a tool to impact an area more easily than the bison which tend to be

less tolerant of higher stock density and require more fencing to do it.

The bison and cattle have different management requirements as well and I tell many people that some things are easier with cattle and some things are easier with bison. Most cattlemen don't believe me when I say that, but calving is one example of bison being much easier, it's best to just get out of the way and leave them alone. Winter time is also easier for the bison to han-



dle as they don't mind the cold although we get very little snow. We don't feed either herd hay but we do feed supplemental range cubes. Sorting animals, on the other hand, can be a little more challenging. We generally bring the herd into the corral system twice per year. The first time is in the second half of September to sort out the bulls only. We do not put any females or calves in an alley or chute at this time. The second time the herd comes in is typically in January for shots, pregnancy checking and weaning. This is when we will also offer bull calves, or females of varying ages for sale.

Over the years I have come to really appreciate the NBA, RMBA, and Kansas Buffalo Association as well as other regional organizations because of the people in them. There are some outstanding folks raising buffalo who are very willing to share their stories and offer suggestions. I have also



come to realize and I think others would admit, very seldom are things black and white. There are not necessarily clear cut right or wrong ways to manage industry wide but right and wrong ways for the individual producer. This isn't to say there aren't "best practices" because I believe there are some. Among them, be an advocate for the animal and the people who care for them. Always respect and be a student of the animals and your feed resources. Most definitely, enjoy them as they are fascinating creatures.

22nd Annual Winter Conference and Black Hills Buffalo Classic Live Auction February 2 - 4, 2018 • Rapid City, SD

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We now know a thing or two, because we have seen a thing or two....

by Kyle Stodola

Fencing and Bison! It has been the topic of conversation for many new and established bison ranchers for years.

Some say standard cattle wire with 4 strands and maybe add 1 top wire. Others say a slightly down scale version of Jurassic park, including but not limited to a lot of electrical.

At Sunrise Bison Ranch, we figured 5 ½ ft of six strands of wire would handle everything and it did, until our bull calves turn 1 ½ to 2 years old. Like any teenager they love to test their boundaries and see if they can find any weak spots. Well, they found them and our herd of about 20 head got to enjoy a 2 day vacation of sightseeing in Elbert County, with many ranch and farm destinations.

With a small army of ATV's, UTV's and trucks (amazing friends and neighbors) we were able to move the herd into a cattle ranch, where we loaded the herd into a couple of stock trailers and brought the mischievous bison back home.

We have now changed our fencing to field fencing. With the help of the tractor and implement, it is very easy to install, however a little pricey. So far we have not had a breakout..... yet!



Old Fencing goes out...



New Fencing goes in!

Up Coming Events to Plan For

January 6, 2018

Turner Ranches Prairie Performance Auction - Turner Enterprises 1st Annual Prairie Performance Auction. Rushmore Plaza Holiday Inn, Rapid City, SD. Contact Dusty Hepper at (605) 280-5637.

January 16, 2018

The Gold Trophy Show and Sale (GTSS) is the premier bison auction in the U.S. For over 35 years, bison producers have brought their best bison stock to Denver's National Western Stock Show to show and sell their animals.

February 2, 2018

Dakota Territory Buffalo Assn. Winter Conference. Best Western Ramkota Hotel, Rapid City, SD. (605) 519-1326 or www.dakotabuffalo.com. February 4: Dakota Territory Buffalo Assn. Black Hills Buffalo Classic Show and Sale, Central States Fairgrounds, Rapid City, SD. (605) 519-1326 or www.dakotabuffalo.com

February 14, 2018

Diamond Tail Ranch Power Genetics On-Line Auction. Contact Scott Butcher, 307/760-7671, [www,diamonddetail-ranch.com](http://www.diamonddetail-ranch.com).

February 20-23, 2018

Durham Ranch On-site Intro Seminar – Gillette, WY - Learn how to practice Holistic Management that will help you make better decisions and improve your management skills. You will learn how to improve your Quality of Life, Work as a Team, Increase Profitability, Raise Healthier Bison (Livestock), and improve the Health of the Land. People who attend these seminars come from all walks of life; seasoned bison/livestock producers to those just thinking about getting into the business. To register for the seminars, visit the following Website: <http://www.crossroadsranchconsulting.com/#!educational-services/c2522>. *Located 30 miles south of Gillette, WY. Limited to 15 people.

Keep Updated on Up Coming Events at bisoncentral.com



NBA Update

By Dave Carter

A historic gathering of the international bison community...launching a campaign to restore one million bison to North America...announcing a new promotion to encourage the public to enjoy bison on Wednesdays...meeting with key policy leaders in Washington, D.C.... it's been a busy few months for the National Bison Association, and for the bison business.

Let's start with the International Bison Conference. The 650 bison producers, marketers and enthusiasts gathering in Big Sky, MT in July represented the largest gathering of the international bison community in at least 17 years. The four-day event was packed full of workshops, culinary demonstrations, concerts and other activities celebrating the growth and success of the bison business.

Among the attendees were 15 journalists from the United States and Canada, which resulted in positive exposure for bison in Bloomberg Businessweek, New Hope Natural Media, Gourmet News, Western Producer, and several other outlets.

The International Bison Conference also served as the launching pad for Bison 1 Million, the ambitious campaign to restore one million bison to North America. This campaign is the brainchild of former NBA President and RMBA member Mike Duncan, and illustrates the commitment of private ranches, public herd managers and tribal national to continue the collaborative effort that led to bison being named the National Mammal last year.

Growing commercial herds requires that we continue to encourage the public to incorporate bison into their diets. So, at the same time that Bison 1 Million rolled out, we unveiled "Bison Hump Day." In recent years, some groups have promoted Meatless Mondays. More recently, Taco Tuesdays have become an excuse for people to enjoy food from South of the Border. Because Wednesdays are already known as Hump Day, it's a logical step for the bison business to build a fun, positive campaign to claim ownership of that day's dining suggestion.

Even as the dust settled from the IBC, the National Bison Association was rounding up recruits to participate as grassroots lobbyists during the Washington, D.C. Policy Roundup in September. RMBA members Ace Ward, Mike Duncan and Michaela Dineen, Bruce Anderson, Karen Conley, Dick Gehring, Sue Carter and Roy Liedtke (along with Jim and me) were among the 18 NBA members who conducted roughly 40 separate meetings on Capitol Hill and at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The members participating in the Roundup helped forge and strengthen the relationship our business has with key lawmakers and policymakers. On Capitol Hill, our members promoted Farm Bill policies to help grow the herds, and encouraged Senators to sign on to the annual resolution designating the first Saturday in November as National Bison Day.

At the USDA, we covered vital topics including research priorities, beginning farmer financing, international trade, and bison meat inspection.

Looking forward, we have a busy calendar over the next several months.

As I am writing this, I'm packing my bags for Indianapolis, where Jim Matheson, former NBA President Peter Cook and I will be visiting with students, advisors and parents attending the annual FFA convention. Then, it's off to the National Association of Farm Broadcasters and the National Agricultural Bankers Conference.

And, John Graves, Deb Thieman and the other members of our Winter Conference Planning Committee are helping to organize a great program for the 23rd annual National Bison Association Winter Conference, scheduled for January 17-19, 2018 at the Renaissance Hotel in Denver. Our conference theme this year is "Roaming to Success." Consignments are now open for the 38th Gold Trophy Show and Sale, scheduled in conjunction with Winter Conference.

While you're marking calendars, go ahead and circle June 27-29, 2018. That's when the Kansas Buffalo Association will be hosting the NBA Summer Conference in Kansas City. The KBA crew is already hard at

work planning a great event.

Finally, we have some transitions taking place on the NBA Board of Directors. Ray Thieman was term limited, and so will be leaving the board as the Region II director in January. Replacing him on the board will be the other half of the Prairie Ridge Buffalo Ranch business, Deb Thieman. We welcome Deb's leadership to the board, and extend sincere thanks to John Graves and Greg Nott for their willingness to serve as board candidates.

Yes, there is a lot happening! The NBA is growing, in both membership numbers and in clout, in large part because of the strong dedication of our grassroots members. We sincerely thank those RMBA members who help make our national and regional associations succeed.

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