

Bison Introduction Experiment Q&A

What is the experiment?

The bison introduction experiment will help determine if bison grazing patterns benefit the tallgrass prairie ecosystem and grassland bird habitat.

How long will it last?

The experiment is planned for up to 20 years.

What are the measures of success?

Success will be measured with data collection and analysis, such as monitoring:

- grassland bird populations;
- native grass and forb populations; and
- visitor-bison interactions.

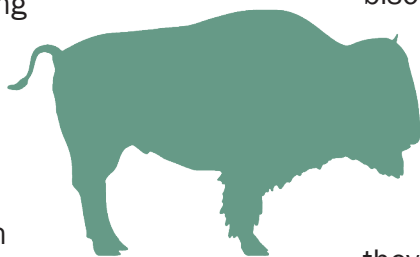
The U.S. Forest Service will adapt the management approach during the experiment, amending it as needed.

How did Midewin select the experiment site? How was this area used historically?

The chosen site met the following criteria:

- close proximity to the proposed Prairie Learning Center and trailhead;
- close proximity to the Supervisor's Office (Midewin Headquarters);
- vast amount of baseline data for grassland bird populations;
- rolling topography for panoramic viewing;
- sizeable with room for sub-pastures;
- soil type is conducive to native prairie grasses and forbs; and
- area is free from army infrastructure.

Since the 1830s, the land in the experiment area has been continuously modified by agricultural cultivation, cattle grazing, drain tile installation and vegetation



removal. During the Arsenal era the Joliet Army Ammunition Plant used this area for row cropping and livestock grazing; the Forest Service has continued these same uses.

What will the experiment area consist of?

The experiment area includes:

- 1,200 acres of non-native prairie;
- A 6 foot tall fence comprised of woven wire and barbed wire that defines the experiment area perimeter;
- A 5 foot interior fence comprised of 5 strands of barbed wire divides the area into 4 sub-pastures. The corral area/handling facility will be centrally located between the 4 sub-pastures.

Why are the bison being introduced onto nonnative prairie?

The experiment is intended to measure how bison can help restore tallgrass prairie. Therefore, introducing bison onto already restored prairie would be more of a restoration sustainability experiment.

Why are we using bison instead of cattle for the experiment?

In the early stages of restoration, grasses dominate the ecosystem to such a degree that they out-compete the forbs for resources. Bison prefer grasses, whereas cattle prefer forbs. By introducing bison as the primary grazers, the Forest Service hope the population of grasses will decline so that other plant species may thrive.

How many bison are coming to Midewin?

The Forest Service will start with a small herd of 30 to 35 bison, monitor herd behavior and let the herd grow through reproduction.

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When will the bison arrive at Midewin?

The bison are expected to arrive fall of 2015.

Who will manage the herd?

Through the duration of the experiment, the Forest Service will manage the bison herd.

Where are the bison coming from?

The bison may come from a number of sources, the specifics of where have yet to be determined. We are confident they'll be free of cow genes.

How do we know the bison are healthy?

The Forest Service will ensure bison arriving at Midewin will be healthy. Prior to arrival, they will be vaccinated for disease (denoted by a metal vaccination tag in the ear), such as brucellosis. In conjunction with general monitoring of bison health, the Forest Service will have an annual round up to perform health examinations.

How long will it take the bison to acclimate?

The Forest Service will hold the bison within the handling area for a time before releasing them onto the prairie. This will give them a chance to recover from transport in a safe and secure area as well as give the Forest Service the opportunity to monitor their behaviors. They anticipate young bison will acclimate faster than mature bison.

If a bison escapes the experiment area, what will the response be?

Through low stress handling, the Forest Service will retrieve the bison and return it to the experiment area. The bison will be monitored further for aggressive behavior.

What are the Tribal interests and involvement in this experiment?

Tribes have expressed interest in conducting a nonpublic ceremony to welcome the bison back to the Midwest prairies. Consequent to the death of a bison, tribes have expressed interest in procurement of remains for traditional and ceremonial purposes. Tribes have also expressed interest in obtaining Midewin bison, as culling of the herd warrants.

Will the public be able to enter the bison pastures?

Due to safety concerns, no one will be permitted access to the bison pastures. There will be a fence along the boundary of the experiment area and signs will be posted for clear designation of the area. In time there will be designated areas, such as prairie overlooks, that will provide for bison viewing.

When will the public be able to view the bison?

The Forest Service anticipates welcoming the public to view the bison in spring of 2016.

Visit Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie

Welcome Center
30239 S. State Route 53 Wilmington, IL
815.423.6370
www.fs.usda.gov/midewin

Visitors are encouraged to stop at the Welcome Center for current **information, maps and advisories.**