



Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie

Bison Reintroduction Experiment Q&A

What is the experiment?

The bison reintroduction 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 is measured through data collection and analysis, and the monitoring of:

- grassland bird populations
- native grass and forb (flowering plant) populations
- visitor-bison interactions

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

How did Midewin select the experimental 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 with sizeable room for sub-pastures
- soil type that is conducive to native prairie grasses and forbs
- area is free from any remaining 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 U.S. Forest Service continues these same uses with the land.

What does the experiment area consist of?

- There are 4 sub-pastures
- 1,030 acres of non-native prairie
- A 6 ft. tall fence comprised of woven wire and barbed wire defines the pasture perimeter
- A 5 ft. tall interior fence comprised of 5 strands of barbed wire that divides the area into 4 sub-pastures
- The corral handling facility is centrally located between the 4 sub-pastures

Why are the bison being introduced onto pasture with non-native grasses?

The experiment is intended to measure how bison can help restore a portion of our land to tallgrass prairie. A pasture with non-native plant species is the starting point. We will learn how reintroducing a missing link, bison, back into the ecological chain will effect tallgrass prairie restoration.

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 U.S. Forest Service hopes the dominant grasses will decrease in number so other plant species may thrive.

How many bison are at Midewin?

The U.S. Forest Service started with a small herd of 23 cows & 4 bulls. The herd will be allowed to grow to a maximum of 100 animals based the sustainability of 1,030 acres of pasture.





When did the bison arrive at Midewin?

The bulls arrived on October 16, 2015. The cows arrived on October 23, 2015.

Who manages the herd?

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

Where did the bison come from?

The bulls came from Colorado and the cows from South Dakota.

How do we know the bison are healthy?

Before arrival at Midewin, all the bison were vaccinated. General visual monitoring of the bison's health is conducted regularly in conjunction with an annual round up to perform thorough examinations of the bison.

If the bison escape from the pasture, what will the response be?

Through low stress handling, the U.S. Forest Service will retrieve the bison and return bison to the pasture.

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 the remains for traditional and ceremonial purposes. Tribes have also expressed interest in obtaining our bison, as culling of the herd warrants.

Will the public be able to enter the bison pastures?

Due to safety concerns, no one is permitted access in the bison pastures. There is a fence along the boundary of the pasture and signs are posted for clear designation of the bison pasture.

When & where can the public view the bison?

The public can view the bison from 4 am to 10 pm daily year round. The bison pasture is accessed from the Iron Bridge Trailhead. Follow the signs to the pasture for an opportunity to view the bison.

Will you see the bison?

The bison are on a large pasture with rolling hills. Bison are not always visible from the perimeter of the pasture. You are watching wildlife. We recommend bringing binoculars. Bringing a bike can make travel on the trails around these large pastures much easier. We hope you enjoy both the experience of prairie and the wildlife.

Visit Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie

Welcome Center
30239 S. State Route 53
Wilmington, IL 60481
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www.fs.usda.gov/Midewin

Twitter: @MidewinNatTP

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

