



FRIENDS OF
NACHUSA
GRASSLANDS

August 2022

Dear Friend,

Ever wonder what goes on during the annual bison roundup at Nachusa Grasslands? In this issue of *A Prairie Calling* your questions will be answered. Every year, usually in October, Nachusa's bison are rounded up and examined in order to maintain the health of the herd and perform various tests for research.

Cody Considine, Nachusa's Deputy Director, has been crucial from the beginning in leading the way for The Nature Conservancy's bison management program. Cody will take you through the process, from early stages through the entire day of a typical roundup.

A roundup is a team effort with all participants having a specific job. Cody will introduce you to many of these dedicated people in this issue and explain why this annual event is so vital to the welfare of Nachusa's most popular residents.

Hope you enjoy this issue of *A Prairie Calling*.

With warm regards from Nachusa Grasslands,

Charles Larry

A Prairie Calling

ISSUE 9 — August 2022



FRIENDS OF
NACHUSA
GRASSLANDS

Restoration at Nachusa is all about learning, adapting, adjusting, having patience, and being humble. This is especially true in how we manage bison on the preserve, specifically regarding the annual bison roundup.

Each October we bring the animals into the corral for their annual health checkup performed by a veterinarian who administers vaccinations, treats health issues, and records their weight. This one day of the year is very important in maintaining the overall health, demographic structure, and size of the herd. This is a time when we collect DNA and other samples for research.

The roundup is also the only time we can safely separate off a predetermined number of animals to ensure that we maintain the overall herd size consistent with sustaining a healthy prairie, given the current size of our bison grazing unit. For all these critical processes to happen, our bison handling facility—aka the corral—is vital to ensuring this work is done safely for both bison and humans.



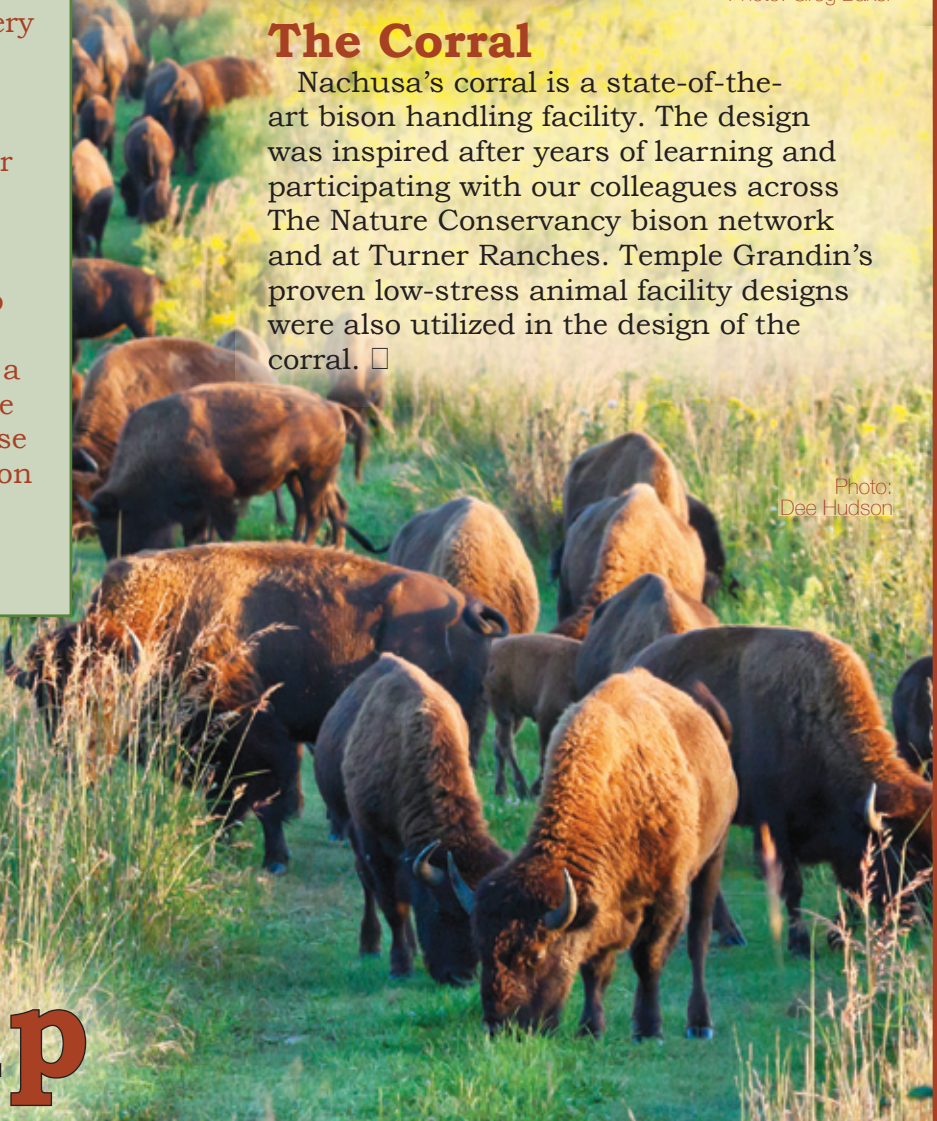
Photo: Greg Baker

The Corral

Nachusa's corral is a state-of-the-art bison handling facility. The design was inspired after years of learning and participating with our colleagues across The Nature Conservancy bison network and at Turner Ranches. Temple Grandin's proven low-stress animal facility designs were also utilized in the design of the corral. □

Photo:
Dee Hudson

Bison Roundup



How Do We Do It?

No, we aren't on horseback, nor do we chase them with trucks or ATVs to the corral. We've found that it's much easier to make bison go where they want to go. We use treats, sometimes called pasture cubes or cakes, to move them closer to the corral.

We try to keep all the bison in the north unit until roundup. About a month or so before roundup, we use the treats to persuade the bison to follow us into the trap pasture and then eventually into the corral. Beginning early morning on the day of the roundup, the group participating in the work meets for an orientation and overview of the day's activities. □



The team meets before the roundup

Photo: Charles Larry



The Vet



Dr. Baker

When in the squeeze chute, the vet, Dr. Steven Baker, examines each animal for health issues and treats them if necessary. He also vaccinates each animal and determines its weight. □

The Process

After the initial setup, everything is ready for moving the bison through the corral. The gatekeepers, Damian Considine and Wes Herwig, sit atop the corral where they can see the entire labyrinth of the



Dave Lawson in the "Crow's Nest"

Photos: Charles Larry



Hydraulic controls



Gatekeepers: Damian Considine & Wes Herwig

corral and operate the gates, allowing the bison to eventually move into the squeeze chute. Dave Lawson sits in a tower where he can oversee other areas of the corral.

Bill Kleiman utilizes a series of hydraulic levers to control the squeeze chute and secure the bison in the most low-stress

possible way. This allows the vet and the people tagging, identifying, and collecting samples for research to do their work in safety for both themselves and the bison.

When everyone has finished, Bill will release the bison from the chute and either direct it to a pen, if going elsewhere, or send back out to the open prairie, if staying at Nachusa. □



Bill Kleiman controls the squeeze chute

Chipping and Tagging

Each bison is provided with a microchip and an ear tag. This is the way each bison is individually tracked. The chip is read with a special wand which communicates via Bluetooth with a computer in The Data Shed, where information about a particular bison is recorded.

One of the results of the Data Shed's info is monitoring the bull-to-cow ratio. Nachusa's herd contains 30 percent mature bulls. This will ensure that there will be a competition for breeding rights, resulting in natural selection of the fittest bulls. □



The wand scans the bison's chip and sends the data to Elizabeth Bach's computer in the Data Shed

Photos: Charles Larry



Samples and Research

Hair and fecal samples are collected from each bison. One of the goals of this is DNA analysis of bison parentage. In 2019 Texas A & M conducted analysis indicating that 13 bulls sired 20 calves born into the herd, meaning that half the bulls present during the 2018 breeding season sired at least one calf. □



Fecal samples



Tail hair samples

Lessons Learned...

We are continually learning to make the roundup a safer and improved experience for both bison and crew. Early on, we noticed that the bison stopped, refusing to advance through the chute. We learned that on bright days shadows were cast that caused the bison to be uncertain of their footing, and they refused to go on. A roof was constructed to remedy this. Other improvements include a camera in the squeeze chute which allows the chute operator to see what is happening inside the chute. □



Photo: Cody Considine



Visitors

A new guest room has been created to allow invited visitors to see the roundup operations and learn about bison or other aspects of Nachusa. The windows in the room can be opened and, if work is paused, guests can ask questions of the Data Shed personnel. □



Photos:
Charles Larry



Author, Cody Considine

Cody Considine has been with The Nature Conservancy's Nachusa Grasslands since 2005 when he first started as a summer intern. He completed his master's degree at Southern Illinois University Carbondale with his thesis on the fire history of The Nature Conservancy's (TNC's) Kankakee Sands.

Photo: Dee Hudson

Shortly thereafter he was hired on as the restoration ecologist for Nachusa in 2008 and was recently promoted to deputy director.

Cody was instrumental in leading the bison reintroduction effort and continues to lead Nachusa's bison management. He also serves a leading role on TNC's bison managers team.



2021 bison roundup team

This newsletter was produced by Friends of Nachusa Grasslands volunteers:
Editor-in-Chief: Charles Larry
Editor: James Higby
Designer: Dee Hudson
Illustrator: Betty Higby
Website: www.nachusagrasslands.org

Photo: Dee Hudson

