



# BISON

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)



At long last, the bison are here! On Dec. 5, 2025, the Forest Preserve District of Kane County made history when it brought six bison back onto Kane County, Illinois, prairie for the first time in 200 years. The animals are within a fenced enclosure at Burlington Prairie Forest Preserve. Here are answers to some of the more-frequently asked questions about the project:

### Where can we see bison?

The bison are at Burlington Prairie Forest Preserve, located at 13N240 Engel Rd., Sycamore, IL, within Kane County. (While the preserve is located within Burlington, the mailing address is Sycamore.)

### When can the public see the bison?

We are excited to announce that **we will reopen the gates to Burlington Prairie Forest Preserve on May 1!** This additional time will accommodate a parking lot expansion and additional fencing. We can't wait for you to come in and see the animals, however, a larger lot will accommodate more visitors and school buses. These improvements will make for a better and safer experience for the public and the animals. Thank you for your patience.

### Where should I park?

Only park in the gravel or asphalt lots. **Do not park outside the gates of the preserve at any time.** Staff and the herd manager need access to the preserve at all times. If you park in front of the gates, you will be ticketed and towed. There are continuing improvements being made to this preserve. Please follow any directions from staff and contractors on site.

### Can I bring my dog to the preserve?

**Dogs are not allowed in the vicinity of the bison.** Dogs must be kept on leash at all times within the preserve, and only north of the entrance road or on trails, west of the bison enclosure. Dogs should not be near the fencing to the bison enclosure. Violators will be subject to a fine.

### How close can people get to the bison?

You should be no closer than an arm's length away from the wire/electric fence. **Do not touch the wire/electric fence.** If the animals begin to approach the fence, please step back 10-15 feet. In areas where there is double fencing, please stay behind the split-rail fencing. When an animal

approaches the fence, it's a signal that you are too close and you may be making the animal(s) uncomfortable.

### Can we feed the animals?

No. Please keep the animals healthy by letting them eat the prairie plants and food already provided for them. Violators to this rule will be subject to a \$500 fine.

### Why did the Forest Preserve embark on this project?

This is how bison originally existed here in *The Prairie State*. Illinois was once almost entirely native prairie grasses. Now, less than one-tenth of one percent of the prairie remains. You can read more about the project in our press release, here: [https://kaneforest.com/upload/BisonReturnToKane\\_Dec25.pdf](https://kaneforest.com/upload/BisonReturnToKane_Dec25.pdf).

### Where did the bison come from?

The bison were transferred from an Illinois herd with provenance that traces back to the last remaining bison on the Great Plains. The exact herd manager wishes to be anonymous, so that the focus can be on the current partners: the Forest Preserve District, American Indian Center of Chicago, and Ruhter Bison.

### How many bison are at the preserve?

The project started out with six animals, three males, three females. Approximately four more animals are expected to be delivered in fall 2026.

### Will this be a breeding herd? If so, when will calves be born/what is the reproduction cycle?

The bison herd will be allowed to expand, depending on the size of the enclosure. The initial enclosure is 38 acres. The District will be adding an additional, adjacent fenced area that will expand the enclosure to approximately 90 acres. As the American Indian Center owns the animals, they will

determine the number of animals on site. Bison are sexually mature at two to three years, but bulls do not typically breed until they are about six years old. Bulls come into their rutting season in early summer, peaking in July and August. As bison have a 285-day (approximately 9 1/2 month) gestation period, calves are usually born in mid-April through May. Most cows have a single calf. Calves spend about nine months being cared for by their mothers.

### **How will bison affect the prairie?**

Bison play a crucial ecological role by grazing and helping maintain healthy grasslands. By eating some of the prairie grasses, we anticipate seeing more native prairie wildflowers. As these large animals wallow, they'll create small depressions that'll temporarily hold rain water. These ephemeral ponds will in turn create microhabitats for insects and other wildlife, which are then fed upon by birds and other insects. Brown-headed Cowbirds, native to Illinois, were once called "buffalo birds" due to their habit of following bison (buffalo) to eat insects. We hope to see that once again, here at Burlington Prairie Forest Preserve. It's all connected!

### **Tell us about the partnership**

The bison project is a three-way partnership between the Forest Preserve District, the American Indian Center of Chicago, and Ruhter Bison. The Forest Preserve District owns the land. The American Indian Center owns the bison, and Ruhter Bison helps manage the herd. You can read more about the project in our press release, here: [https://kaneforest.com/upload/BisonReturnToKane\\_Dec25.pdf](https://kaneforest.com/upload/BisonReturnToKane_Dec25.pdf) or on our website at [www.kaneforest.com](http://www.kaneforest.com).

### **Aren't there also bison at Fermilab in Batavia and at Lords Park Zoo in Elgin?**

Yes. There are bison at Fermilab in Batavia and at Lords Park in Elgin. The difference is that the Fermilab

bison are on grass pasture. The bison at Lords Park are in a Zoo enclosure. The Forest Preserve District is celebrating that this is a return of bison specifically to Kane County prairie.

### **What is the correct term, "bison" or "buffalo"?**

The scientifically correct term is "bison." The genus and species for the American bison is *Bison bison*. The term "buffalo" has become a common name for the bison indigenous to North America. "American buffalo" is also accepted as an appropriate name for bison. The term "buffalo" originated when early settlers referred to the animals, as they looked like "true buffalo," which are the water buffalo and the cape buffalo, both indigenous to Africa and Asia.

### **How big are bison?**

Bison calves weigh approximately 40 to 60 pounds at birth. Adult bulls can weigh as much as 1,800 to 2,000 pounds, stand six-feet high at the shoulder and be 11-feet long. Cows can grow to 900 to 1,100 pounds.

### **What do bison eat?**

Bison are herbivores and eat grasses and sedges. Bison do not typically eat forbs (flowers). If driven by hunger, bison have been known to eat twigs and tree bark.

### **What kind of sounds do bison make?**

Bison do not moo like domestic cattle. They make low guttural sounds which may be loud if they are startled or if a cow is warning a calf of danger. Bison can also be heard snorting. The primary way bison communicate is through body movements and various smells.

### **How long do bison live?**

Typically, bison live for 15 years in the wild and approximately 25 years when raised domestically.

