



Spring Lake Park Reserve Bison Prairie

September 2022

Fall 2022 marks the return of bison to Dakota County prairieland. The bison will play a crucial role in restoring their year-round home — a 150-acre prairie — while growing into a herd of about 15. Dakota County Parks staff will monitor the bison's impact on the prairie, while supporting their needs and wellbeing.

Four big things

- The land that would become Dakota County is the homeland for the Indigenous Dakota people.
- Prior to European settlement, the land consisted primarily of prairie and oak savanna.
- Bison live up to 20 years in the wild and are the largest land mammal in North America.
- Bison grazing habits boost plant diversity on the prairie by giving flowers the chance to compete with the tall grasses bison eat.

Prairie pointers

- Controlled burns will be done periodically to maintain the prairie's health. Burned areas have more nutritious forage for plant-eating species like the bison.
- The safety fence was constructed so it does not pose a barrier to other wildlife in the park.
- Lupine, yarrow and leadplant — which attracts the rare leadplant moth — are among wildflowers found on the prairie.

Bison life

- The Dakota County bison herd will be a breeding herd. An adult bull will be introduced to the herd in the future to promote local herd growth and to grow the Minnesota Bison Conservation Herd.
- The bison will be moved periodically among enclosures called paddocks. Each paddock contains a source of fresh water, even during winter months.
- The acreage, plant species diversity and rate of plant consumption will dictate time spent in each paddock — usually between a few months and a few weeks as the herd grows.
- Prairie grass hay bales harvested from other parks within Dakota County are available as food for the bison as necessary.
- With powerful neck muscles supported by their hump, bison plow through deep snow using their large heads to reach vegetation to eat.

Beyond the prairie

- The Mississippi River Greenway, which will eventually connect St. Paul and Hastings, runs directly through the Spring Lake Park Reserve Bison Prairie.
- The east end of the park features Schaar's Bluff, which offers a sweeping overlook of the Mississippi River.

Partnerships

- The bison reintroduction project at Spring Lake Park Reserve is made possible with support from Dakota County and the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LLCMR).
- The reintroduced bison come to Dakota County from other members of the Minnesota Bison Conservation Herd, which seeks to establish a healthy, stable herd of 500 genetically diverse bison.

