



Cowessess First Nation #73

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Chambers of the Chief & Council

Tanisi and Anin Sikwa!

Thank you for your patience as we pieced together this update regarding the acquisition of our bison.

As many of you are aware, Cowessess First Nation signed a Treaty known as the Buffalo Treaty. This marks a culturally significant relationship amongst Nations across Canada and the United States in the reclamation and renewal of our sacred relationship with the plains bison. We also began working with the International Buffalo Relations Institute on a procurement strategy to bring a small herd of pure plains bison from Yellowstone National Park. This is part of the initiative to the sharing of bison herds by those party to the Buffalo Treaty.

Within the most recent update from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency we were informed that the request for the importation of the herd has been 'unfortunately denied at this time'. This decision was based on the following reasons:

1. the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) did not agree to CFIA's preexport testing requirements for Bovine Tuberculosis (TB),
2. CFIA's TB testing requirements took into account the great deal of uncertainties in regards to this disease for this importation: the unknown TB status and prevalence of the GYA, the lack of any TB testing of the entire cohort of bison during their entire 3 year quarantine period, and the low diagnostic test sensitivity of the Caudal Fold Tuberculin (CFT) test,
3. the two Canadian premises of destination that have been identified in the import request, as of January 8th 2024, are not ready to receive the bison (fencing is not adequate or completed, handling facility is not yet available on site).

Moving forward we will continue with the process to ensure all requirements are met to procure this herd of bison safely and bring them to the Nation. We will continue collaboratively with the International Buffalo Relations Institute, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and all the other levels of governments involved to see that all requirements are met. We remain confident in our partnership with our American counterparts as this particular herd is not only rated as pure but has also never been through this process before. We view this setback as just that – a setback, as well as a learning opportunity.

International Buffalo Relations Institute has assured us that all necessary steps will be taken to ensure the Yellowstone bison herd will not only meet our high standards but exceed them. We thank International Buffalo Relations Institute for the diligence and transparency.

To us as people of the plains, the buffalo have always been our greatest provider, protector, teacher, and amongst our most sacred beings. God/Creator has placed this setback in our path as a teaching, one of patience, diligence, trust, and good will. Even now, the buffalo still teaches us lessons we are meant to learn and/or be reminded of.

Recently, we have also been offered, as a gift, another herd of bison and we are in the early stages of gathering information on all what this entails. Your leadership team is working to ensure the strategic planning is in place prior to moving forward with the acquisition of these particular bison.

We will continue to communicate with membership once we have updates regarding the acquisition of bison, and look forward to not only their return to our homelands, but our hearts, minds, and spirits as well.

Thank you for your continued support and patience as we continue the process of bringing our sacred buffalo home.

Hiy hiy and Chi-miigwetch,

Your Leadership Team