

HB 202 Bison Drawing Permit Fees

From Don Quarberg

I am a 38 year resident of Alaska and a 36+ year resident of Delta Junction. I have professionally worked as a District Conservationist with the USDA-SCS (now NRCS) during the beginning of the Delta Agricultural Project. In 1979, I changed professions to become the Agricultural Extension Agent with the University of Alaska Fairbanks from which I retired as Professor Emeritus of Agricultural Extension.

I'd like to speak to some of the introductory comments made at the February 21 hearing on this bill. HB 202 was introduced by Legislative Aid Mike Paschall – who also happens to be chair of the Delta chapter of the AK Farm Bureau, but failed to mention this. In this position, Mr. Paschall lead an attempt a few years ago to have the Delta bison eradicated because they were a non-indigenous, invasive species (much as are all of us non-indigenous, invasive humans occupying Alaska). The bison were here 50+ years before the development of the Delta AG Project. Prospective Farmers knew this or certainly should have.

Mr. Paschall talked of the lost opportunity (woulda-coulda-shoulda appeal) the farmers face because of the bison. They imply that there are higher value crops that could be planted but because of the perceived bison damage, they are not. If there really are any miracle crops that would grow on the Delta Ag project, would it not be reasonable to assume that it would already be growing in the Tanana Loop farm area or the Eielson Farm Project, both of which have better soils and no bison problems? Would it not also be reasonable to also assume that this crop would be growing inside some of the already fenced areas on Ag Project lands?

Another loss to the farmers, as stated by Mr. Paschall, is the extra cost of drying the grain, because the farmers harvest it earlier, before it has cured in the field, to avoid having bison damage. In 1981 early snow prevented some 75-80% of the grain from being harvested by the farmers. In 1992, permanent snow arrived on September 10th, again preventing a substantial amount of the grain crop from being harvested. Snow is non-selective in that it covers all crops, severely lodges the grain and makes it unharvestable. Any grain that can be harvested following snowfall requires much more drying effort due to the snow trapped in the awns and heads of the grain. In reality, bison do damage some of the grain when they arrive early; snow damages ALL of the grain when it arrives before harvest. Consequently the farmers harvest grain when it is physiologically mature and at an acceptable moisture to balance against the increased cost of drying and the losses of weather and bison (not just because of the threat of bison).

Agriculture here in Alaska has cost the State well over \$100 million since the launching of the Delta Ag Project. In addition, the Federal Government (USDA) has spent approximately the same in loans and subsidies to Alaska Agriculture over the same time period. For example, one farm family received over \$3 Million in subsidies over a 15 year period for doing basically very little, never planted one post for a fence, and is now strongly advocating that this bill pass

Farmers have been forgiven millions of dollars in loans and received millions of dollars more in subsidies and now this bill asks Alaskan hunters to double the cost of a bison permit fee to give grants to a select few farmers for fences. This is absurd!

I urge you to oppose this bill. It sets precedence by addressing one land user's (farmers) economic compensation for damage from one species (bison). After all the farmers signed contracts acknowledging the bison's presence, while agreeing to hold the State harmless for any damage they incurred from bison.

Thank You, Don Quarberg, Professor Emeritus Agricultural Extension, 907-895-4650 or dmlaf@yahoo.com