

Forest Service OKs bison fence year Yellowstone

BOZEMAN, Mont. (AP) — The U.S. Forest Service has given Montana wildlife officials permission to construct a four-foot high, seven-mile long electric fence near Gardiner to steer bison that migrate out of Yellowstone National Park to acceptable grazing land.

The fencing is required as part of a lease agreement with the Royal Teton Ranch, which enables a limited number of bison to traverse a corridor so they may graze on public land north of the park.

Some, like area landowner Bonnie Lynn, are worried about the effect of the fence on wildlife. And Lynn suggests bison will likely use the Yellowstone River as a passage around the fence.

Gardiner District Ranger Ken Britton said forest rangers and scientists with the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks will monitor how bison and other wildlife navigate the corridor, and make any necessary adjustments.

The Royal Teton Ranch deal is part of a larger effort to give bison more room to roam while protecting livestock from brucellosis, a disease carried by bison that causes cattle to abort.

State wildlife officials have said elk are the likely cause of recent brucellosis infections in Montana cattle, but bison are still slaughtered after leaving the park in search of winter forage.

Since 2000, more than 3,000 bison that left park boundaries have been slaughtered. No transmissions of brucellosis from wild bison to cattle have been recorded.

The Government Accountability Office earlier this year criticized federal and state agencies for failing to expand the area where bison can freely roam outside the park, as called for in the 2000 Inter-agency Bison Management Plan.

Jack D. Jones, a retired Bureau of Land Management wildlife biologist, argues that fencing wildlife on public land sets a bad precedent, treating the bison like livestock rather than wildlife. He also argues that people could be harmed by the high-voltage wires.

Britton said the bottom of the fence will be 20 inches off the ground while the top will be 48 inches of the ground, low enough for an elk to jump.

Pat Flowers with FWP said it's likely that some of the fencing will only be up briefly, until bison make their way further north. Then the fence will be shut off and dropped down, posing no threat to wildlife, people or property. Flowers said the corridor will be unfenced about nine months of the year.

If the agencies determine the fence is harming other wildlife, FWP will reevaluate the plan.

"This is going to be a learning process," Flowers said.

Artifacts believed to be at least 2,000 years old

COLCORD, Okla. (AP) — Archaeologists believe artifacts unearthed during a recent dig in northeastern Oklahoma date back between 2,000 and 8,000 years.

AMEC Earth and Environmental conducted the 20-day dig in Colcord that was funded largely by the Bureau of Indian Affairs because it is in the Cherokee Nation.

The 12 archaeologists found about 16,000 stone artifacts at the site of a new Delaware County bridge and plan to issue a preliminary report next month on their findings.

The artifacts will be taken to Jefferson City, Mo., to be washed and cataloged before they go on display at the Institute of the Great Plains in Lawton.

Indian Country new year resolutions

By S.E. Ruckman

The year we have just lived slips away like Leo DiCaprio's Jack in the end of "Titanic."

This time of year allows the impossible to teeter on the possible. New Year's resolutions are a great tradition that someone who is a top notch procrastinator must have created. I know about this since my past resolutions are stacked up like totem pole symbols.

In Indian Country, the potential for good, positive change bubbles up like the crude oil beneath the tv sitcom family who moved to Beverly Hills. You know who I mean. Thankfully, not all of 2008 was too brutal. I hope even the most pessimistic person looks to 2009 with some degree of optimism. But New Year's resolutions are different from Christmas wish lists. One we have the power to alter and the latter is up to how well we behaved.

Making up a list of stuff to change about oneself is kind of bruising. Not the accidental kind of bruising that comes from bumping into a chair in the dark. But like taking a shot on the chin in a fight. We know full well, as our head rocks back, that we must have been in conflict somewhere.

But with resolutions, the conflict is usually with ourselves. What follows is a three-pronged blanket resolution to improve us physically, mentally and emotionally.

In Indian Country, our tribal communities, reservations and headquarters are the springboards for change. But alteration must first come to our physical selves. Indians still have a stellar rate of diabetes. Our old way of eating, the protein-rich diets, natural grains and fruits are merely oddities in a commercial haze of processed carbohydrates, sugar and fats. Estimates put the diabetes rate at between 19-21 percent amongst American Indians and Alaska Natives. This is probably the point where some stop reading.

Nonetheless, our diabetes statistics are sobering. I spoke to a doctor who primarily treats Indians and he seemed resigned that our children, especially those who were overweight, were doomed to eventual diabetes. The right kind of change germinates at home. One of my friends insists on foods all in the brown range when we go to a buffet. Yes, this person is diabetic. But my warnings sail over the table, past the macaroni and cheese, chicken fried steak (with cream gravy), mashed

potatoes and dinner roll.

For mental uplift, we should look to our children's education. Their aptitude is waiting to be buffed to a golden shine. Improved higher education accessibility is a no-brainer. Gaming tribes are especially at an advantage here. The tribe that liberally improves education for its younger citizens lays the groundwork for a tomorrow that is not dependent on a wobbly economic climate.

Meanwhile, the emotional self is tended by promoting tribal identity. A philosopher once said the nation that did not know where it came from would perish. The promulgation of our tribal museums (here gaming tribes have the advantage as well) declares to the community at-large of who we are. Not because we have to remind everyone of it but because we can. The Citizen Potawatomi Nation in Shawnee, Okla. and the Chickasaw Nation in Ada, Okla. pop into mind.

Every now and again, I read stories in the media about a tribe saving their language. An admirable goal to be sure, but I glaze over those types of stories. Not because they are unimportant, but I think it's more pressing to reduce teen suicide in Indian Country so there can be tribal

members to speak the languages. I went to a funeral of this type this year. I never want to experience that kind of bewildered despair that seems to tap into an aquifer of anguish.

I aspire to New Year's resolutions. I wish I had a story to relay that could point to how I modulated/improved/eliminated some behavior of mine. But I do not. I instead wonder why the New Year is depicted as a baby and the old one looks like an old man. I get the analogy of chronology, mind you.

But I wonder if it says something larger about human nature. At the new year's onset, we are egocentric, like newborns. By the end of the year, we are more accepting of our foibles. "Live and let live," becomes our misty-eyed mantra. Then another New Year is upon us.

This is my own trick: Eat a mess of black-eyed peas and hope for the best.

S.E. Ruckman is a citizen of the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes in Anadarko, Okla. She graduated from the University of Oklahoma's School of Journalism and lives in Tulsa. Ruckman advocates newsroom diversity and HIV/AIDS awareness in Indian Country.

Pounding nails



Associated Press

Southwest Indian Foundation employee James Yazzie puts together a frame for a home at the foundation's warehouse in Gallup, on Dec. 15. The foundation provides about 25 homes per year to Navajo families in need.

Millions come from tax-exempt cigarettes

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Figures from monthly sales reports that tobacco wholesalers file with New York's Department of Taxation and Finance indicate Indian retailers are making millions annually selling tax-free cigarettes.

Citing sales reports released in a lawsuit and distributor estimates, The Buffalo News says the profit margin at Seneca stores is about \$7 a carton, the difference between what they pay for brand name cigarettes and what they charge. A congressional report put the figure at \$3.

The newspaper reports Seneca president Bary Snyder, for example, made \$5.4 million from 2005 through 2007 selling tax-exempt smokes at his Seneca Hawk gasoline station on the Cattaraugus Reservation.

A new law, signed by Gov. David Paterson this month, is set to take effect in February. It bans manufacturers from selling unstamped tobacco products to wholesalers that would supply Indian-owned stores. Some lawmakers estimate the state is losing \$400 million a year from uncollected taxes on Indian sales to non-Indians.

A judge temporarily barred state officials from enforcing the new law.

State Supreme Court Justice Rose Sconiers signed the order this month in Buffalo. A wholesale company and a businessman had sought to block the law until the state takes certain actions, including giving tax-exempt coupons to Indian tribes.

Man pulled from Pueblo building collapse dies

PUEBLO, Colo. (AP) — The last man pulled from the wreckage of a Pueblo explosion last month has died, just days after being released from the hospital.

Seventy-four-year-old Eugene "Geno" Roney died Saturday at a hospice. The Pueblo Chieftain reported that Roney was released from the hospital Monday and admitted to a hospice on Christmas Eve. A friend and caretaker, Max Garcia, told the newspaper that Roney died of cancer.

Roney was among several injured in mid-November, when a natural gas explosion leveled the Branch Inn and a clothing store in downtown Pueblo. One woman was killed, and Roney was

trapped for more than four hours before being rescued.

After Roney was rescued, he spent five weeks recovering from his injuries, including burns and broken bones, in Parkview Medical Center. When he was released Monday, Garcia told the newspaper, he was told he didn't have much longer to live because of terminal cancer.

Garcia did not say whether Roney knew about the terminal cancer before the explosion.

"The doctor said it was just too far along," said Garcia, who was granted power of attorney for Roney, who had no local relatives. "They said they just wanted him to be comfortable."

Garcia told the newspaper that he

tried to care for Roney at home but couldn't.

"I had him with me here at home until Dec. 24," Garcia said. "He was just too hard to take care of. I couldn't lift him, so we put him in hospice."

The Branch Inn explosion happened Nov. 13, just moments after Roney entered the hotel's bar and ordered a beer.

The thunderous blast leveled the bar and an adjoining boutique. A worker in the dress shop, 22-year-old Ashley Johnson, was killed.

Roney told the newspaper earlier that he had just sat down to talk to the Branch Inn co-owner when the explosion happened. Roney was trapped under the rubble for more than four

hours before rescuers pulled him to safety.

"I had one sip of beer," he said after being released from the hospital last week. "I got all banged up. My shoes were on fire, my shirt, my hair."

Despite his illness, Roney was in good spirits, said Garcia, who visited him hours before he passed away.

"He seemed to be doing fine, the same old Geno. The news was very unexpected," Garcia said.

Funeral arrangements were pending, and Garcia told the paper he planned a public wake at Zippers in Pueblo, another favorite watering hole of Roney's.

"He was a good guy and he's going to be missed," Garcia said.

Doctor buys, preserves access to historical site

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Dr. Arthur Cushman couldn't stand the idea that most people couldn't get to a place where ancient tribes once built a thriving civilization along the Harpeth River.

So Cushman bought the 65 acres leading to Mound Bottom, guaranteeing that visitors will have access to the 1,000-year-old earthworks that the state has preserved for decades.

"I believe, as Chief Seattle said, 'We belong to the Earth. The Earth does not belong to us,'" said Cushman, a

Nashville neurologist with a lifelong passion for Indian culture and history.

Until Cushman made the purchase, it was difficult for anyone to get onto the property to marvel at the mounds that ancient tribes built up, one basketful of earth at a time, until they towered overhead.

By buying the gateway property, Cushman ensured that future visitors will enter it surrounded by undisturbed woods and wildlife and the remains of dozens of smaller mounds and fortifications.

"This area is still consid-

ered sacred," he said. "The earth is sacred, the trees are sacred."

Tennessee's state naturalist emeritus Mack Prichard agreed. Prichard participated in earlier excavations at Mound Bottom after the state bought the site in 1972.

"These places are very rare and unfortunately, bulldozers have been at work on most of them," he said.

Visitors to Mound Bottom can stand on the site and see a view that is not all that different from the world the mound builders knew 1,000 years

ago.

A horseshoe-bend in the river still rolls around the land. The fields beyond are still being farmed, and the gateway to the mounds is still woodlands.

Those woodlands were almost lost to the bulldozers, too.

Developers were looking into the gateway property when Cushman bought it.

"Dr. Cushman saved the day," said Kathleen Williams, executive director of the Tennessee Parks and Greenways Foundation. "We're trying to

save the beautiful sites, these sacred sites that by right belong to the people of Tennessee ... I think we're doing God's work here now."

The state purchased Mound Bottom in 1972. Between the river and a neighboring property owner who didn't welcome intruders, the site was accessible only by boat.

It is still closed to most visitors, but the Greenways Foundation is offering tours to groups that contact the foundation and make arrangements.