

**National Park Service**  
**Theodore Roosevelt National Park Livestock Management Plan**  
**Virtual Civic Engagement Meeting Transcript**  
**March 30, 2022, 6:00-7:30pm Mountain Time**

00:00:30.000 --> 00:00:41.000

EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Good evening, everyone. I'd like to welcome you to the Virtual Civic Engagement meeting for the Theodore Roosevelt National Park Livestock Management Plan.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: My name is Katie Patterson and I work for Environmental Management and Planning Solutions Incorporated or EMPSi.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: We're a nationwide environmental consulting firm working with the Park Service to prepare the Livestock Management Plan. Tonight, I and our other EMPSi staff present will be helping facilitate this meeting and manage the Zoom application. Before beginning today's presentation, we'll briefly review some information about meeting logistics and introduce the Park Service specialists assisting with responding to questions. I'd like to remind everyone that this meeting is being recorded. To enable the use of closed captions, you can click the live transcript button icon on your Zoom toolbar, and then select show subtitles.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Tonight's meeting will include a presentation with information about the park and the project followed by a question-and-answer session. During the question-and-answer session, we'll begin with Park Service staff answering questions received through the registration process. We'll then answer questions received through the Q&A box in this meeting.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: As I mentioned during the meeting, you may submit additional questions using the Q&A box at the bottom of your Zoom window. Feel free to submit a question at any time during the meeting. We'll begin answering questions after the presentation is finished.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: This meeting is scheduled to run until 7:30 PM mountain time. The Park Service will answer as many questions as possible during that time, focusing on questions that are specifically related to the Livestock Management Plan and the upcoming NEPA process.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: If there are additional relevant questions that we aren't able to get to tonight, the Park Service will answer those questions on the FAQ pages that you see here on the screen.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: We'll also post these links into the meeting chat for you to access and bookmark.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: The Park Service is not accepting comments during tonight's meeting. To submit your comments, please visit the project's Planning Environment and Public comment or PEPC page at the link you see at the bottom of this slide.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: We'll also paste this link into the meeting chat. Next slide, please.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: This slide has a couple of relevant Zoom tips to be aware of during today's meeting. First is a picture of what the Q&A icon will look like at the bottom of your screen.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: You may need to move your mouse around to see this.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: You will also see the chat icon at the bottom of your screen.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: We are not accepting questions or comments through chat today, but if you have an urgent technical question, you can use this icon to reach us for assistance.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: You can also email Clayton McGee at the email address shown on the screen.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: We will also put this email address in the meeting chat for you to access later.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Now I'll turn it over to Angie Richman with the Park Service for some welcoming remarks and introductions.

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NPS – Angie Richman: Great thanks, Katie. And good evening, everyone. Welcome.

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NPS – Angie Richman: My name is Angie Richman and I'm the relatively new superintendent at Theodore Roosevelt National Park. I want to thank you all for joining us during your dinner hour this evening and allowing us an opportunity to share our preliminary thoughts with you about the future of horse and cattle management here at the park.

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NPS – Angie Richman: So back in December, actually my first week here at the park, we began a planning process with the intent of updating our management approach for the longhorn steers up in the North Unit of the park, and the horses here at the South Unit. And it's in our intent for developing this plan that we want to apply current scientific information and management practices for how we manage these two species in the park into the future.

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NPS – Angie Richman: It's really important to note that we are still very early in this planning process, and this meeting is our initial civic engagement meeting, where we can share with you our preliminary management options under consideration.

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NPS – Angie Richman: Next slide, please. And it's also really important to note that these options are draft concepts, an early exploration of what the park might do to solve some of our challenges associated with horse and cattle management. With your input and as we move through each of the stages of this planning process, it is expected that the options that we're going to share with you tonight will evolve. So we wanted to put this slide up here that shows all the steps kind of in this planning process.

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NPS – Angie Richman: to show you we are right here at the very beginning. And the graphics that have an asterisk next to them are places, as we move throughout this process, where you will have an opportunity to provide input once again, so there will be two more opportunities for you to tune in and let us know what you think.

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NPS – Angie Richman: And we know that Theodore Roosevelt National Park is not separate from our community or our visiting public, but a part of it, and any planning process that we would embark on we want to hear from you.

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NPS – Angie Richman: So, for tonight's presentation you will be able to submit your questions as Katie mentioned in the Q&A box at any time, and we will do our best to answer as many of those questions as we can at the end of the presentation.

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NPS – Angie Richman: But for those questions that we can't get to, we will answer them online on our website at our horse or cattle portals.

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NPS – Angie Richman: And I believe we are going to put the links to those portals in the chat box for you as well.

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NPS – Angie Richman: And again, as Katie mentioned, it's important to note that to submit a formal comment.

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NPS – Angie Richman: So after tonight's presentation, and after your questions are answered, if you want to submit a formal comment, please go to our Parks Planning portion of our website and put your comments there, or you can mail them to the park directly, and I believe we'll put the mailing address for the park either in the chat box or we have a slide with the address for you later. So, the comment period is open for 30 days.

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NPS – Angie Richman: It's open now, and it will run through April 15th.

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NPS – Angie Richman: So you still have 2 weeks to get your comments in there.

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NPS – Angie Richman: Next slide, please. So the goals and the objectives of our presentation tonight is to provide a brief history of the horses and cattle here at the park.

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NPS – Angie Richman: We want to describe to you our goals in developing this new Livestock Management Plan.

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NPS – Angie Richman: We want to present those preliminary options that we shared in the newsletter- and if you haven't seen the newsletter, you'll see them here tonight.

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NPS – Angie Richman: And then we also want to answer your questions and hear from you on your thoughts on what we've done so far.

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NPS – Angie Richman: So there are a number of NPS employees, experts, and contractors that we have gathered to help us with this effort, and some of them are here tonight to help with the presentation and to help with answering your questions, and I'd like to introduce them now.

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NPS – Angie Richman: So if you guys would turn your cameras on while I introduce you, that would be great.

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NPS – Angie Richman: So we have Blake McCann, who is our Director of Resource Management and Science here at the park, at Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

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NPS – Angie Richman: We have Jenny Powers, who is our Wildlife Health Branch Chief with our National Biological Resources division.

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NPS – Angie Richman: We have Jordan Spaak, who is an ecologist also with our National Biological Resources division.

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NPS – Angie Richman: We have Scott Carleton, who is the lead with our regional Natural Resources Program. And we have Christine Gabriel, who is our Environmental Coordinator and NEPA lead with our regional office.

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NPS – Angie Richman: So, thank you all for joining us again, and with that I appreciate your time, and I will turn it over now to Blake, who will give the presentation. Thank you.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Thank you, Angie. Theodore Roosevelt National Park consists of 3 units in the Little Missouri Badlands of Western North Dakota.

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NPS – Blake McCann: The South Unit is located 32 miles west of Dickinson, North Dakota, along the I-94 corridor near the city of Medora.

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NPS – Blake McCann: The North Unit is located 15 miles South of Watford City, North Dakota, and the Elkhorn Unit located between the North and South Units.

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NPS – Blake McCann: The Little Missouri River interacts with each unit, and all units have existing perimeter fences.

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NPS – Blake McCann: The South Unit is 46,000 acres in size, and horses are allowed to range across the entire area.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Common areas where visitors encounter horses are presented here in rose-colored polygons.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Note, the bison corrals at the east side of the park where both bison and horses are handled for management purposes.

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NPS – Blake McCann: The North Unit is 24,000 acres in size and longhorn steer are allowed to range across the entire area.

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NPS – Blake McCann: However, they most commonly frequent the rose-colored areas indicated here along the river, and in association with the North Unit bison corrals. Longhorn cattle are pastured in winter and provided supplemental forage and veterinary care at the bison corrals.

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NPS – Blake McCann: The Elkhorn Unit is 218 acres in size, with approximately 140 acres fenced to keep neighboring livestock out. No park livestock currently used the Elkhorn site.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Note the red dot indicating the location of Theodore Roosevelt's ranch house site.

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NPS – Blake McCann: In this next series of slides, I'll briefly explore the background and history of horses and cattle globally in North America, in the local area, and on park lands.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Horses began their evolutionary history in North America some 55 million years ago. Fossils of horses similar in form to how we know them today date to approximately 3.5 million years ago. Horses are thought to have dispersed across land bridges to Asia during times of Glacial Maxima as early as 2.5 million years ago.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Subsequently horses became extinct to North America, but adapted and dispersed across the eastern hemisphere, where they were later domesticated by humans.

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NPS – Blake McCann: From the 1500s onward, horses and other domestic animals were introduced to North America and by the 1700s horses were widely used by native Americans.

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NPS – Blake McCann: By the late 1800s, most tribal herds were disbanded, but many horses were left free roaming, intermingling with horses and cattle managed under open range livestock practices of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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NPS – Blake McCann: At the time of park establishment, in 1947, horses and cattle were present and were under some management of neighboring ranch operations.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Efforts were made to remove livestock, but not all horses were removed ahead of construction of the park's perimeter fence, which was built to contain bison and keep neighboring livestock out.

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NPS – Blake McCann: From the 1950s onward, roundup and sale of horses was a common management practice, and in 1978 an environmental assessment recommended the herd be kept between 35 to 60 head and advised introduction of new bloodlines to increase genetic diversity.

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NPS – Blake McCann: During recent decades, the park has conducted research and explored a wide range of techniques for managing the herd amid a backdrop of growing public concern.

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NPS – Blake McCann: The park is now well positioned to use research results and lessons learned here and elsewhere, as well as proven best management practices, to develop a comprehensive management strategy for horses.

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NPS – Blake McCann: As with horses, cattle are derived from a wild progenitor, the auroch, which were native to Europe and Asia.

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NPS – Blake McCann: It is thought that domestication occurred in the near east some 10,000 years ago, and that these new domesticates were dispersed by agriculturalists, and various breeds were developed over time.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Cattle follow a similar introduction and free-range husbandry as with horses in North America.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Longhorn cattle are thought to be derived from feral stock that occupied and adapted to parts of Mexico and Texas.

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NPS – Blake McCann: These animals were well suited for long cattle drives that followed routes north, such as the Great Western Trail and the Long X Trail in North Dakota.

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NPS – Blake McCann: As the era of cattle drives ended, the longhorn breed lost favor, but was maintained by enthusiasts as a symbol of that history.

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NPS – Blake McCann: When the park was created, cattle were expelled from park lands.

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NPS – Blake McCann: By 1962 when the North Unit was fenced, no longhorn cattle were present, but in the late 1960s a small herd of longhorn steer were introduced to the North Unit to represent a historic scene, reminiscent of the open range livestock practices that Theodore Roosevelt would have experienced during his time in North Dakota.

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NPS – Blake McCann: A management plan was developed in 1970.

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NPS – Blake McCann: It did not recommend a population range, but it did recommend that only steer being maintained, as reproductive animals would result in overpopulation that would increase management burden.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Since then, new animals have been introduced as existing steer aged and perished.

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NPS – Blake McCann: The steer coming with bison near the North Unit bison corrals.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Currently a bacterial disease called Mycoplasma bovis in domestic cattle is threatening bison herds.

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NPS – Blake McCann: The disease is not known to be present in the park's bison herd, but longhorn cattle and trespass cattle in park lands present the risk of transmission to bison.

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NPS – Blake McCann: So, there are some key considerations we are striving to address in providing long-term direction for livestock management at the park.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Horses and cattle are authorized to occur on NPS lands to recreate a historic scene.

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NPS – Blake McCann: However, visitor experience goals and interpretive programming are not well defined.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Range science has advanced, and new data are available to inform how we manage livestock.

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NPS – Blake McCann: There is a need for better alignment of livestock management, with stewardship goals for the park’s ecosystem functions, and its native wildlife, including our national mammal plains bison, which occur in both the North and South Units of the park.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Apparent disease risks must be considered. So six preliminary ideas have been developed as a basis for thought and discussion.

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NPS – Blake McCann: We anticipate that the alternatives will change over the course of our planning process as a result of your input, scientific evaluation, policy review, and in consideration of the fundamental resources the park must prioritize.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Under draft alternative A, management would continue according to current plans for longhorns and horses with horses roaming freely in the South Unit and steer roaming freely in the North Unit.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Contraception would be applied to managed horses and reduce the herd over time to prescribed population objectives.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Sale of excess horses would continue on GSA and longhorn cattle would be maintained at a small herd size by introducing new steer as animals age and die.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Under draft Alternative B, a soft approach would be applied to reduce herds over time to a point where no livestock remain on park lands. Horses would be captured and contracepted and then released back to the South Unit of the park, to live out their lives.

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NPS – Blake McCann: At time of capture young horses, capable of being transferred to private owners, would be offered to Tribes or sold through GSA.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Longhorn steer would not be replenished but would remain free in the North Unit of the park until none remain.

Under draft Alternative C, nonreproductive populations of both horses and steer would be maintained.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Horses will be captured and contracepted, and then most would be released back to the South Unit of the park to live out their lives.

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NPS – Blake McCann: At time of capture, young horses capable of being transferred to private owners, would be offered to Tribes, or sold through GSA.

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NPS – Blake McCann: A subset of horses, representing traits of the larger herd, would be released to a newly fenced portion of the South Unit.

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NPS – Blake McCann: This group would be maintained at 15 to 30 animals over time, through introduction of new non-reproductive horses from feral herds elsewhere.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Longhorn steer would be placed in a newly fenced portion of the North Unit corrals and would be supplemented with new steer over time to maintain a group of 5 to 15 animals.

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NPS – Blake McCann: New waysides and viewing areas would be constructed to provide interpretation and consistent viewing opportunities for visitors.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Draft Alternative D provides the same actions as described for the last slide, except that longhorn steer would be removed from the North Unit and placed in a pasture at the Elkhorn Unit.

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NPS – Blake McCann: The existing fence at the Elkhorn Unit would be strengthened and supporting infrastructure would be installed.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Under draft Alternative E, new population objectives would be defined for horses and cattle, with both species being reproductive. Horses would be captured, and a representative subset, based on genetic information and physical characteristics, would be released to the South Unit to reproduce in the park.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Young horses, not identified as part of the reproductive subset, would be transferred out of the park to Tribes or through GSA auctions.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Older horses, not part of the reproductive subset, would be contracepted and released to live out their lives in the park.

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NPS – Blake McCann: New horses from genetically diverse lineages would be sourced and introduced to contribute to the breeding herd.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Over time, excess horses would be transferred out of the park to maintain a herd of 30 to 70 animals.

Existing steer would be placed in a pasture in the North Unit and new reproductive longhorn cattle would be sourced.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Over time, excess cattle would be transferred out of the park to maintain a herd of 15 to 40 animals.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Under draft Alternative F, horses would roam free in the South Unit of the park, and steer would be removed from park lands.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Horses would be captured and contracepted, and then release back to the South Unit of the park to live out their lives.

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NPS – Blake McCann: At time of capture, young horses, capable of being transferred to private owners, would be offered to Tribes or sold through GSA.

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NPS – Blake McCann: The population objective of 30 to 70 horses would be maintained through introduction of new non-reproductive animals, excessed from feral herds elsewhere.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Here you see the horse pasture proposed under draft Alternatives C and D, where non-reproductive subsets of the existing herd would be maintained for visitor viewing.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Available land could support 15 to 30 horses with supplemental feeding and water sources.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Proximity to bison corrals would provide opportunity for sheltering animals and handling to render veterinary care.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Parking lot and viewing areas would be established along the eastern boundary of the pasture.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Horses would be viewable from the interstate, and from roads adjacent to the park boundary. Hiking access would be maintained through vestibule fencing at points of egress.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Here you see the cattle pasture proposed under a draft Alternatives C and E.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Available land could support 10 non-reproductive cattle, or 15 to 40 reproductive cattle with supplemental feeding. Proximity to bison corrals would provide opportunity for sheltering animals and handling to render veterinary care.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Waysides would be developed at existing pullouts on the park scenic drive to provide interpretation of the cattle herd.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Cattle would remain viewable in the core of their current range in the North Unit.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Here you see the cattle pasture proposed at the Elkhorn Unit, under draft Alternative D. Available land could support 5 to 15 non-reproductive cattle with supplemental feeding. Fencing and hay yards would be constructed to support cattle operations and provide areas to isolate animals for veterinary care.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Waysides would be developed adjacent to the existing parking area and trail access would be maintained.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Theodore Roosevelt's cattle operation at the Elkhorn Unit provides context useful for interpretation of the cattle.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Exclusionary fencing already in place would protect the archaeology of Theodore Roosevelt's ranch site.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Thank you for listening. We will now transition to the question-and-answer portion of our meeting.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Okay. Thanks for that great presentation, Blake. Now we're going to take a quick 5-minute break before you move to the question-and-answer portion of the meeting.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: During this time, feel free to submit additional questions and use the Q&A box to do that.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: This slide provides additional guidance for how to use the Zoom Q&A feature.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: You can click the Q&A icon at the bottom of your screen, type in your question, and press the send button.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: You'll notice that the option to ask a question anonymously has been grayed out.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: We'll take our break now and we'll return in 5 minutes to start the Q&A.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Welcome back. And thank you for continuing to submit your questions.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Before we continue, I do just want to note, in response to one question that we will be posting a PDF version of this presentation on the documents portion of the Park Service's PEPC page for this project.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: The link to that PEPC page is in the chat box. So, we'll now begin the question-and-answer a portion of the meeting.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Again, to submit a question, click the Q&A icon at the bottom of your screen, type in your question, and press the send button.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: I will read questions aloud, and Park Service staff members will respond.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: As a reminder, we'll be focusing on questions related to the livestock management plan and the upcoming NEPA process.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: We'll begin with those questions submitted through the registration process prior to the meeting, and then we'll get to those submitted through this Q&A feature.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Please only submit your question once. The Park Service will answer questions as quickly as possible; however, you may hear brief pauses as they consider their answer.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Please do not use the chat button to submit a question. Only use the Q&A icon.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: With that we will be, begin with our first question.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: This question is- Will the number of horse populations support band structure for visitors to continue to enjoy?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Blake, I believe, is going to take this question.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Thanks, Katie. Some alternatives would affect band structure more than others, and visitor enjoyment relevant to herd composition will be considered as part of the planning process.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Blake. Our next question is- What does moving horses and longhorn steers to a different pasture mean? Is it still within the park? And Angie, I believe you're going to answer this one.

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NPS – Angie Richman: Great. That is a great clarifying question.

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NPS – Angie Richman: And part of this planning process is to look to see if there's a more feasible location within the park that we would want to locate these herds and we have to look at our purpose and our goals.

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NPS – Angie Richman: If we want to be more historically accurate, then, you know, we need to consider potentially moving the herds to the Elkhorn, and especially the longhorn steer, because that's where Theodore Roosevelt actually did his ranching.

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NPS – Angie Richman: But if our goal is to provide them for visitor enjoyment, then, you know, we may look at a more feasible location within the South Unit to place both the horses and the cattle.

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NPS – Angie Richman: But if we do suggest relocation throughout this process, we will find a good location within the park.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Angie. Our next question is- Has a new forage study been completed? And Jordan is going to take this question here.

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NPS – Jordan Spaak: Thanks, Katie. We have been monitoring and studying forage allocation and habitat since the 70's, when the plans were signed, and we are currently applying best available range science right now to evaluate animal numbers and appropriately identify how many animals and different species of animals can be in new areas.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Jordan. Next question we have is- Has the park considered ending the birth control study with Colorado State and employing a more humane form of birth control?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Jenny is going to take this question.

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NPS – Jenny Powers: Thank you, Katie. The study with Colorado State University has been finished since 2020, and as part of this planning process, we will be analyzing all feasible methods of fertility control for horses. Thanks.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Okay. Our next question is- Drought and heat will negatively impact forage. Will a reduction in horse numbers increase health and viability of native ungulates?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Blake, I believe, is going to answer this question.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Thanks, Katie. Yes, because the park is fenced, there are finite resources for wildlife as well as horses and cattle and species numbers must be balanced conservatively with available resources to enable resiliency during times of environmental extremes.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Bison, elk, and other wildlife have overlapping diets with livestock.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Therefore, with larger numbers of livestock, less forage would be available for native species, and the margin of management in extreme conditions is reduced.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thank you, Blake. Okay, our next question is- Is the Park Service required to follow NEPA EA and EIS?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: And Christine is going to speak to this one.

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NPS – Christine Gabriel: Thanks, Katie. So, yes, the Park Service, like all Federal agencies, is subject to the National Environmental Policy Act, also known as NEPA, and we anticipate that an EA or an environmental assessment is the pathway that we would need to fulfill our NEPA responsibility. Thanks.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Okay, we have another question. Will the management plan for the wild horses take into account genetics and bloodlines to ensure long-term viability? Blake is going to take this one.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Thanks, Katie. Well, for any alternatives or alternative that includes reproductive populations, genetic diversity and gene flow strategies would be considered to enable genetic health of livestock.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: I think we've got another one for you Blake. It's-How will the horse herd size be determined? It should involve science to make sure the herd is large enough to prevent inbreeding.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Thanks, Katie. Herd size will be considered in context of the size of the landscape on which the animals roam to ensure that resources are not overburdened.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Where reproductive animals are concerned, genetic health can be maintained even in smaller herds, with sufficient gene flow.

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NPS – Blake McCann: These factors will be considered as part of our planning process going forward.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Great. Thanks. Another question- Is it possible to combine draft Alternatives C and E? Christine you're going to speak to this one.

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NPS – Christine Gabriel: Yep, so as these types of plans progress, it's common to combine alternatives or aspects of different alternatives to create new ones. So, we will be considering all these ideas going forward and look forward to more of your comments.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Great. Thank you, Christine. Our next question is- Why is there a genetic diversity or inbreeding concern if all are sterilized or non-productive?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Blake, are you going to take this one?

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NPS – Blake McCann: Yes, thanks, thanks, Katie. Topics of genetic diversity and inbreeding are relevant to reproductive herds, as with draft Alternatives A and E.

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NPS – Blake McCann: For non-reproductive herds, considered under draft alternatives, B, C, D and F these factors would not be a primary concern for management.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Okay, thanks, Blake. Next one- Can a new forage survey or AML be done to more accurately show how much is available for the grazing animals in the park?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Jordan. I believe you're going to take this one.

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NPS – Jordan Spaak: Sure, thanks. Yes, we are planning to complete a range assessment in 2022. It might trickle over into 2023, potentially further depending on the scale that we decide to engage in that effort. And we'll be looking at forage analysis as part of those assessments, and that'll help us determine how much forage is available for the native ungulates and also the livestock. Thanks.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: That's great, thank you Jordan. Our next question is- Why are they not being acknowledged as a keystone species?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: And Blake, you want to take this one?

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NPS – Blake McCann: Yes, thanks, Katie. Keystone species are native plants, animals, or other organisms that have a disproportionate effect on the ecosystem on which they interact.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Livestock are not part of this native system, and therefore do not participate in natural ecosystem function in that ecosystem function role.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Blake. Our next question is- With the Teddy Roosevelt Library opening in a few years, why would there be consideration to eliminating the wild horse herd?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: And, Angie, you want to take this one?

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NPS – Angie Richman: So, development of this plan and development of the library, you know, these are 2 separate kinds of parallel projects, and while they are both still relevant to Theodore Roosevelt's legacy, I believe they're unrelated efforts.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Angie. I think we have another one for you here, too. It's- can I add questions at a later time?

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NPS – Angie Richman: Yes, you can add questions later. If after tonight you go back and ponder this and have more questions for us, you can go on our website, and you can submit them through the horse and the cattle portals.

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NPS – Angie Richman: And I think we've put those links in the chat box but we can put them in there again.

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NPS – Angie Richman: But also, just a reminder, if you have a formal comment, go to our PEPC planning page.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Angie. Our next question is- How did the park arrive at the number of horses?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Why so few? People won't be able to see very many. Blake, you want to speak to this one.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Yes, the current draft preliminary alternatives are general ideas intended to provoke thought. For small herds and viewing pastures as suggested under draft alternatives C, D, and E, herd size ranges are based on available biomass and species interactions with the landscape to enable sustainable soil, water, vegetative and wildlife resources.

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NPS – Blake McCann: In the case of animals ranging across park units, livestock numbers must be managed in consideration of wildlife populations, including bison and elk, competing for the same resources.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Blake. I think we have another one for you here.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Where our horses for reproduction being obtained from? Mustangs for survival, or South Dakota range raised quarter horses?

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NPS – Blake McCann: As I said in the last question, we're at the beginning stages of our planning effort and alternatives that may include introduction of new animals would be explored later in the process to make determinations regarding potential sources.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Blake. Got a couple more for you here- If lowering the herd to 40 to 70 animals, how large will the roundups be as older mares and stallions should be allowed to stay?

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NPS – Blake McCann: Sure. It's a good question. Capture of most animals in the herd may be necessary to achieve reproductive, demographic, or population objectives described for draft preliminary alternatives.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Great thanks. We'll keep you up here on the hot seat Blake. Okay- When captures resume, will the park make every effort to continue doing low stress captures?

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NPS – Blake McCann: The park works to minimize handling stress for animals regardless of capture tools that are utilized.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thank you. Alright, we'll keep right on rolling with our next question.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: This one is- Will new horses be brought into the park to help diversify the genetics of the herd?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: What are the current and potential sources of newly introduced steers and horses? And Blake, do you want to speak to this one?

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NPS – Blake McCann: I can. I think it's the same answer as the last question.

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NPS – Blake McCann: We're at the beginning stages and with those types of alternatives details as to sources for animals will be further explored and evaluated later in the process.

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NPS – Blake McCann: So, I think that's all we can say at this time.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Blake. Our next question is- Would it be more costly to keep the long horn at Elkhorn Unit? That unit seems to make the most sense for interpretive purposes, unless it's harder to access to feed and provide veterinary care. For example, in the winter.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Angie, do you want to speak to this one?

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NPS – Angie Richman: Yeah, I'd be happy to. That's a great question. And those are things that we would definitely have to consider.

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NPS – Angie Richman: And I would say, yeah, it probably would be more costly especially at the outset.

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NPS – Angie Richman: We don't have facilities at the Elkhorn right now to support the cattle or the horses.

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NPS – Angie Richman: I mean we'd have to build fences, you know, we have to put some infrastructure in there.

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NPS – Angie Richman: So it might be more costly, at least initially.

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NPS – Angie Richman: But I think it would then balance out once we kind of establish them there.

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NPS – Angie Richman: But that's a great question and it's definitely something that, you know, if that were an alternative that we were serious about exploring we'd have to factor all those costs and everything into it. So yeah, thank you.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Angie. Our next question is- Dry conditions are not uncommon in the area. How are cattle and horse populations managed at the park when grazing is short?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Jordan, are you going to speak to this one?

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NPS – Jordan Spaak: Sure, Thanks. Certainly, a good question. Drought is a real scenario that we need to be thinking about when we manage. How we've been understanding drought is through our vegetation monitoring and knowing what is there, and how much is there through the drought years and thought these are quite rare, the wet years.

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NPS – Jordan Spaak: That is going to be a piece of the bigger puzzle when we understand how many animals can be included in each of these draft alternatives.

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NPS – Jordan Spaak: So we're just using the vegetation and the soil moisture conditions to understand how much food is there for all the animals that are on the landscape.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Jordan. Okay, I believe our next question is- You indicated that Mycoplasma is emerging.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: What do you mean by that? Is there already prevalence of it in the herd? And if so, what is the estimated loss due to it?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: And additional information provided with this question is, Mycoplasma is a disease that has showed up in some feedlot situations more frequently in the last number of years-you're dealing with stressed calves.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Could you please elaborate on the risk spreading this to what you call trespass cattle and then spread to cattle back out of the park or is this not a concern?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: And Jenny, I believe you're going to speak to this.

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NPS – Jenny Powers: Yeah, great questions. So, we generally think of Mycoplasma bovis as a disease of animals that are kept in close confinement.

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NPS – Jenny Powers: However, in the last approximately 10 years, but even more prevalent, or more intensively in the last year, we've seen it in extensively managed bison herds, which means animals that are kept on free-range and not in a really tight close confinement are getting the disease and we're not entirely sure why.

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NPS – Jenny Powers: There are lots of questions about Mycoplasma bovis in bison, and so we are most concerned with trespass cattle potentially bringing it to the bison and while we have no evidence that Mycoplasma bovis is currently in Theodore Roosevelt's herd, we are going to be doing some testing in the future with the bison.

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NPS – Jenny Powers: That's what we know at the moment.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Great, thank you, Jenny. Our next question is- How many horses and cattle are now on the parks land? and Angie, I believe, is going to speak to this.

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NPS – Angie Richman: Yeah, you can test me and Blake you tell me if I'm wrong?

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NPS – Angie Richman: So, we have 9 cattle or 9 steers up in the North Unit, and I believe we have about 180 horses.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: I don't hear Blake chiming in.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Yeah. Approximately 180.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Great. Thank you. Our next question- Blake don't go too far.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Will new horses be brought into the park to help diversify the genetics of the herd?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: What are the current and potential sources of newly introduced steers and horses?

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NPS – Blake McCann: Thanks, Katie, and I appreciate everybody's interest in this topic.

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NPS – Blake McCann: But again, we're so early in the process and this would be something that would be addressed at a later point.

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NPS – Blake McCann: We have not identified sources for new animals to come into the park because we are at the very beginning of presenting some ideas to provoke thought and discussion going forward.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Okay, thanks, Blake. Our next question is, what other public engagement opportunities does the Park Service have planned on this proposal, and when are those scheduled to take place? And Christine, you can speak to this?

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NPS – Christine Gabriel: Yeah. So there's going to be two more opportunities to comment. The next one is going to be at the start of the actual NEPA process which we're going to- which is called the scoping period.

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NPS – Christine Gabriel: And then a third opportunity will come when we issue the draft environmental assessment, and we will have a public, another public comment period.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thank you, Christine. Our next question is- Is E. coli a concern when cattle are allowed access to the Little Missouri?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Jenny, you're going to speak to this one.

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NPS – Jenny Powers: So certainly E. coli and other common enteric bacteria are common components of fecal material in wide variety of species.

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NPS – Jenny Powers: I do not believe that the pasture itself is going to include the river, and Blake can speak to that part. Regardless as to whether it actually includes the river or not, the cattle will be at a pretty low stocking rate and so the contamination would be quite low.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Our next question is, can the park move some of the horses to the North Unit with the bison and the longhorn or not?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: And we'll go to Blake for this one.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Yes, thanks Katie. I think there are a lot of things that maybe aren't in our current alternatives, and I would encourage anybody that has different ideas about what we may pursue to submit comments either on our PEPC portal or through hard copy correspondence to the park.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Blake. We have another one here for you.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Are any of the cattle privately owned?

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NPS – Blake McCann: Sure. No, currently the cattle are owned by the park. We do occasionally have cattle from neighboring ranching operations that enter park lands, and we work with those landowners to remove cattle when we observe them.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Great thanks. Okay, our next question is- How will native grasses be affected if cattle and horses are removed from the park? I'll pose this to all the panelists.

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NPS – Jordan Spaak: Sorry, Katie can you repeat that one more time?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Yeah it's- How will native grasses be affected if cattle and horses are removed from the park?

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NPS – Jordan Spaak: Sure. Good question. Likely, there'll be less pressure on them due to fewer animals consuming them, trampling them, etc.

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NPS – Jordan Spaak: We still have a lot of native ungulates on the landscape that will provide the necessary disturbance, and we do have a fire program that is also continuing to do control burns in the park and other areas too.

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NPS – Jordan Spaak: So, we should be able to provide the necessary disturbance that those species of grasses need with our current management strategies and the current animals that are on the landscape.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Jordan. Next one is- If there are 3 separate units in the park, would they be fenced off separately, or still have widened spaces for these animals to roam? And we'll go to Blake. for this one.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Katie, I had a little glitch there. Could you please repeat the question?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Certainly. Yeah. If there are 3 separate units in the park, would they be fenced off separately, or still have wide open spaces for these animals to roam?

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NPS – Blake McCann: There are different scenarios under the alternatives that are out for consideration and discussion.

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NPS – Blake McCann: You know, right now, all the park units are perimeter fenced.

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NPS – Blake McCann: In the case of the North Unit and South Unit to contain bison, and in the case of the Elkhorn to prevent neighboring cattle from entering the site.

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NPS – Blake McCann: I think under a couple of the alternatives that we discussed in the presentation, we have some smaller pasture areas to consolidate animals for visitor viewing, and on others we have options for animals to continue to exist throughout the area of the park that they currently occur.

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NPS – Blake McCann: So it's a range of options for fencing and where animals would be that we've got out for discussion at this time.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Great thanks, Blake. Our next question is, will the transcript of this meeting be available to the public?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: And I can answer that one. It will be available. I believe it will be on the document page of the Park Services PEPC site for this project.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: We have another question on- Why are you saying that an EA and not an EIS, will be sufficient for this process?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: And Christine, you want to take this one?

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NPS – Christine Gabriel: Sure, so we're not saying that an EIS is definitely not going to be prepared. But right now, for this, for the ideas being presented, and the alternatives and the proposed actions, you know, possibly that could take place, we feel like an EA would be a sufficient NEPA pathway.

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NPS – Christine Gabriel: Could that change at the end of the EA process? Yes, it can, based on what else is proposed, based on public comments and as the plan progresses.

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NPS – Christine Gabriel: So, but for the moment, we feel like an EA would be the appropriate NEPA pathway going forward.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Christine. And there was also a follow-up question- Hoping you could help explain what our role, EMPSi's role is in this process.

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NPS – Christine Gabriel: So EMPSi is helping us with the public and involvement process, and the civic engagement process, and they're also going to help us write the EA itself.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks. Okay, our next question is- Are there burros in the park? And we'll go back to Blake for this one.

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NPS – Blake McCann: The park does not have burros, it's not been part of our history.

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NPS – Blake McCann: There are none that I'm aware of that occur in the park. So, no is the answer.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Blake. Another question we'll ask for you- Do you believe with the horse numbers so low they'll maintain genetic viability?

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NPS – Blake McCann: So, this is a question we have with a lot of the wildlife species that we have here at the park- in particular bison, which are maintained on park lands with the perimeter fence in isolation from other herds.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Currently, we're working to resolve genetic diversity issues across bison that are managed by the National Park Service and DOI by developing a meta-population management strategy and ultimately working towards getting gene flow into herds to improve genetic diversity and resiliency.

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NPS – Blake McCann: So, I think anytime you have an isolated population there is a potential for genetic issues, including inbreeding and drift, genetic drift, which is the random loss of genetic diversity over time in small populations.

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NPS – Blake McCann: In reality, it takes a very, very large population of any species to outpace genetic drift over time.

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NPS – Blake McCann: And so, you know, whether it's 180 horses, or if it's more than that, being small, generally speaking, and isolated, if you're going to have reproductive herd going forward, then we would be considering what management of genetics would be necessary to keep a sustainable population.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thank you, Blake. Okay, we're going to go to our next question.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: This one's going to go to Angie- If horses and longhorn are introduced to Elkhorn Ranch, will there be handicap access for people who can't hike there to see the horses and longhorn?

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NPS – Angie Richman: Great question, and definitely a fair comment. And I will just say that again-

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NPS – Angie Richman: We're really early in this process, and so if we were to really get serious about moving the herds there, then we would have to consider that. So, I guess the answer is, we don't really have an answer. It's a great comment, and noted.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Angie, and that's a great reminder, too, that folks asking questions like this who do have specific suggestions-those are great comments to submit through the PEPC site as well, and they'll be documented there for further consideration.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Okay, our next question is- Who will be involved in making future decisions concerning the horse herds?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Will you allow outside horse experts to work with park officials in making decisions? And Blake, do you want to maybe take this one?

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NPS – Blake McCann: I'm sorry, Katie. Would you please repeat the question?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Absolutely- and who will be involved in making future decisions concerning horse herds? Will you allow outside horse experts to work with park officials in making decisions?

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NPS – Blake McCann: Well, currently we have a variety of experts within NPS that are part of our interdisciplinary team that is developing and moving forward with planning. Right now, we do not have plans to include external cooperators.

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NPS – Blake McCann: There has been a variety of research conducted in the park on horses and on landscape use by wildlife.

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NPS – Blake McCann: National Park Service conducts inventory and monitoring that's been happening for decades.

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NPS – Blake McCann: We also have fire ecology studies, and a variety of tools that are used over time to understand landscape and range changes at the park level.

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NPS – Blake McCann: And so, you know, we're hoping to bring all of that to bear as well as the available literature that is published on livestock interactions in natural areas to help our understanding of the scope and context of topics that will be pursued in moving forward with this planning process.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Blake. All right. Our next question and I'm just myself not familiar enough to know if this one is directly relevant.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: But- Will the park reduce the amount of prairie dogs? They seem to be impacting the land.

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NPS – Blake McCann: So, I'll take this one Katie. We're not evaluating prairie dogs under this management plan. Prairie dogs are a native species here, and they're an important part of our ecology. I understand different points of view on prairie dogs and the relative value in context of our park and in context of the area where we're working, but that is not part of what's being analyzed in this management planning process.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Blake. Next one we'll go to is- The wild horses are a unique and historical asset to the park.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: If you Google the park they're mentioned as a reason people visit, so why are they not given a fair management plan?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: The longhorns are given this, and Christine is going to speak to this.

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NPS – Christine Gabriel: I believe so. I would say the whole purpose for this effort that we're starting right now, and that we're undertaking, is to explore all the management ideas out there.

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NPS – Christine Gabriel: So this is the start of this fair, hopefully fair management plan.

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NPS – Christine Gabriel: We hope to make it as fair and open and consider all options that we're being presented with.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Christine. We have another question here of how much would park attendance go down without the horses? And I'm going to ask if Angie has anything to speak to that. I know, of course, you probably can't pull the specific statistic out but your thoughts.

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NPS – Angie Richman: Thoughts. Yeah, I definitely can't. It's a good question.

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NPS – Angie Richman: It's a fair question. Yeah, I don't know I think, unless we did a visitor use study or some social science along with this to kind of get at that we can't really know, for sure.

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NPS – Angie Richman: We have other factors like gas, you know, rising gas prices. that might be a higher probability for decreasing visitation, but we also saw last year we had the highest visitation on record here at the park, with just under 800,000 visitors, and, you know, we really saw over the last couple of years with Covid that there was a huge push for people who'd been cooped up to get outside and many of those people, many Americans, came to their national parks to kind of get out and be out in the world again after Covid.

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NPS – Angie Richman: And so the parks, you know, saw a huge increase in visitation just for those reasons, and not necessarily for each of the things that they would see in the parks. But just being able to be in a wilderness setting. So I don't know that's kind of a long way of saying we don't know and unless we did, you know, a specific kind of study to look at that, it's really hard to say.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Great, thanks, Angie. Why don't we stick with you for another question here?

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NPS – Angie Richman: How long will this take to come to fruition? Well, if you're if they're asking about the plan itself, you know, we're hoping to have it finished next year.

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NPS – Angie Richman: Perhaps this time next year. But these things are a process and things do change as we go throughout the process, so we're kind of hoping that we can get something done next year but if they're asking about, you know, the alternative that we choose you know it's really going to be dependent on and tied to that alternative.

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NPS – Angie Richman: But, you know, it seems like many of them are things that would take place over a long period of time, you know not something that would happen very quickly.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks. Okay, let's go to this next question- What are some of the lessons learned that are being considered in the management of the wild horses in the park?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: I think this is referring back to Blake's presentation.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Blake-Do you want to speak to this one?

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NPS – Blake McCann: Certainly. There are a variety of things that we have learned about management of horses and cattle over the years. A few that come to mind are different approaches we've taken with management.

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NPS – Blake McCann: You know we've used a variety of tools, and in recent years we've explored different techniques for capture.

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NPS – Blake McCann: We've explored partnerships with nonprofit organizations.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Replacing animals. We have explored naming animals, and you know what are the different approaches we could take with interacting with the public in regard to the horses that were transitioning out of the park to private ownership.

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NPS – Blake McCann: In terms of longhorn cattle, you know, we've been a lot of different places in terms of how we're pasturing them in the winter, how we're confining them and rendering veterinary care, the different techniques we've used to deal with public interaction.

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NPS – Blake McCann: We've had, for instance, cattle showing up in our campground where maybe they're not as welcome, or some of the interactions that visitors have had with horses along the roadway that are not beneficial to the animals or the horses.

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NPS – Blake McCann: So a lot of that background and you know there's more things I could describe here. But that should give some idea of the experience that we've gone through, especially in recent decades, you know, with our program that will help guide the decisions that we'll be working towards through this management process, this planning process.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thank you, Blake. And the next question we have is one that maybe Blake, we might want you to speak to as well, or possibly Jordan or Jenny- How can we be sure that the horses are recognized and treated as a reintroduced native species and protect it as such?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: How will the environmental impact assessment be conducted and herd viability numbers be determined?

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NPS – Jenny Powers: I can take that, Katie.

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NPS – Jenny Powers: This is Jenny, and the National Park Service does not recognize horses as a native species throughout the United States.

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NPS – Jenny Powers: These are domesticated species that have become feral and are ranging in different areas, and that's not to say that they aren't valued.

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NPS – Jenny Powers: That's to say that they are not native wildlife.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks Jenny. Next one is- has the park been in contact with local tribal leadership to discuss a potential partnership for community development? Angie, you want to speak to this?

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NPS – Angie Richman: Yes, we've been in touch with our affiliated tribes, and shared the same information with them that you're getting tonight, and tribal consultation will be an ongoing part of this process.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Great. Thank you. This is one that looks like Blake will take- If you pastured your horses to make them more easily viewed, what would make these horses more special than the horses you see driving down the road?

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NPS – Blake McCann: Yeah, thanks, Katie. You know, I think what we're trying to do here is find a way to align management of horses and cattle with our priorities for natural resources available in the park.

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NPS – Blake McCann: You know, currently the cattle and horses exist behind a fence.

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NPS – Blake McCann: It's a large area but it is behind a fence.

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NPS – Blake McCann: I understand that there is this perception that their interaction with the landscape and the visitor perception may change in a smaller viewing area, but there are some other potential benefits.

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NPS – Blake McCann: If we have animals that are in association with corrals where supplemental care can be provided as we've done with longhorn cattle.

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NPS – Blake McCann: So it's a matter of balancing a lot of different aspects and needs going forward, and we'll be considering all of those points, including this one that's being made as we work towards new alternatives for consideration by the public.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Blake. Maybe you can speak to this next question, too. It's- How would the park conduct bison capture operations if a pasture is built on the eastern fence line in the South Unit?

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NPS – Blake McCann: Certainly. Again, we're still early in the process.

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NPS – Blake McCann: A lot of these things are ideas. They are areas on maps at this point.

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NPS – Blake McCann: To resolve that issue, I imagine that we could use mobile fencing. For if you're not familiar with our park, we have a drive lane, for when we push bison into the South Unit corrals where we push them up the buttes, and they interact with a wing fence that forms a funnel.

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NPS – Blake McCann: And we have experimented with mobile corral panels and handling of bison, and the horses, in the past.

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NPS – Blake McCann: And so some form of fencing or panels for a part of the fence could be utilized, and if animals were in the pasture, they could be shifted to another part of a pasture, the fence opened up to the funnel for driving bison, and the roundup of bison could be conducted, bison release, and then the entire pasture restored for access for horses. In terms of the South Unit. That's just one idea that could be pursued.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks for that, Blake. We have another question, and this may be another one for you, Blake.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: But- How many horses would the area offered in option E ultimately support to allow for growth? Is enough, money being considered to obtain horses that would likely survive the North Dakota climate?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: How old are the new reproductive horses going to be? Perhaps 2 or 3 to be accepted by the existing herd.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Okay, there were a lot of questions there. Can we start with the first part? Yes, certainly.

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NPS – Blake McCann: How many horses would the area offered in an option E ultimately support to allow for growth?

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NPS – Blake McCann: Okay, so we're talking about the entire South Unit under on our option E, if I remember correctly. I don't know, Jordan if you want to speak at this time, or if it's premature before you have a chance to look on the ground this summer.

NPS – Jordan Spaak: Yeah, I think it's a little premature Blake.

NPS – Blake McCann: Okay, but again, I think I would fall back on these central tenants that we had established that there are competing, there's competition for resources, especially if we think about our bison herd.

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NPS – Blake McCann: If we think about elk and other ungulates and other animals that forage on grass and forage throughout the Park, and you know, we have to make sure that we are programming to have enough resources for those wildlife species during a challenging year.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Whether we're talking about drought and water availability and aboveground biomass, if we're talking about the effects of difficult winters and available forage coming out of the summer season. So, I don't think it's a simple answer in terms of how many horses or cattle we could grow on park land.

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NPS – Blake McCann: So much is, how can we find an appropriate stocking rate for livestock that does not compromise the wildlife and the landscape ecology of the park. That's the first part, is there another part to that question?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Yeah, there are 2 more parts; the second one - is enough money being considered to obtain horses that would likely survive the North Dakota climate?

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NPS – Blake McCann: I think this is going back to the sourcing question like, where would we receive animals.

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NPS – Blake McCann: And again, I think we are too early in the process to speak to those elements of it.

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NPS – Blake McCann: There are a lot of things that we've talked about. Obviously if we pursued alternatives with new pasture there's fence that costs, there's expenditures for other things like viewing areas and parking lots and waysides, that would be considered.

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NPS – Blake McCann: So it's just too, early to really get into that side of the conversation.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Okay, you may have a similar answer to this third part of the question.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: How old are the new reproductive horses going to be? Perhaps 2 or 3 to be accepted by the existing herd.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Yeah again. I don't think there's much more to offer at this time.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Those are all really great questions, and I think you know, those would be important topics to address at a later point.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thank you, Blake. Let's go to Jenny for our next question.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Are the horses managed in accordance with the Wild Horse and Burrow Act, or some other legislation?

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NPS – Jenny Powers: Yeah, good question. The Wild Horse and Burro Act does not apply to National Park Service lands.

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NPS – Jenny Powers: So, no, they are not managed under Wild Horse and Burro Act. Similar to say, for example, BLM or Forest Service, which is what the act applies to.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Jenny. Our next question here is- Is it your position that fencing is keeping wildlife in the park?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Why not use wildlife friendly fencing? And we'll go a Blake for this one.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Currently fencing is just keeping bison in the park, and the cattle and the horses. Elk can come and go. We do have wildlife-friendly fencing in terms of there are jump overs where we lower the fence by 18 inches, and there are duck-unders where we raise the fence, by 18 inches, to allow elk and deer and coyotes, and other animals to pass, but in terms of the bison, and in terms of the cattle and horses, when they leave the park they're considered trespass animals, and so, although National Park Service views bison as wildlife, in the State of North Dakota, the State views bison as livestock.

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NPS – Blake McCann: And so when they leave, we do have to try to recover them.

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NPS – Blake McCann: And so we can't simply, given our situation, allow bison to roam freely, and I think much the same is true in terms of the cattle and the horses.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Blake. Staying on the bison topic let's talk about this question.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: How many more bison could the parks support in the alternative without livestock?

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NPS – Blake McCann: Yeah, you know, we don't have an exact answer to that question right now. Right now, in the South Unit, we manage between 300-500 as our goal.

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NPS – Blake McCann: We often get a little bit higher than that. In the North Unit, it's 100 to 300 but we're managing conservatively to make sure we have enough forage to get a through those difficult years and right now we're about on the third year of a difficult drought each year.

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NPS – Blake McCann: When we go into the fall, we have diminishing returns in terms of what's there to get those animals through the winter, and so I think certainly more bison could be supported in the park going forward but we'd have to be careful to watch what our range condition was, and make sure that we weren't overburdening the ecosystem with those numbers.

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NPS – Blake McCann: You know, there's some key points here as well in terms of what I would call social carrying capacity, and what I mean is when we get a lot of bison, and I'll say a lot of bison since I've been here has been about 700 animals in the South Unit, we start to see more issues with animals getting out of the park, with some of the interactions with visitors that are negative.

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NPS – Blake McCann: And so there's more to it I think than just how much we have available on the ground versus how many animals we can support.

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NPS – Blake McCann: There is that interface with fence, with the roads, with the infrastructure, and moving forward, we have to be responsive to all of those things in ensuring that we're maintaining healthy herds, and also not putting ourselves in a place where we have problems.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Blake. Let's, go to Angie now with this next question- What is being used to define best management practices? And others can feel free to weigh in on this, too, from the panel.

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NPS – Angie Richman: Yeah, thank you. I can take a stab at it but, I would love to hear maybe Scott or Christine or Jenny weigh in after I start us off.

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NPS – Angie Richman: But we definitely want to take the most up-to-date scientific research that we have available and make sure we're applying that. And you know currently the cattle are managed under a 1970 management plan, and the horses under 1978 EA.

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NPS – Angie Richman: A lot has changed in the 44 years since those were developed.

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NPS – Angie Richman: So you know, best management would be to update our thinking based on current science.

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NPS – Angie Richman: It's also to look at examples and actions that other parks have utilized that are effective and make sure that we're applying things that we know to be effective.

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NPS – Angie Richman: And also taking some of the lessons learned so that we're not repeating things that weren't effective.

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NPS – Angie Richman: So that's kind of the first thoughts that come to the top of my head.

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NPS – Angie Richman: But yeah, I'd love to hear other people maybe weigh in.

NPS – Christine: I'll just add to that, and say that even though the Park Service is not subject to the Wild Horse and Burro Act that doesn't mean that we can't learn from other agencies like the Forest Service and BLM, and we frequently do consult their subject matter experts and resource experts as well, as we're going through a project.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks. Does anybody else want to weigh in on that question from the panel?

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: All right. Well, thanks to both of you. All right let's go to Jenny for our next question- Is there actual proof to the public that any of the horses have been in any way sterilized by the GonaCon?

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NPS – Jenny Powers: Good question. We do have a couple of published papers showing that GonaCon is reversible, meaning that animals return to fertility post vaccination. However, with any individual animal it is possible that they could be permanently sterilized, and it is unknown at this time if our current herd has sterilized individuals or not. We'd have to play out the rest of their reproductive lives to know that.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Jenny. Our next question is- Have the horses damaged park ground? I'm not sure-maybe Jordan or Blake wants to take this one.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Yeah, this is Blake. I think we can point to a couple studies.

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NPS – Blake McCann: There was some research done in the 90s looking at habitat use of horses and you know they certainly have different grazing patterns than do our native ungulates, and they tend to occupy certain locations throughout the park, and also have a different digestive system than what we have with our ruminants.

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NPS – Blake McCann: So I think there's a lot of factors that could come into play as to how they're interacting ecologically. One thing that comes to mind is potential for behavior around water sources, and that interaction that social dynamic with wildlife also works to access those resources.

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NPS – Blake McCann: The focused use by horses of certain parts of the park.

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NPS – Blake McCann: You know, for instance, Lindbo Flats receives a lot of horse use in the summertime, and there are other locations that they frequent as well.

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NPS – Blake McCann: So, I think there is a different disturbance regime that we would expect, and you know, disturbance, we're talking about animals foraging or their hoof traffic on the ground, and we have that from wildlife in the park, too. But you know, a fair question would be to ask is it a natural disturbance, disturbance regime.

01:23:43.000 --> 01:24:06.000

NPS – Blake McCann: And is it something that is benefiting the ecology of the park at the scale that it's currently occurring? And with our understanding of horses as not being native animals it is an impact on the landscape that is different than we experience with the wildlife that we preserved in the park.

01:24:06.000 --> 01:24:17.000

EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks for that explanation. Blake let's stay with you for another minute to ask back to Bison. Is it possible to reduce the bison herd to be able to allow a larger wild horse herd?

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NPS – Blake McCann: Yeah, I can speak to that. Right now, Department of Interior and including our park and our region with other bison parks, are working very hard on bison stewardship going forward.

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NPS – Blake McCann: We're working to connect and develop management strategies that are all aligning towards the same goals under the DOI Bison Conservation Initiative, and I alluded to this earlier with meta-population management strategies and in terms of genetic health, asking questions as to how we can help foster and improve bison stewardship globally, you know, as the continent's largest land mammal, and one that existed in the millions in the past that is now, you know, largely confined to smaller parts of the landscape without connectivity.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Bison conservation is a key part of how we're moving forward, and it's part of NPS's story, and you know, taking what was the vestiges of wild bison and preserving them on National Park Service lands. So I think it is. . .

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NPS – Blake McCann: it would run counter to those efforts, not just today, but going back a hundred years with NPS to the to think about offsetting numbers of bison that are contributing to that conservation effort on behalf of horses or cattle in this instance.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Blake. Let's go to another question for Angie. When will roundups resume in light of this planning stage?

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NPS – Angie Richman: Sure. Yeah. Since we embarked on this effort this year, it is not our intention to conduct a roundup or a removal of any of the horses or cattle this year, and so likely we will reassess where we're at this time next year.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Great, thank you. And we have one for Jenny here. Do you have any research as to the effects of sterilization on the social fabric of a horse herd?

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NPS – Jenny Powers: Yeah. Great question. So we do. We did a very extensive behavior study after beginning the GonaCon vaccination trials back in 2009 and extending forward through 2020, and it is already published and available, and we can. . .

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NPS – Jenny Powers: we can make that available to you. The reference. However, what we found was that there were very little change in behavior other than mares with foals at side tended to graze more which makes a whole lot of sense, since they have higher energy needs. But as far as band structure and keeping the band together, and these types of things, there was very little effect.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Jenny. We have another one here, and maybe Blake wants to answer this one.

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EMPSi – Katie Patterson: This is -To maintain quality of the horses, such as good confirmation, might quarter horses be considered? On Chincoteague Island quality shetland pony stallions are introduced, for example.

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NPS – Blake McCann: Oh, yeah, again, I think this kind of goes back to some of the other questions that we've addressed you know, in terms of sourcing animals that may be involved in future process under an alternative.

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NPS – Blake McCann: There is going to be some consideration that would have to be pursued to identify best breeding stock to bring in.

01:28:27.000 --> 01:29:24.000

NPS – Blake McCann: If we're going to have a reproductive herd going forward. And you know I think it's more than any one opinion about what would be best to bring in. We do have an understanding of herd genetics and we do have understanding of history of the herd, and all of that will be brought to bear at some point in the process of developing a better understanding of how we might augment in the case of the horses, or in in the case of a reproductive cattle herd to ensure that we have a viable population, even if it is small but in need of some gene flow. That's something that we're not addressing at this point, because again, these are just some preliminary ideas that we've put out there to start some of this conversation.

01:29:24.000 --> 01:29:29.000

EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Blake and Blake, why, don't you stay with us for this one?

01:29:29.000 --> 01:29:33.000

EMPSi – Katie Patterson: This may be our last question that we have time for during this meeting. That is- Assuming the park plans to continue managing wild horses as livestock, does the park plan to provide food, water, and or veterinary care for the park's wild horses? If not, why?

01:29:33.000 --> 01:29:54.000

NPS – Blake McCann: Yes, you know, there are a lot of different scenarios under the 6 draft preliminary alternatives.

01:29:54.000 --> 01:30:15.000

NPS – Blake McCann: You know, one thing that that could be addressed going forward is the disparity between how we've managed the cattle and the horses. Wherever horses are free ranging across the landscape not in association with corral facilities, the options are really limited to provide supportive care.

01:30:15.000 --> 01:30:34.000

NPS – Blake McCann: With the cattle, on the other hand, where we have facilities that we can put them behind a fence, we can provide supplements that then wouldn't also be accessed by the bison or other wildlife, because we do not want to be in this place of providing those unnatural things to a wildlife population.

01:30:34.000 --> 01:30:44.000

NPS – Blake McCann: We want them to continue to interact with the environment and to adapt and change over time in response to that environment.

01:30:44.000 --> 01:30:58.000

NPS – Blake McCann: So, under scenarios where we have pastured animals, it would create the opportunity for a different interaction in the case with horses that could include supplemental feeding and veterinary care.

01:30:58.000 --> 01:31:04.000

NPS – Blake McCann: That would change that, you know, that relationship that we have with them currently.

01:31:04.000 --> 01:31:14.000

EMPSi – Katie Patterson: Thanks, Blake. And we are at 7:30 now, so we are going to have to end tonight's meeting.

01:31:14.000 --> 01:31:33.000

EMPSi – Katie Patterson: But just as a reminder, questions that the Park Service were not able to get to tonight will still be answered on one of the FAQs pages that we linked to in the chat earlier in this meeting. The Park Service looks forward to continuing that dialogue through those avenues, and I will hand it off to Angie now to close this out.

01:31:33.000 --> 01:31:39.000

NPS – Angie Richman: Thanks, Katie, and I just want to reiterate again.

01:31:39.000 --> 01:31:52.000

NPS – Angie Richman: Thank you all for attending tonight. We had a really great turnout, and we intentionally left a lot of time for questions tonight, because we had a sense that there were a lot of questions and concerns out there.

01:31:52.000 --> 01:32:02.000

NPS – Angie Richman: And I just really appreciate you tuning in, submitting your questions and allowing us the opportunity to share our answers and our thinking to date.

01:32:02.000 --> 01:32:25.000

NPS – Angie Richman: So thank you and I look forward to working with all of you as we continue down the path of developing this plan. So have a good night.