

This is our new herd bull, “Young Bill, of Snake River Farm.”



We keep a small herd of bison. The herd ranges between 20 and 40 animals, depending on the time of year.

Less than ten of our animals are cows of breeding age.

Only one is a “mature” bull.

Spring births increase the number.

Fall harvest reduces the number.

I also buy young animals to add to the herd.

We keep only one “herd” bull. One bull can easily meet the needs of 10 to 15 cows. Even more important, if there were two mature bulls with the herd at the same time, they would fight. Fighting bulls can destroy a lot of fences without even noticing.

There are other bulls in the herd but they are young and always much smaller than Bill.

Smaller bulls do not challenge mature bulls.

I once added a second mature bull to an existing cattle herd. The two competing bulls smashed more than a quarter mile of fence over night.

The bulls were polled Angus, (hornless) so fortunately neither was seriously injured. By morning, they were so exhausted that they could barely stand.

I spent the next two days rebuilding fences.

Our bison herd bull is always named Bill.

Herd bulls need to be replaced from time to time for a variety of reasons.

Because of that, I try to keep a young bull in the herd who I think would be a good Bill, if needed.

We always name that bull, Bob.

A Bill can keep his job as long as does it well and does not get too mean.,

Bulls, bison or cattle, tend to get mean as they age.

If Bill is doing well, Bob is harvested before he grows large enough to seriously challenge Bill.

When a Bill's term ends, he becomes ground bison. Then Bob becomes Bill.

Old Bill, the one who just moved on, had been Bill for nine years.

He had a good life.

Young Bill was formerly Bob of Blue Mounds. Gail and I bought him from Blue Mounds State Park in 2014.

Young Bill was a yearling then.

He has a lot of growing to do but he seems to be an excellent choice for herd bull.

Old Bill moved on to the Happy Grazing Ground on Saturday.

Darrell performed a fine Lakota blessing before Bill started his journey.

He left this world without stress.

In fact, he was munching on a mouthful of ground oats at the time.

A rare and special treat.

About 25 family members and friends attended.

Sarah is planning to have the magnificent hide tanned.

Bison coats are prime in November.

It will make a great rug.

The skull and organs are on the hill by the raptor perch. They will provide nutrition for hundreds of creatures through the winter. From mice to eagles.

On Saturday, someone asked me how long it would take Bob to realize he was Bill. I said, "I somewhere between 15 minutes and a day." Nature fills gaps quickly. It did not take that long.

The bison are in a 40 acre winter pasture. The grass is done so I drop big bales of hay over the fence every couple of days as needed.

This morning as I drove out with hay, Young Bill was standing at the gate. He was standing with an authoritative pose to tell me his herd needed food.

He is taking his new job seriously.

The former "Bob of Blue Mounds" will be a fine Bill.

Tom