



August 2020

The Bison Rancher

Official Newsletter of the Rocky Mountain Bison Association

Join us as we co-host the 2021 NBA Summer Conference

We are so excited to be able to co-host the 2021 NBA Summer Conference in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Mark your calendars for this great event featuring both learning & ranch tours.

The dates are tentatively planned for June 27 - 30, 2021.

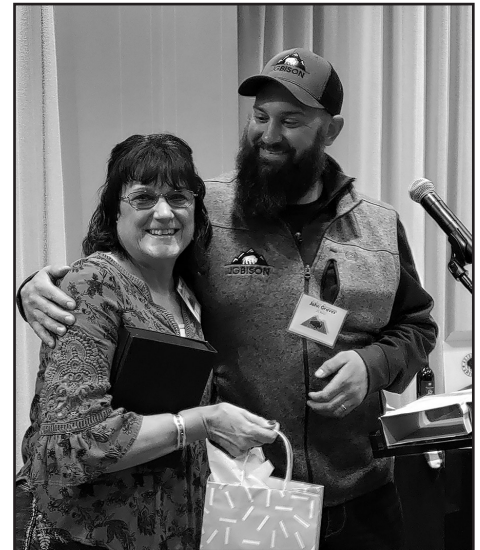
We hope to see you there!

Board thanks outgoing, welcomes new board members

Elections are held every year at the RMBA Spring Conference. Officer positions (i.e. President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer) and two of the four director positions are up for election each year.

This year we had two board members leave as their terms ended: Debbie Thieman, our Vice President and Tom Stelmach, a Director. Debbie and Tom were recognized for their years of service to RMBA at the Spring Conference banquet.

Filling the vacancy of Vice President is Kyle Stodola. Kyle has served on the board as a Director and volunteered to take a leadership role. This move left two vacant Director positions, which were filled by Tiffany Castle and Rick Forepaugh through a vote of the membership.



John Graves presents Debbie Thieman with a thank you gift on behalf of the board during the conference banquet.

John Graves, Jen Graves and Patty Smith retained their seats as President, Secretary and Treasurer, respectively.

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RMBA's strong 2020 progress

By Jen Graves, RMBA Secretary

What a year. The RMBA board has kept the members at the forefront of all decisions made so far in 2020 and will continue to do so. Everyone has been impacted in one way or another and RMBA is not immune. While we were unable to host an in-person summer conference with the National Bison Association (NBA) this year, we are tentatively rescheduled for next summer. It's one step at a time to get us from now to next summer and the board will keep the membership

in mind while planning that walk. You can expect email updates from RMBA President John Graves as more information becomes available. Until then, know that we have still accomplished a lot in 2020.

Spring Conference Recap

RMBA was fortunate to gather on March 7, 2020 for our Spring Conference before stay-at-home orders were implemented and gatherings were cancelled. This year's conference was condensed into one day to reduce the cost of

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BISON
ASSOCIATION

Board of Directors

PRESIDENT

John Graves

JG Bison
303-887-9677

VICE PRESIDENT

Kyle Stodola

Sunrise Bison Ranch
720-364-0835

TREASURER

Patty Smith

Lay Valley Bison Ranch
303-906-2638

SECRETARY

Jen Graves

JG Bison
720-891-9360

DIRECTOR

Ace Ward

Brush Meat Processors
970-488-0003

DIRECTOR

Nicole Jeffries

Nilisber Bison Ranch
303-995-2783

DIRECTOR

Tiffany Castle

Castle Bison Co.
720-641-0639

DIRECTOR

Rick Forepaugh

Rocky Hollow Buffalo Company
308-235-3214

Elections are held annually at the Spring General Membership Meeting. Meeting minutes & financials are available from the Board Secretary.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Always looking forward

By John Graves, RMBA President

So many things have changed in the last few months for our world, nation, industry, as well as for Jen and me personally. I am writing this from Wyoming - a new state for Jen and I to reside in. Who knows what will be different by the time this newsletter is printed, delivered to you and you have had time to read it? Unfortunately, that's where we are right now - dealing with uncertainty.

Unfortunately, it has been a long time since we have been in contact and we still don't know when that will change. The beginning of March seems like so long ago. Not long before our spring conference, COVID-19 was slowly overtaking the news. We still had a wonderful conference in Westminster, and we were encouraged by the promise and potential for a rebound in pricing of bison after a few years of slight decline.

Just two weeks after our conference, just about everything came to a sudden stop. While many businesses closed, essential places had to adapt to functioning in our new "normal," full of restrictions and new requirements. For ranchers, many saw little to no change in our daily routines, as animals must be cared for and chores must get done. American ranchers, farmers, truckers and processors are all part of the essential workforce.

RMBA members make up every size and aspect of the bison industry. We have small, medium, and large-scale bison producers, marketers and processors. We have bison hobbyists, enthusiasts, educators, and scientists. We also live in different states and that fact alone has had a huge difference on how our governmental officials and



public health offices have reacted to the pandemic and ultimately impacted our lives. The pandemic has affected everyone differently.

I did not know what to say in this "Presidents' Message" so I chatted with our new Vice-President Kyle Stodola a little bit in May and he mentioned how fortunate his family and business has been during this time. Like several of our members, their direct sales have increased significantly and helped their business. Many attribute this increase in direct sales to consumers leery of going out to the grocery stores, but still needing food for their families. Many families are stock piling food because of uncertainty and fear. Others have realized the need to know exactly where their food comes from and how it is raised. I have heard of and seen many RMBA members who have shifted their business model to do more direct sales because of increased demand for their product or because of loss of business through other channels. Kyle told me that "things are tough, but business is doing well, and customer demand is high."

Like many of us who are unsure of what the future holds, I too am

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE CONTINUED

unsure what these shifts and changes in our industry will result in. Many bison producers are unable to do direct sales for a multitude of reasons. Many producers are unable to fulfill the demand they are seeing for their direct sales products for many reasons as well. But I can say for certain there is one thing I know will happen: those in the bison industry are able to quickly change and adapt to anything, just like the animal we have been entrusted to raise.

Watching agriculture news, emails, and social media channels, it seemed like bison ranchers quickly adapted to direct sales or

new ways to get products to consumers without much delay or hardship. Other protein industries, in general, seemed to stick to their traditional distribution methods and when backed against a wall, their change was slow and sacrificial. As a younger, more agile industry, bison ranchers kept moving forward and many were able to try new methods and adjust to stay afloat.

Our future will be different once this pandemic is over. However, our spirit and passion will never leave us and never change. Kyle and I both agree we are very optimistic for the future for our industry and our members!

Welcome New Members in 2020

Shawn & Carrie Bennett
Joe Bradfield
Peggy Desseyn
Eddie Gaw
Michael Guenther
Angela Johnson
Chad Kremer
Kayleen Kriner & Justin Lane
Tanna Lyon
Monica & Landon Meier
Chris & Shanon Stults
Michael Wailes

The wrong kind of phishing

By Jen Graves, RMBA Secretary

Unfortunately, the National Bison Association (NBA) as well as state and regional associations, including RMBA, are constant targets for cyber criminals. Perhaps this is because we are small, non-profit associations and therefore easier targets. While our websites are locked down and secure, there is one side effect that we cannot stop: fraudulent emails.

By now, all RMBA members have received a fake email from John asking for money or gift cards. Please know that this is not how RMBA conducts business. Since we cannot stop these scammers, I wanted to provide you with my 5 tips for spotting a fake email.

Always check the "from" email address. Anyone can change the display name, but does the email address make any sense?

- jennifer.nmn.gray@gmail.com <-- **legit**
- h36456nkl@gmail.com <-- **shady lady**

How to check? Usually you can

check by hovering your mouse/pointer over the sender's name or clicking on it.

Pro tip: For RMBA members, you can check a fellow member's email address on bisonranchers.com. (I'll save you time - John's email address is john.graves@colorado.edu).

Trust your gut. If it doesn't sound like the person, it probably isn't them. Consider how RMBA president John Graves begins his emails.

- "Howdy folks !!!! John Here! Wanted to say hi..." <-- **Not John**
- "Dear Sir/Madam" <-- **nope, not John either**
- "Hi RMBA" <-- **yep - that's probably John**

Consider the urgency. What's the rush? Spammers need you to act fast & not think, so they will say "I need help fast." Like many of you, John reserves panic for when bison are not behaving. If RMBA needs something quickly, John will say "timely request" or put a deadline on it. Anything else

would warrant a phone call.

Be skeptical. Ask yourself why RMBA (or any organization) would need this information. Real groups state the reason they are asking for information, donations, etc. If they don't say why, don't hesitate to call and ask!

RMBA will not email members asking for wire transfers or gift cards, etc.

RMBA does not need and therefore will never ask for your social security number or banking account information.

We respect you. If nothing else, please consider this: RMBA respects its members and John respects you.

If RMBA was raising money or asking for favors, you better believe that we would write a better email than "Hey you - can I please get some money?"

In short: Thank you for considering sending "John" money for whatever crazy request he had, but you can ignore it.





Chad Kremer presents to attendees on low stress handling.

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attendees, with the hope that attendees could also make time for the NBA Summer Conference, which was scheduled to be co-hosted by RMBA and held in Cheyenne, Wyoming. While the Summer Conference has since been delayed to 2021, our Spring 2020 conference still packed a lot of learning and progress into one Saturday.

President John Graves provided an update on current RMBA projects, including:

- **Junior Judging at the Gold Trophy Show and Sale:** RMBA has volunteered to take a more active role, helping to run Junior Judging. This last January 2020, approximately 50 kids participated, which is great. However, these kids do not understand the bison terminology when judging these animals. As an industry,

we don't have a guideline/resources like others do. RMBA will be working on creating that resource.

- **"Hot topics" that impact our members:** A few political movements impacting bison ranchers, including artificial meat labeling, bison versus water buffalo labeling and wolf reintroduction, were prevalent at the time. While the pandemic has since overshadowed these conversations, John introduce them to the membership and promised that the RMBA Board would discuss each in detail and provide RMBA's stance to the membership (read more in our other recap).
- **Upcoming changes to the Gold Trophy Show and Sale:** With the rebuilding of the National Western Stock Show grounds, RMBA and the National Bison Association (NBA) needed to move a

trailer that has long served as storage for the necessary grounds equipment. This trailer was no longer street legal, but it still served a purpose. The NBA and RMBA agreed to purchase a new

trailer and in return, we will continue to have the storage we need as well a RMBA logo on the trailer for promotional purposes.

Strong agenda of amazing speakers

Conference participants were then treated to a full day of presentations, including:

- Tips on small business from the Denver Small Business Development Center,
- Information from the National Bison Association and National Buffalo Museum,
- An education on how to select bison from Moritz Espy,
- The rundown on low stress handling by Chad Kremer,
- Tips on marketing your product in an #AlternativeFacts world, and
- A wealth of knowledge from a panel of speakers sharing how they diversified their business.

An open forum discussion followed and naturally led into a social hour before a delicious



Following a full day of learning, attendees enjoyed a delicious bison dinner, Bison Bingo and the Fun Auction, which always brings out the best characters. Pictured: Ray Thieman, Larry Higgins, Mary Adams, Mary Lou & Jim Matheson.

bison dinner and the benefit auction.

RMBA relies on the generous support of RMBA members and conference attendees to bring items for our annual benefit auction. This year was another success, with beautiful pieces of artwork, artistic flower arrangements, and so much more – auctioned off by the very talented Jud Seaman. Thank you to everyone who brought or bought an item!

Thank you to those who made it possible

Our spring conference is made possible by our very generous sponsors. We are grateful for the support provided by Adams Natural Meats for providing bison meat for our delicious dinner, Lay Valley Bison for the bison meat for lunch, Patty Smith for monetary donation and Jud Seaman for his auctioneer services, which never disappoints! We would also like to thank Land & Bison and Bison Union for donating a basket of goods for our raffle.



Ray Thieman "buffaloed" attendees to buy Bison Bingo cards.

RMBA's financial position in 2020

By Jen Graves, RMBA Secretary

Our association remains financially strong in 2020. Each year, we count on our Spring Conference to raise money for the coming year. We are fortunate to have held our conference before communities were closed and gatherings cancelled. Here is a summary of expenses and income from our Spring Conference:

Expenses: Hotel space rental, catering, accommodating presenters: \$10,564.42

Income:

- Member registration fees: \$7,090
- Fun Auction, Bison Bingo & Raffle fundraisers: \$10,542

Net income from our Spring Conference: \$7,067.58

It is through the generous support of our RMBA members and conference attendees that we make money at this event. The board keeps registration fees low to enable as many people to attend as possible.

Income from the Spring Conference enables RMBA to do

some pretty cool things, including:

- Provide a \$1,200 scholarship for the second place finisher in the Junior Judging competition at the Gold Trophy Show & Sale.
- Replacing our storage trailer that holds supplies for the Gold Trophy Show & Sale (a shared expense with the NBA, but one that will include prominent logo placement on the trailer for advertising).
- Operate RMBA, paying the bills for our website, newsletters, brochures, educational banners and sending welcome letters & stickers to our new members.
- Replenish our funding reserves used last year for our website redesign and reprinting of our educational materials following our name change.

Money well-spent

Last year we used some of our reserve funds to overhaul our website. This was a necessary move to keep our website and

member information secure, as well as put our best foot forward with the public. From these improvements, along with the latest impacts from the pandemic, we have seen a huge jump in website visits.

From Jan. 1 - June 30 in 2020:

- 22,026 new visitors
- 15,224 visitors came from social media
- 52,975 page views (as of mid-July)

We feel like the expense to update our website last year and the expenses related to now maintaining the website is certainly worth it to allow the public to connect with our members more easily. We will now turn our attention to fine-tuning the site, adding content and marketing the site on social media.

A big "Thank You" is due to our Treasurer, Patty Smith, for her continual work on maintaining our detailed financial records.

WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBER

Tiffany Castle

A note from Tiffany Castle

Hello! I am Tiffany Castle and my husband Michael and I are newer, but enthusiastic members of RMBA and I am very excited to join the board.

Michael and I joined RMBA in 2018. We were new to bison, livestock and the agriculture industry altogether. We were both city kids with a dream to get out of that chaos and live in the country to raise a family at a different pace of life. Raising bison as quality meat to feed ourselves, our family, our friends, and our community, was our way to make that dream happen.

I have always loved being part of organizations that are united behind a shared cause and seeing just what that group of people can accomplish.

For instance, I began playing bagpipes when I was nine years old and became involved in the Irish community. In 2012, I was fortunate enough to have been selected to represent the Denver Irish community in an international role model competition in Ireland. I was a finalist and learned so much during that experience. Following the competition, I



remained a member of many organizations in the local Irish community and served on several of their boards.

It was during my trip to Ireland in 2012 that I picked up a camera and discovered my passion for photography. That passion grew and I started my own photography business in 2016. I focus on family and wedding photography and will soon be offering branding photography for businesses to use for their social media, websites, marketing, etc. The RMBA website includes some of my work. As of now, photography is a job I focus on during evenings and weekends. My 8 a.m. to 5

p.m. job is working for Industrial Battery Service as their Sales and Service Coordinator.

I met my Michael in 2011 when he joined my pipe band. We moved to my hometown of Firestone, CO, where we bought our first home in 2013 and got married in 2016. We have been so fortunate to have good jobs, a beautiful home and to be surrounded by great friends and family, but we soon felt called to do something "more" with our lives.

One day we will move to the middle of nowhere and raise bison.



After a long week in the city, we were stuck sitting in traffic on I-70 headed to the mountains for the weekend. Frustrated, Michael looked over and saw the Genesee bison herd. Michael joked "Let's just move to the mountains and raise bison". After that - the idea stuck in my head. I spent the next two weeks researching bison. I went to Michael and said "We can raise bison!" and I proceeded to tell him everything I could about bison. This quickly became our

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WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBER

Rick Forepaugh

A note from Rick Forepaugh

Thank you for electing me to the board of RMBA. It is an honor to serve an organization that has done so much for bison and is comprised of so many great members.

As an RMBA board member, I will lead and lend my support in advancing the organization, while adhering to the mission and purpose of the RMBA.

I have always believed in giving back, including the currently trendy phrase, "paying it forward." Being chosen to serve on the RMBA board allows me to help the people, animals, our association, our industry, our way of life and to serve the greater good of the buffalo nation.

I was born in Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and grew up on military bases across the country. After graduating from high school in Colorado Springs, Colorado, I attended college at Western Colorado University (formerly Western State College) in Gunnison, Colorado, where I earned a Bachelor of Arts in political science.



Before my wife and I found our calling in bison, I had careers in operations and marketing in the media and transportation sectors. My wife, Lindsay, spent nearly a decade working for an oil and gas company as the Supply Chain Manager for North America. Today, Lindsay works as the Chief Financial Officer for our local electric cooperative.

It was in 2014 when we joined the bison community. We were blessed with an opportunity from my parents, Jill Crotty and Vance Forepaugh, to move to the Monkey

Ranch in Kimball, Nebraska, and learn how to be buffaleros.

Lindsay and I started Rocky Hollow Buffalo Company in 2015 as a direct meat sales company. As the years passed, we slowly acquired a few animals and honed our ranching skills. Last year we purchased the Monkey Ranch and our herd from my parents. Many of you know my parents and their award-winning Medicine Wheel herd.

The primary source of revenue comes from annual calf sales with secondary revenue streams generated through "Ranch to Table" direct meat sales, meat sales to local restaurants, agritourism, absentee bison ownership, and select animals sold as premium breeding stock.

I manage our business, ranch, and the bison herd holistically.

Naturally, holistic management is an ongoing pursuit that takes time to see results. It was during our third year on the ranch when we began to see positive results on the property. There were areas of pastures that were once thick with cheatgrass that was returning to native prairie grass. Also, wildlife that we had not seen

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WE KNOW A THING OR TWO, BECAUSE WE'VE SEEN A THING OR TWO

My take on trailering bison

Nic Campbell, Land & Bison Company

Whether you're hauling bison long distances or just a short pasture move with stock trailers, there are a few tips that will make the process easier for you and less stressful for your animals.

Bison are fairly easy to load and to haul with the proper equipment and a little patience.

I have loaded out using all types of systems. I've used anywhere from something that you wouldn't try to load your sweetest bottle raised Holstein out of, all the way to the top of the line load outs specially designed for bison. What it comes down to is working with what you have and what's best suited for your animals while being as safe as possible for you and them.

We have a heavy duty aluminum stock combo trailer that has held up really nice with all the bison we have stuck in it. I personally am not scared of having an aluminum trailer as opposed to steel. One thing I will suggest when it comes to trailers: make sure you have a really good slam latch on the back door so you can swing it hard and fast if needed and have time to safely get it latched.

Load reassurance

Once we are loaded and everyone is content, we will hit the dusty trail. But I always like to stop after the first few miles of taking off just to do a double check that an animal isn't down. I feel like if they are loaded correctly, you usually do not even notice they are back there. Once you get to moving they settle in and it's like hauling a load of bricks, unlike beef animals that are constantly moving around.



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When driving with a load of animals on, whether it's fifty in a cattle pot or one in a horse trailer, just think about it like hauling a bucket of water in the bed of your pickup - if you accelerate too fast you will spill some, turn to fast, you're going to spill, hit the brakes too hard... same scenario.

Plan your load

If the animals are sized up correctly, you typically won't have a problem. Try and sort your animals prior to loading (if you are able), but never put young calves in with older bulls. It seems like weaned calves to a couple years old haul the best and don't typically need to be tight, but older cows loaded fairly tight will prevent them from having room to fight.

If possible when hauling older bulls, try to separate compartments. Obviously there are times, especially if hauling a load of culls, that that's not possible. Again, the best thing you can do with them if you must pen them together is to load them tight so they do not have room to hook one another or get one down.

Hauling pairs - or not

I have hauled pairs before and my best advice is that if you can get by without having to haul them at that stage then don't. We sorted the calves off from the cows and hauled them in separate compartments to keep anything from getting trampled in the confusion and chaos of being confined in a trailer. Then once we got to the destination, unloaded the cows and calves into a large corral and gave them a couple days to pair up again. It worked out fine but was super stressful for them (and me)!

Unloading with ease

When unloading at your

destination, try and plan for it to be daylight so the animals can see where they are going. I have unloaded in the dark several times and it's super tempting to turn those bright interior lights on inside the trailer so you can see what's going on, but I can tell you they will unload way easier if it's dark in the trailer and they are stepping out into some light.

When you do open the door to let them out, refrain from trying to force them out. Typically if you give them a little time to build up some courage - they will come running out on their own.

Using a flag to get them going may be necessary, but if they are fighting you right off the bat, all you are going to do is irritate them. Once they get to the point of being mad, then they definitely are not coming off until they are ready.

Anyone that has hauled several loads of bison before has had to sit and wait on them to finally decide to unload themselves, because as we all know when it comes down to it, no matter how good of stockmen (or women) we think we are, a bison is going to only do what it wants to do if its

mind is set to something.

Padlock for the unexpected

When traveling some distance (anywhere off of the ranch) I always padlock the doors on the trailer. It's not that I am worried about the animals opening the doors themselves. It's the untrustworthy people when we stop for fuel, etc. that might do something dumb. It might make me sound paranoid, but the last thing anyone wants is to have a trailer load of bison running down Main Street. It's a small solution to what could be a big problem.

I am far from an expert and have only learned from doing things wrong more times than right and I am sure there are some things a lot of you all could teach me, but hopefully this helps someone out. I am a way better talker than I am a writer!

If you have questions feel free to reach out to me and if you're ever around Northeast Wyoming, swing in and say hi.

I hope everyone is staying healthy and enjoying their summer!



Welcome New Board Members *continued*

Tiffany Castle continued

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"one day" dream.

We decided to attend our first RMBA conference in the spring of 2018. We sat in the parking lot before going in and said "Well, this is going to go one of two ways: when we leave here we will have been laughed out of the room and told we are crazy by real bison ranchers OR we will know we're on the right track and

will have to make a decision to change our lives now."

**What we were told was:
"Yes - you are crazy. But no - this isn't impossible. You can do it, and we will help you."**

In 2017 we bought some ground in Carr, CO and have been pressing forward with the dream ever since.

I look forward to bringing my

experience from serving other organizations, operating and working for businesses not related to the bison industry, and my enthusiasm to learn from our members on how to best serve them and this community.

RMBA and the rest of the bison community has been so instrumental in helping Michael and I chase our dream and I cannot wait to give back.

Rick Forepaugh continued

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before began arriving on the property, like turkeys, deer, elk, and antelope.

Lindsay and I have been married for ten years. After meeting in Oregon, we moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, and then Midland and Ft Worth, Texas, before moving to the Monkey Ranch in Nebraska.

We share our home with a menagerie of pets. In addition to the bison, the list of critters on the ranch includes a rescued lab, an adopted lab, three adopted cats, two barn cats, five mallard ducks, and one chicken.

Community is incredibly important to both Lindsay and me, and we take pride in our service to our rural community by

serving on local boards and volunteering with service groups.

When we are not busy on the ranch or in the community you might find us SCUBA diving somewhere in the Caribbean.

Again, thank you for the honor to serve you, the organization, and the buffalo nation.



We love our members!

RMBA is so proud to support our membership and we hope to see it continue to grow. As of mid-July, we have 94 total paid memberships, representing over 125 individuals.

- 31 dual memberships (62 members)
- 59 individual members
- 4 lifetime members
- 1 junior member

Your history. Your future.
Your foundation



We support research that makes herds healthier, we promote the industry and we are the trusted source of funding for bison-related programs.

Donations are always welcome, but it is your ideas that are vital to keep the industry moving forward toward Bison One Million.

Find out how you can help support the bison industry. Visit us online or contact a NBF board member today.



NationalBuffaloFoundation.org

Preserve their history. Foster their future.



Thank you Debbie & Tom for your years of service to RMBA

Debbie Thieman and Tom Stelmach retired from RMBA's Board of Directors following our elections at the Spring Conference. Debbie served on the board from 2004-2019 and Tom served from 2014-2019. We cannot thank them enough for what they have done for all of us!



RMBA speaking up on labeling, artificial meat & wolves

Prior to the pandemic, the RMBA board discussed three large topics for our industry: Truth in Buffalo Labeling (i.e. what can be labeled as buffalo meat), artificial meat labeling, and efforts to reintroduce wolves to our territory. These issues were brought to the attention of the board by concerned RMBA members. After much research and discussion, the RMBA board issued three resolutions, taking a public stand on each issue.

- RMBA supports the federal Truth in Buffalo Labeling Act to ensure meat products containing ingredients from the genus *Bubalus* would be labeled as water buffalo, while products containing ingredients from the genus *Bison* can be labeled as bison, North American Buffalo or buffalo.
- RMBA supports truthful labeling on artificial meat, specifically supporting regulation where food products not derived from animals are labeled with the term "imitation" or "artificial," prominently displayed on the product label preceding the product name.
- RMBA opposes any efforts to introduce or expand the population of wolves in Colorado. RMBA supports the recommendations of the Colorado Wolf Working Group and Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission, including their resolution concerning wolf introduction in Colorado.

The full text of RMBA's resolutions were emailed to all members, the National Bison Association, and the respective legislators and organizations working on the issues. By adding RMBA's name to the fold, we are bolstering the voice of those advocating for these issues.



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First Class



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