The Forum OF FARGO-MOORHEAD

CRAZY FINISH

CONCORDIA LOSES ON LAST-MINUTE PLAY, SPORTS, D3

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John M. Steiner / Forum News Service
The Jamestown Fire Department driveway is cleared by a snowblower Friday, Oct. 11.

'It's not easy, but farming never is'

Early snowstorm presents challenges for ND farmers

By Travis Svihovec and Blake Nicholson
Bismarck Tribune

BISMARCK — The early October snowstorm that buried much of the eastern two-thirds of North Dakota created an immediate crisis for farmers and ranchers and promised to present problems that will linger into next year's growing season.

The storm that moved in late Wednesday, Oct. 9, continued to drop snow in some areas on Saturday. Harvey had a storm total of 30 inches, and Bismarck a little more than 16, according to the National Weather Service. No travel was advised in central and northeast North Dakota, and Interstate 94 was closed for a day between Bismarck and Fargo. An estimated 300 people in the state were without power, mostly in the northeast, according to PowerOutage.us.

Snowdrifts in the Jamestown area rose as high as 5 feet, said Ryan Wanzek, who farms land south and west of the city. In his fields, corn and soybean crops sit unharvested after near-historic rainfall late this summer.

It's a situation farmers across the state are facing, and without a crop to sell, Wanzek is worried many of them will run into cash-flow problems.

"If you didn't get anything off and can't combine until January, how do you pay your bills?" he said.

There also is concern in ranching country, even with the storm being forecast well in advance.

SNOWSTORM: Page A8

Photo courtesy of Mandy Wentz
Soybean field north east of Aneta, N.D.

Photos by Patrick Springer / The Forum
Two buffalo bulls, part of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's herd of around 250, roam in a pasture west of Fort Yates, N.D. The tribe's herd started in 1968 when it received six buffalo from Theodore Roosevelt National Park. Ultimately, the tribe would like to expand the buffalo herd to 1,000.

LASTING SHOCK

Study asserts effects of buffalo slaughter evident in Standing Rock Sioux Tribe today

By Patrick Springer
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FORT YATES, N.D.

A Standing Rock Sioux winter count remembers 1882 as the year White Beard went on a buffalo hunt with the Native Americans.

White Beard was the name the Lakotas and Yanktonai of the Standing Rock Indian Reservation gave to James McLaughlin, the agent who joined the Sioux in one of the last large buffalo hunts in North Dakota.

"This was a happy, though brief, interlude for the people who were now forced to eat government rations most of the time," a history written by the tribe in 1995 observed. By 1883, the northern herd, which once numbered in the millions, had been eliminated.

In fact, the sudden loss of the buffalo for tribes associated with Sitting Bull was a disaster that delivered an economic and cultural shock that persists today, more than a century later, according to a study by a team of economists.

The lingering adverse effects of the loss of the buffalo are dramatic, according to the report, "The Slaughter of the Bison and Reversal of Fortunes on the Great Plains" by economists working for the Center for Indian Country Development at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.

The reversal of fortunes: "Historically, bison-reliant societies were among the richest in the world and now they are among the

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The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe maintains a buffalo herd, which it uses to provide buffalo as food for tribal members and as part of ceremonies. The buffalo were a staple for the Sioux, who suffered enduring economic and cultural setbacks from the near extinction of the buffalo in the 1880s.

This is the second of a three-part series examining the economic and cultural significance of the buffalo to certain tribes, with a focus on the Standing Rock Sioux.

INSIDE TODAY'S FORUM

LIFE: ND native goes from Valley City bike rides to helping Miles Davis in Switzerland.
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Whistleblowers warned of unwieldy child protection caseloads early on

Letter to Cass County leaders came a year before investigation

By April Baumgarten
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FARGO — Systemic problems troubling Cass County's child protection unit came to light this month after a caseworker's resignation spurred a county investigation into allegations of a hostile work environment, as well as concerns about heavy caseloads.

However, it turns out county leaders were warned a year before the investigation began that increased caseloads had become unmanageable, according to a whistleblower letter The Forum obtained through a public records request.

The warning came from seven caseworkers who signed the June 1, 2018, letter, which said

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$2.50 (Suggested retail price)
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Today's weather

Cloudy, flurries — 38° / 26° — Details, D6

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Classifieds .... G
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BUFFALO

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poorest," the researchers wrote.

The economic and social shocks were the greatest for tribes, like the Standing Rock Sioux, that relied heavily on the buffalo for their sustenance and lost them rapidly due to a massive slaughter by hide hunters in the 1870s and 1880s.

Today, tribes that once relied on the buffalo have between 20% and 40% less income per capita than the average American Indian nation, the study found.

At Standing Rock, which straddles the North Dakota-South Dakota border south of Bismarck, per capita income is $14,633, compared to $29,829 for the United States and $33,107 for North Dakota, according to figures compiled by the tribe.

More than 40% of Standing Rock residents live below the poverty level, more than three times the U.S. rate.

The abrupt loss of the buffalo also is evident in decreased relative height — a marker of health and nutrition — and higher death rates, according to the research team led by economist Donna Feir.

Once the tallest in the world, the generations of buffalo-reliant tribes born after the slaughter were among the shortest, experiencing a decline of height ranging from 1.96 inches to 3.54 inches.

"This decline more than eliminates the initial height advantage of bison-reliant people," and provides the first empirical evidence, suggested by earlier researchers, that Great Plains tribes gained the height advantage from their access to once-plentiful buffalo, the researchers wrote.

Also, mortality rates were higher for tribes that depended on the buffalo and lost them rapidly compared to tribes that experienced a gradual loss, allowing more time to adapt. Tribes that suffered an abrupt collapse of buffalo herds lost about 25 to 35 more people, a result the researchers termed "non-trivial."

Similarly, mothers from tribes that abruptly lost the buffalo had about 5% fewer surviving children as of 1900 and 1919.

"We see this as direct evidence of higher mortality in bison societies after the slaughter of the bison," the researchers wrote.

Suicide rates are higher among tribes that once relied heavily on buffalo — so high, according to the study, that they explain the difference in mortality rates between buffalo-reliant tribes that lost the buffalo rapidly compared to those that experienced a gradual loss.

Chris Flynn / The Forum
Petra Harmon One Hawk is manager of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's elderly nutrition program.

The findings of the study likely won't surprise Great Plains tribes, such as the Standing Rock Sioux, which relied heavily on the buffalo and have since confronted entrenched poverty, high rates of substance abuse and other problems, Feir said.

"We wrote this paper to tell a story that many native communities already knew implicitly," she said. "We felt that it was a very important story to tell."

The research team, which also included economists Rob Gillezeau and Maggie Jones, wrote the paper to show that the enduring effects of the rapid slaughter of the buffalo herds can be quantified and are evident today.

"This a quantifiable narrative that holds up on empirical analysis," Feir said. The paper, released in November, has not yet been published in a journal, but has been reviewed by other economists and has been well received.

"To be honest I didn't know what we would find," she said. "I was surprised by how strong things came out in the data. I hope that it raises the profile of native economics."

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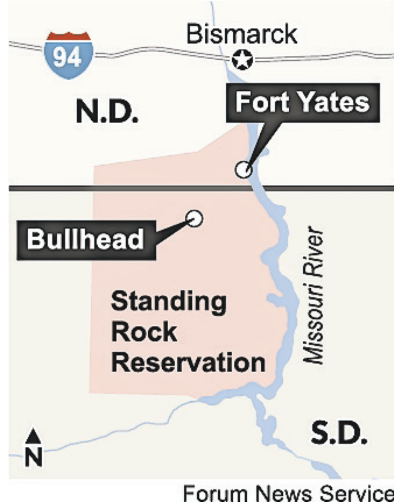
Petra Harmon One Hawk sometimes astonishes herself when she reflects on the fact that she is only four generations removed from the days her ancestors lived the life of the chase, wandering with the buffalo herds.

Memories of those days, when the Lakota and Yanktonai bands now living at Standing Rock reigned over a vast territory of hunting lands, remain vivid. So are memories of the hardships of the transition to reservation life and the dependency that resulted.

"It's something that's still very much alive," One Hawk said. "In Lakota, there's no past tense. So when you talk about ancestors or people who have passed away, you talk about them in the present tense."



Forum News Service

Her mother, Phyllis Young, remembers growing up along the Missouri River before Oahe Dam created a huge reservoir that forced them to move to higher ground. Before the move, her family lived off the land, cultivating a large garden, raising chickens and picking berries, plums and grapes. Her grandfather had a wagon and a team of horses.

The family was self-sufficient and ate a healthy diet, Young said, adding, "I lived in paradise for 10 years."

Now, as the manager of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's elderly nutrition program, One Hawk confronts a much different world.

Residents on the reservation have high rates of diabetes and other chronic diseases resulting from obesity, which paradoxically results from the unhealthy diet so many poor tribal members must eat.

"We're the Death Valley of food deserts," One Hawk said. She's working to encourage families to grow gardens so they have access to fresh vegetables.

The Head Start program at Standing Rock reports that some children eat a diet of uncooked ramen noodles and hot dogs at home, a diet "sorely lacking in any nutritional value," she said.

The nutrition program serves 430 meals per day to elders, at dining sites in Fort Yates and Cannonball and through home delivery.

A few times a year, One Hawk's program can serve buffalo, donated from the tribe's herd. Ironically, buffalo meat now is an acquired taste at Standing Rock.

Patrick Springer / The Forum
Above: Buffalo grazing at a ranch on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, which straddles the North Dakota-South Dakota border. Buffalo in herds owned communally by the tribe or in district herds, as well as raised by native ranchers, are making a comeback on the reservation.

Special to The Forum
Below: Dr. Donald Warne directs the Indians Into Medicine program at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences.

"Bison meat is really lean, which is actually a challenge," she said. "A lot of our people have become accustomed to eating beef, which is high in saturated fat."

But, she added, "It gives us access to healthy food."

At the supermarket, buffalo meat sells for $8 to $10 per pound, too expensive for the grocery budgets of most families, she said.

Often, buffalo is served on special occasions or in meals accompanying ceremonies. Because it is such a healthy source of protein, and such an important part of the traditions of the Sioux, Young yearns for the day buffalo could be served routinely. Prepared properly, cooked slowly to make it tender and seasoned, buffalo meat is a delicacy, she said.

"I'm tired of the ritual and the novelty and the feast and the feeds," Young said. "I want some buffalo stew and just eat it for Sunday."

Providing access to healthy foods, including revitalizing traditional food sources, is one of the tribe's strategic priorities.

"It's really about community," One Hawk said. "The way I look at it is using our traditional foods as medicine, to heal our community. We're really not going to improve our socioeconomic condition as Indians until we eat healthy, have access to healthy foods."

In time, she hopes, buffalo will cease to be an exotic food. "It's part of our recovery," she said.

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Donald Warne travels to Standing Rock every winter, where he visits the Brownotter Buffalo Ranch to hunt a buffalo.

The buffalo he harvests supplies his family in Grand Forks, N.D., with a healthy source of meat for months, enabling his family to eat buffalo regularly as part of their meals. Berries from the supermarket also are a staple.

"So it's wonderful for my family," he said.

A medical doctor, Warne directs the Indians Into Medicine program at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences. Warne, who also has a master of public health degree, is an enrolled member of the Oglala Lakota Tribe at Pine Ridge, S.D.

So when he read the "Slaughter of the Bison" study documenting the long-term adverse effects of the loss of buffalo, both economic and to the health status of tribes that relied upon them, it immediately resonated with him.

"The buffalo provided a tremendous food supply, a very healthy source of food," Warne said, adding that it is superior to beef. "The profile of bison is much better. In addition to that, we used every part," sinews for thread, skins for clothing and lodging, bones for tools.

"The purposeful slaughter of the buffalo was really devastating to the Northern Plains tribes," Warne said. "The Lakota and Dakota used to be known as the giants of the plains," a people who grew tall and healthy on a diet of buffalo, berries, corn, beans and squash.

Once the buffalo were gone and the Sioux were confined to reservations, they became dependent on government rations, resulting in a diet that was much less healthy, Warne said.

Fry bread, cooked in oil, is considered a staple today, but is not a traditional Native American food; it became popular because flour, lard, shortening and sugar were prominent parts of the commodity food program — which helped fuel the obesity epidemic on reservations, he said.

Encouragingly, many tribes today have communal buffalo herds. The InterTribal Buffalo Council, based in Rapid City, S.D., is comprised of 60 tribes from 19 states that collectively maintain buffalo herds totaling more than 20,000 animals.

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