

Staying Safe Near Wood Bison



It is rare for wood bison to attack people. Bison want to move away or avoid people, but if cornered could become aggressive.

Give them plenty of space and don't approach them. Be extra careful in May and June when bison cows are protecting their newborn calves and during the July and August breeding season when bulls are fighting for breeding dominance.

Canada has both wood bison and moose, but moose give trail users the most problems and are the more aggressive species. Bison use trails to travel, but will typically move off a trail when approached by people.

Signals that indicate a bison may charge:

- Stops what it's doing and looks at you or turns to face you;
- Swings its head back and forth while staring at you;
- Paws at the ground or hooks the ground with its horns;
- Makes short bluff charges at you or snorts loudly;
- Moves straight toward you.

Other things to remember

- Bison are quick and agile. Watch them closely and have an escape route planned.
- Bison don't like fast moving objects or vehicles near them.
- Don't let dogs chase bison.
- Use a telephoto lens when photographing bison to keep a safe distance away.
- If a bison charges get behind trees or vehicles.

Rule of Thumb



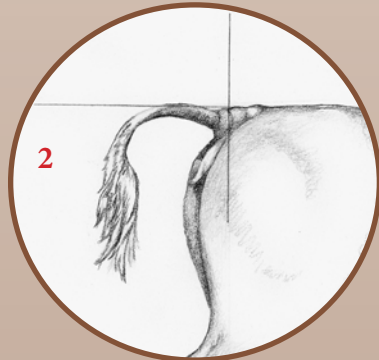
Hold your thumb in front of you at arms length. Cover the bison (which is standing sideways) with your thumb. If the bison is totally covered, you are about 100 yards away, a safe distance. If not, back off.

Watch the tail position for clues of behavior

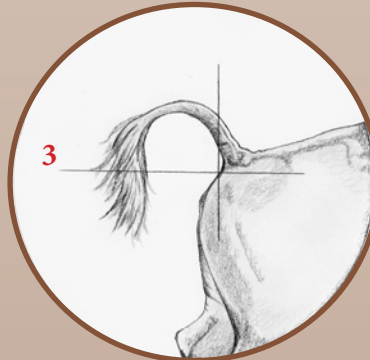
Note: A bison tail will raise when the animal defecates (similar to positions 3 and 4) but otherwise indicates the level of stress of the animal.



Bison at rest and not agitated.



Bison is interested or curious.



Bison is agitated. Used as a warning to other bison or people to move away.



Bison is highly stressed, signaling that something is about to happen. You are too close. Move away.

Bison tail artwork ©Wes Olson.

Bison photo ©Doug Lindstrand



If you see a bison near your village, contact your community bison guard. If your community has no bison guard contact ADF&G: tom.seaton@alaska.gov or call 907-459-7235 or 459-7206.

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