

February 5, 2025



Chairman Nelson and Members of the House Appropriations Human Resources Division,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 1012. I am here on behalf of Bison World, a cultural and bison-themed destination tourist attraction designed for development along I-94 at Exit 258 in Jamestown. The state-owned parcels of land where Bison World would be located are north of the interstate and designated as State Hospital land. I served the State of North Dakota as the Superintendent of the North Dakota State Hospital from 1995 to 2015. During my tenure, no one approached the Hospital about leasing the land, which has been the case for several years. The property is currently not leased but is a good fit for the Bison World project.

### **About Bison World**

[Bison World](#) is envisioned as a premier tourist destination that celebrates North Dakota's cultural heritage, history of the bison, and capitalizes on a growing industry of niche tourism, offering true economic potential for North Dakota. The project aims to attract visitors from all around the nation, boost the state's tourism industry, and generate economic activity by leveraging underutilized state land.

### **The Need for a Long-Term Lease**

Under the current statute, lease renewals are limited to two-year terms. While this structure may have met past administrative needs, it creates significant barriers to attracting private investment for large-scale development into the future. Investors require stability and certainty before committing capital. Short-term leases introduce unnecessary risk, making it difficult to secure financing, plan long-term operations, or implement sustainable infrastructure.

A long-term lease would:

- **Encourage Private Investment** – Investors will only commit funds when they have sufficient time to recoup costs and generate returns.
- **Minimize Policy Risks** – A stable lease reduces the likelihood of policy changes disrupting any project, allowing for responsible planning and development.
- **Ensure Public-Private Balance** – The state retains ownership while benefiting from economic activity, infrastructure improvements, and increased public engagement with the site.

### **Proposed Legislative Amendment**

With the guidance of Jonathan Alm at the Department of Health and Human Services, we are proposing amendment language that grants the department the discretion to approve long-term leases, with a maximum term of 99 years. This flexibility would allow the state to evaluate projects on a case-by-case basis while ensuring long-term economic and community benefits:

**50-06-06.6. Department may lease real and personal property.**

~~The commissioner of the department or commissioner's designee may lease surplus farm and pastureland at the state hospital and the life skills and transition center. The commissioner or designee also may enter into further leases of real or personal property at the life skills and transition center or the state hospital upon a specific finding that the granting of each such leasehold interest will result in a net economic gain for the department, taking into account all identifiable costs. Any lease of space for the purpose of providing child care services must meet requirements as determined by the department. The commissioner of the department or commissioner's designee may prescribe the terms and conditions of any leases entered into pursuant to this section and may renew existing leases. Any~~The term of any lease entered into must be subject to renewal or cancelable each biennium~~may not exceed ninety-nine years.~~

## **Conclusion**

Over the past four years, we have worked diligently to finalize the design of Bison World, pursue state support, and attract private investment. This project will strengthen North Dakota's tourism industry, capture visitors from within and outside the state, stimulate economic activity on underutilized public land, and generate new revenue for the state.

Updating the statute to allow for a long-term lease is a practical solution that will unlock economic potential while ensuring the land remains a valuable asset for the state. We urge the committee's support for this amendment and thank you for your time and consideration.

Alex Schweitzer

Board Chairman, Bison World, Fund

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# North Dakota's **BISON WORLD**

TOURISM | REVENUE | ENTERTAINMENT | EDUCATION

Bison World is a planned "destination attraction" that will captivate and inspire visitors from all over the world. As the only theme park centered around America's national mammal, Bison World will deliver dynamic guest experiences featuring a Bison Discovery Center filled with interactive exhibits, a children's immersive play area, live entertainment, an aerial skyway and a safari ride offering guests "up close and personal" encounters with the majestic American Bison. Bison World offers visitors of all ages an exciting variety of entertaining and educational experiences at a world-class destination.

## Attendance and Financial Highlights

**325K VISITORS** = **1.5%** of ND visitor market share

First year projection of 1.5% of the North Dakota visitor market share consisting of 21.7 million visitors in 2021.

Adjacent Frontier Village draws an average of 240,000 visitors (without much promotion) to take picture with Bison monument annually.

**\$17M**  
FIRST YEAR  
REVENUES

**23%**  
FIRST YEAR  
EBITA %

To learn more,  
scan or click the  
QR code below.



## Location, Location, Location

### Best Interstate Exit Left for Tourism Development

The 140 acres of vacant, state-owned land at Exit 258 is the only undeveloped interstate exit left in the country that would have a destination tourism attraction within three blocks of the exit ramp.

## Building Upon 60 years of "Brand Equity"

**WELL-KNOWN AS THE** The Jamestown area "**BUFFALO CITY**" has over 60 years of "brand equity" which is waiting to be leveraged and monetized with a new, modern tourism attraction. It is already well-known as the "Buffalo City" with the National Buffalo Museum and the world's largest buffalo monument. **240,000 tourists from all 50 states and 20 foreign countries already visit this roadside attraction annually**, but virtually no revenue is captured for the state from these visitors.

## Tourism Gateway

**8.8M PEOPLE** TRAVEL PAST EXIT 258 EVERY YEAR, according to federal and state DOT data. Most of them are west-bound travelers – capturing them early at a destination attraction provides the state with an opportunity to promote other tourist attractions like Medora and the new TR Presidential Library... and everything in between. A separate attendance model shows that Bison World will capture over 3.6% of these travelers.

## No Competition

A formal market study found that there is **virtually no competition for a regional themed destination in the eastern part of our state.** Bison World also sits at a “tourism crossroads” where east/west I-94 and north/south U.S 281 intersect.

## Millions in Economic Impacts

An independent financial analysis of Bison World found that it passes the capital budgeting test, creates jobs and adds millions of dollars of value to the state of North Dakota.

## Highest and Best Use of Land

The state is losing millions of dollars every year – and has been for 65 years since President Eisenhower built the interstate highway system – because it has not turned this extremely productive location into an economic development opportunity that produces revenue. **Real estate advisors have determined that the “highest and best use” for this tract of land is tourism.**

### Can Bison World be profitable?



Yes. At 1.5% capture (325k visitors) means \$17 million in operating revenue and a 23% profit margin/EBITDA.

### Will Bison World Benefit the State of North Dakota?



Yes. At 1.5% capture, the result is 622 indirect jobs. GDP is \$45.3 million and \$4.6 million in state and local taxes.

### Will Bison World Create Jobs?



Yes. A 1.5% capture creates between 30-44 year-round full-time employees and at least 244 part-time jobs.

Additional attendance and financial information along with formal disclosure and disclaimer statements for any information cited above can be attained from The Bison World Fund, P.O. Box 293, Jamestown, ND 58402.



## BISON WORLD

### Designed, Planned and Analyzed by Leading National/International Experts

During the two-year planning process, The Bison World Fund Board of Directors brought in a number of national leaders in their respective fields. They include Apogee Attractions, considered by many to be the #1 theme park designer, developer and operator in the country; David Haukaas, a former senior executive at one of the world's largest sovereign wealth funds; and Eide Bailly, one of the nation's leading accounting and business advisory firms.

