Good evening, everyone. We're just going to give this a few more minutes for people to continue to join the meeting and we're going to begin momentarily, so stand by.

Begin in just a few minutes. Thank you.

Hi everyone. If you're just now joining us, we're just going to give it another minute for folks to continue to join us. So, we will begin in about 1 minute. Thank you for being here.

We're seeing fewer people joining. So, I think we've got critical mass here and we'll go ahead and get started.

So, good evening. Welcome to the public meeting for Theodore Roosevelt National Park's livestock plan.

My name is Renee Ohms. I'm an Environmental Protection specialist with the Midwest region of the National Park Service.

I'm going to introduce tonight's speakers. You will see each of them later on in tonight's meeting on camera.

Our speakers tonight will be Angie Richman, who is the Superintendent. of Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

Maureen McGee-Ballinger, who is the deputy Superintendent at Theodore Roosevelt.

Blake McCann, who is the director of resource management, and Christine Gabriel, Christine is the regional environmental coordinator for the Midwest region of the National Park Service.

You can go ahead to the next slide.

Tonight, we're going to have an informational presentation and that will be followed by a question and answer session.

So, please feel free to submit your questions in the chat box all throughout the presentation.

Please note that this presentation is being recorded.

We'll get that posted to the National Park Service PEPC website, and we will provide you with that link later in the meeting.

Keep in mind, if you're viewing on a mobile device, you may.
need to tap your screen for options to appear up at the top.

One of them in the upper right will have a button to submit questions.

Please note that if you join the meeting late Microsoft Teams live may start the presentation over from the beginning.

So, you may need to Fast forward using the bar at the bottom of your screen to catch up to the meeting in real time.

Next slide please.

We're going to take a short break after the presentation and then answer questions in the second portion of tonight's meeting.

The livestock plan is currently in the public scoping phase of the national Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA process.

So, in this phase, you're invited to submit comments on the preliminary alternatives proposed action and what the environmental assessment or EA should address an analyze.

Following the close of the scoping period, the National Park Service will update the alternatives based on public input.

And additional opportunity for public engagement and public comment will be provided for the EA in the spring or summer of 2023.

In order for comments to be considered in the NEPA process, they must be submitted to PEPC or by postal correspondence, not in the chat box in this meeting.

Next slide please.

When you submit your questions tonight, our team will be able to see them and we'll answer as many of them as we possibly can.

We've also shared frequently asked questions on the Park’s website. and we intend to get those updated as needed.

We do expect to receive several questions tonight and we're already seeing quite a few come in. So, if we're unable to get to your question tonight, then be sure to check the FAQ to see if it's been answered there.

Next slide please.

So to submit a question, if you haven't figured this out already, click. on the Q&A icon at the top of your screen.

You should now see a box at the bottom of the window where you can enter your question and then once you finish typing your question in, make sure you click the little arrow button below the box to submit it.

All right, now I'm going to turn it over to Angie Richman, the Superintendent of Theodore Roosevelt National Park to begin tonight's presentation. Angie, go ahead.

Great. Thank you, Renee, and good evening, everyone.
My name is Angie Richman, and I'm the Superintendent of Theodore, Roosevelt National Park. And it's so nice to see so many attendees

joining us tonight. Thank you for giving us a little bit of your evening to allow us the opportunity to share our purpose and need and our preliminary alternatives from the livestock plan that is currently underway.

As many of you may be aware cattle management in the park has been guided by a 1970 management plan.
And horse management has been guided by a 1978 environmental assessment, or EA. Both of which have been in place for decades now.

So, the goal of this current effort is to revisit the purpose of livestock in the park and consider their role on the park landscape and their impacts on native species and the native Prairie ecosystem.

A starting place for us was to go back to the purpose statement for the park, which is shared on this slide here, and is from our 2014 foundation document.

Although similar sentiments can be found in our enabling legislation and our general management plan, the purpose statement for Theodore Roosevelt National Park states that the park was established to pay tribute to the conservation legacy of Theater Roosevelt, which is defined by a natural ecosystem, including native animal species such as bison, elk, antelope and a native grassland ecology.

Next slide please.

When developing a livestock plan, it's important to note what is considered livestock. At the park it includes any species of animal that has been selectively bred by humans for domestic and agricultural purposes. So, for us this would include the Longhorn steer in the North unit and the horses in the South.

So, another goal of this plan is to align our management with current laws, regulations and policies, as directed by the NPS Organic Act.
And to do that, we have to reconsider the role of livestock at the park.
Next slide.

So this slide shows our timeline and where we currently are in the planning process. We have finished our preliminary information gathering and issue identification process, and we are at the point where we are initiating the NEPA process, as Renee mentioned at the beginning, with this public scoping period.

And civic engagement is important part of any planning that we do in the National Park Service, and this is the 2nd opportunity that you have all had, or the public has had, to share comments on our livestock planning effort.

We do want to hear from you and we do appreciate all the comments that come in and so our next step, we will have a draft preliminary livestock plan. We will have an EA that will go out to the public later this spring and that will be your next opportunity to provide comment.

Next slide please.

So our goals for the meeting tonight are to provide a history of livestock in the park, to review the management history for livestock, how we've addressed them in past decades, to describe our purpose and need for this current livestock plan, and to present actions to accomplish the purpose and need, and then to answer any of your questions at the end.

Next slide.

So, before we dive into that history of livestock at the park I wanted to just quickly orient you to the areas of the park that are being considered in this plan.

So this image shows the three units of the park. Our North unit is located just outside of Watford City. The South Unit is located in the Medora area and in between the two units is our small Elkhorn unit.

We do not have any livestock at the Elkhorn, so we are just looking at the North and the South units.

Next slide.

The Longhorn cattle are located in our North unit. We currently have 9 steer in the North Unit, and they have free range of the entire area, but they do tend to stay within a two to three mile radius that stems from the bison corals, which you can see on the slide here and the pink shading on the slide shows the areas that the cattle tend to roam and where visitors could potentially see them.

Next slide.

And the horses are located in our South unit. There are currently 186 horses. They also have free range of the South Unit and they tend to roam a much larger area.

And again, the pink shading shows where horses have been commonly. observed in the South unit.

So now to move on and to share with you the history of how the cattle and horses came to the park, how we have managed them in the past, I'm going to turn the presentation over to our Park’s Director of Resource management and Science, Blake McCann, and I'll look forward to getting back on the camera with you at the end of the presentation to answer your questions.

Thanks, Angie. Hello everybody.

In this next series of slides, I'll briefly explore the history of horse and cattle management at the park.

When the park was created, cattle were expelled. By 1962, when the North unit was fenced, no longhorn cattle were present. But in the late 1960s,

a small herd of Longhorn steer were introduced to the North unit of the park.

A Management plan was developed in 1970, which recommended that only steer be maintained.

Since then, new animals have been introduced as existing steer aged and perished, and currently there are 9 cattle in the North unit.

Next slide please.

At the time of Park establishment in 1947, horses and cattle from neighboring ranching operations were present in the South Unit.

Efforts were made to remove these livestock, but not all horses were removed ahead of construction of the park's perimeter fence, which was built to contain bison and preclude trespass livestock.

From the 1950s onward, round up and sale of horses was a common management practice, and in 1978 an environmental assessment defined population objectives for the herd of 35 to 60 head and recommended introduction of new bloodlines to prevent inbreeding.

A 1984 resource management plan built upon the 1978 EA and identified. research needs to inform management. The 1984 plan acknowledges that when the park received its National Park status, the presence of livestock became in conflict within PS policy.

It goes on to say that the long-term impacts of these animals. on park natural systems are unknown and need to be evaluated.

Additional research on contraception techniques and population genetics followed, along with field evaluation of novel capture, handling, and transfer techniques, as well as partnership with nonprofit groups.

A 2014 Foundation Document identified horses as an "other important resource" reflecting park perception in management of horses beginning. in the 1970s.

Next slide please.

The 1960s and 1970s were a time of much public discourse over horses on public lands, leading to legislation to guide their management by the Bureau of Land Management and US Forest Service.

But it's important to note, as highlighted here in blue text, that the wild and free roaming horses and Burro Act does not apply to NPS managed lands. Instead, NPS is guided by the US Organic Act and NPS policy and regulations. During the 1970s, and since, horses and cattle were allowed to occur in the park under the perception that they could be here to represent a historic scene.

However, recent legal review through our planning process has revealed that there is no legal basis in park enabling legislation or NPS policy that allows for livestock to occur at Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

The Code of Federal Regulations provides few specific circumstances. where livestock are allowed on NPS lands.

At Theodore Roosevelt National Park, there is no regulation or. policy to enable their presence under 36. CFR 2.60 part a, sub Part 3.

Next slide please.

As discussed earlier, Theodore Roosevelt National Park was created to preserve native wildlife and natural systems.

This priority is also clearly articulated in the US Organic Act that. guides management of all NPS lands.

Further, the park signifies the genesis of Theodore Roosevelt's conservation ethic that began a national movement for stewardship of natural resources.

The Badlands of North Dakota is considered by some to be the cradle of conservation for this reason.

Next slide please.

Purpose and need statements for this planning process were developed. based on NPS priority for management of native systems.

The purpose is to address the livestock, horses and cattle herds, within the park under relevant laws, regulations, policies and park management priorities, including the conservation of native species and natural. ecosystem functions.

This effort is needed to address operational commitments to livestock management and natural resources, including native wildlife, native vegetation and water resources.

Address potential impacts of livestock on cultural resources. including archaeological sites and cultural landscapes.

Provide resiliency for native ecosystems and species. in the face of a changing climate.

And to bring livestock management into compliance with relevant. laws, regulations and policies.

Next slide please.

3 alternatives have been formulated. The no action alternative. And two action alternatives that would accomplish the purpose and need of the plan.

In the following slides, I will review details of each.

Before proceeding, I wish to clarify a point on management methods. These alternatives would include live capture methods as a primary technique for herd reduction with the intent to place animals.

Next slide please.

The no action alternative describes current management practices.

No action means that the park would continue under the existing 1978 EA for horses and the 1970 Longhorn Management Plan.

It is a helpful reference for comparison to action alternatives.
It is also important to note that under the no action alternative, the park would need to meet the population objectives in existing plans and would need to remove approximately 140 horses.

We are currently meeting the population objective for cattle, and their population would be maintained at current levels.

The no action alternative provides a benchmark for us to compare what would happen to the environment if current management were to continue versus what would happen to the environment if one of the action alternatives were selected for implementation.

Next slide please.

Action alternatives are developed to accomplish the purpose and need of the plan.

The first action alternative, Alternative B, is expedited reduction of herds to no livestock.
Here, animals would be gathered with methods best suited to reducing. populations to 0.

Tribes would be provided the first opportunity to receive livestock. Otherwise, horses and cattle would be transferred to other eligible entities or sold to the public.

The intent is to remove all livestock within two years under this alternative.

Next slide please.

The second action Alternative, Alternative C, is the proposed action. This alternative proposes phased reduction of herds to no livestock. Here livestock would be gathered with methods best suited to reducing populations to 0, but in a phased approach. Tribes would be provided the first opportunity to receive livestock. Otherwise, horses and cattle would be transferred. to other eligible entities or sold to the public. A reduced herd of non-reproductive horses would live out their lives in the park.

We're seeking your comment on the purpose and need of this plan, as well as the alternatives just shared.

And with that, we'll return to Renee.

Thank you.

Alright, thank you so much Blake, appreciate that.

We're going to move into the question and answer period of tonight's meeting. We are going to take a short break first. We're going to take a 5 minute break.

Please use those 5 minutes to submit some questions for our staff to respond to. To do that, once again, the instructions appear here on the screen.

Click the Q&A icon at the top of your screen and a little window will pop up and you can write your question in the box at the bottom of the window.

Make sure that you click the little arrow below that box to submit your question.

And I realized that as a participant in a teams live event, it can feel a little bit isolating. You'll enter your questions and then it may seem like they're going into the ether.

Our staff is looking at those questions. We do see them even though you might not be getting immediate feedback. So we're gonna take a 5 minute break so that our staff can sort through the questions. We are getting quite a few coming in through the Q&A box.

So we'll take a 5 minute break. We are going to resume at 626 mountain time. So we will see you in 5 minutes.

All right, everyone, we are back.

And we're ready to answer your questions. We've had some wonderful questions coming into the chat tonight, so thanks for all your participation.

We really appreciate it.

So we have, we are going to try to get to as many of your questions as we possibly can. We've got about 30 minutes left in tonight's meeting. And again, if we are unable to get to your question tonight, be sure to check the frequently asked questions on the park’s website because there's a good chance that it's answered there and we'll also be updating that FAQ as needed.

So check there if your question is not answered tonight.

OK. Our first question is for Superintendent Angie Richman.

So, Angie, what is the outcome of animals that leave the park?

You're on mute, Angie.

Thank you. Thanks Rene.

So I'll just reiterate what Blake mentioned in the presentation that tribes will have the first opportunity to accept horses and cattle, and after our tribal requests have been fulfilled, we will work with nonprofit organizations that have an educational mission to place these animals. And then any remaining animals would be available for sale on GSA and it's important to note that the park cannot guarantee the outcome of horses and cattle after their adoption.

But just like in the past and going into the future, we will work hard to place the animals with entities and individuals that can provide for their health and longevity.

And I do want to mention that I think there's been some misperception on social media or out in the media that we're going to be killing animal, or that we are currently killing animals. And I just want to say that. we have suspended all of our Roundup activities while we have been going through this planning process.

And it's our intent that when we go back to roundups that we will be doing live capture and will be hoping to find a good home for these animals.

Alright. Yeah. Thank you for that Angie

Our next question is gonna be for Blake McCann, and for those of you who may notice a bit of a lag.

I just want to let you know that as we're changing from one speaker to the next during this question and answer period you might see that the camera doesn't quite catch up with the person who's speaking due to some of our technological limitations. So hopefully it's not too distracting for you.

So, Blake should be on your camera on your screen now, and Blake next question is, why are the horses considered livestock?

Thanks, Renee.

The best way to explain is that the natural History record, the historical record and genetic studies of horses demonstrate that they are domestic stock. Whether they be in ownership and part of agricultural purposes, or for other intents here in the United States, or running free on the landscape, their origins are from those domestic means.

So that's the best answer I can provide there in terms of their perception and that's in alignment with our definition of what livestock is.

OK. Thanks for that, Blake.

Very interesting. OK, I'm gonna move on to Maureen for the next question and Maureen, go ahead and introduce yourself before you start with the answer to this next question, because I don't think anybody seen your face yet.

So, Maureen, why is the park embarking on this project at this time?

Thanks, Renee. I'm Maureen McGee-Ballinger, and I am the deputy Superintendent at Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

And the park is looking at the project at this time, but actually. it has been looking at this issue of livestock for years.

There was a discussion in the 1984 management plan that prompted research to be done on this.

The planning documents have been reviewed and they've revealed that the park enabling legislation doesn't address livestock, and there's no law or requirement that allows livestock to occur at Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

So, it doesn't align with the Code of Federal Regulations.

Hey, thanks for that, Maureen. Yeah, sounds like this has been. something the park has been looking at for a very long time.

So, the next question is for Christine.

And Christine, you can go ahead and introduce yourself too.
And the question for you is why aren't you preparing an environmental impact statement or EIS instead of an environmental assessment or EA?

Thanks, Renee. Good evening, everybody. I'm Christine Gabriel and I'm the regional environmental coordinator. The reason why we're not preparing an EIS at this time is because we don't anticipate having any adverse impacts, significant adverse impacts, as a result of the actions that we are proposing.

The other reason that anyone would prepare an EIS is if information was not available or incomplete and extensive research was effort needed to take place. Since those two issues don't apply here, we're going to go ahead and prepare an EA. But if, in the course of that analysis, we deem that a particular impact would be significant, then we could easily switch into preparing an EIS.

OK. Thanks, Christine. That's very helpful. I think there's probably. a lot of people in the audience that might not be as familiar with any process, so really appreciate that.

Our next question is for Angie again.
So, Angie, the question that we've got for you is, aren't the horses considered to be historically significant?

Yeah. So in response to public sentiment, horses and cattle were allowed to occur at the park as a historic demonstration heard since the 1970s. But again, going back and reviewing our enabling legislation and policies, that has illustrated that there really is no clear basis to support livestock at the park, and to put it directly, we are charged with paying tribute to Theodore Roosevelt's conservation legacy, not his ranching legacy.

His conservation legacy grew from a desire to protect and preserve land and ecosystems as close to their natural state as possible before the impacts of colonization. So, for us that means realignment back to our native wildlife and native prairie ecosystem.

All right. Thank you, Angie, for that response.

Yeah, know the horses do have a long history there at the park.
Our next question is gonna be for Blake.

Blake, how will you ensure care of the horses during roundups and how long would the phased reduction take?
Thank you, Renee.

We've spent a number of years, certainly this last decade, exploring best management practices for handling animals, horses and bison through our operations that we conduct to manage the herds. Those include low stress, livestock herding or handling techniques. We've had a number of trainings here at the park. We've had evaluations during our handling operations and I think we've gained a lot of experience over the years that has helped improve how those operations proceed to the benefit of the animals.

Beyond that, we have veterinarians on staff. We have staff veterinarians with NPS and we also rely on local veterinarians here in North Dakota to provide health checks and for any animals that leave the park, we have a health evaluation that goes forward and documentation that follows and we provide veterinary care and feed and other things that they need while they're in our custody.

These procedures have taken a long time to refine and we've really come a long way. In terms of how long the phased reduction would take under the proposed action, it is too preliminary to speak to that at this point. We are in scoping on some proposed actions for people to consider, and. it's not the time where we can address. That would be later.

OK. Thanks. Yeah. Appreciate the answer to that question Blake, and Yeah, I understand. We're in the scoping phase at this point, so maybe a little too early.

So the next question is for Maureen, but before I get to Maureen's question, I just wanted to address another question that we had come in, which was, is this presentation going to be available?

Yes, the presentation will, it was recorded and it will be posted to the PEPC website. So it'll be at parkplanning.nps.gov/LP.

You should see that on the screen. So if you go there, you'll be able to see the recording.

OK. Maureen, what is the impact on tourism of this planning effort?

Thank you for the question, Renee.
That Theodore Roosevelt National Park memorializes Theodore Roosevelt and it pays tribute to his enduring contributions to the conservation ethic of our nation's resources.
It's protecting scenery, the wildlife, the wilderness.
And that's what inspired Roosevelt, and it's what inspires our visitors today. There are so many things that visitors can see and do that are unique to this place. For example, the Little Missouri River flows through all three units of the Badlands.
It is the only designated state Scenic River in the state of North Dakota.
The park has native wildlife. It has one of the most intact Northern Great Plains wildlife communities, including bison and bighorn sheep and elk and mule deer and pronghorn and coyote.
There's habitat, diverse landscapes of plant communities including mixed grass prairies, juniper draws, Cottonwood forests.
There's outstanding geologic and paleontological resources including petrified forest. There's large concretions, cap rocks, glacial erratic, there's oxbows.
We have scenic views, clean air and dark night skies.
There's also the Elkhorn Ranch and the Maltese Cross ranch.
There's a lot to see.

Wow, Maureen, thank you for that response. You're getting me really. excited about getting up to Theodore Roosevelt.

Awesome. So our next question is gonna be for Christine.
And before I answer that question, I just want to say wow again.
what a fantastic park this is.

Alright, Christine, we are getting quite a few questions about this one. So how did the National Park Service go from 6 alternatives to only three alternatives?

Thanks, Renee. So whenever the Park Service or any other agency embarks. on trying to deal with an issue, it's really not unusual to go from a lot of ideas and try and whittle it down to lesser ideas.
So, for this particular planning effort, we started out with six. We went out to the public with six to initiate the conversation, but we also did, we also had an internal planning process and we consulted our subject matter and resource experts and we took a deep dive into the park's Policies, regulations, the laws that govern what it is that we do, and the decisions that we make.

We also looked at the responses and public sentiment from that first round of civic engagement that we did and we took all that and refined

our purpose and need. So that's essentially how we went from 6 to 3. Again, it's really 2. We wanted to address the purpose and need. But also have viable alternatives that were doable. For the other three alternatives or aspects, going to be analyzed further, the EA will have a section in it that will explain why some alternatives would be dismiss out of hand.

OK, great. Thank you. That really helps to clarify things. Christine. Appreciate it.
OK. Our next question is gonna be for Angie.
And Angie, this question is about the the public comment period.

So will the public comment period be extended, and did the public and others provide input for the options?
I think that's for the options that were put out during scoping.

Yeah. So, I'll answer the first part of that. The comment period will not be extended. We opened this comment period back on December 12th, and normally comment periods are open for 30 days, but we knew that with the holidays in there, we wanted to give extra time. So going from December 12th through the end of January, it's a 50 day comment period as it is. So we do not have any intention of extending it.

And then what was the other? Sorry, what was the second-half of that question?

Yeah. The second half of that was did the public and others provide. input for the options?

Yeah, and so as I mentioned earlier, this was the 2nd opportunity. for public comment. We did have a public comment period back in March where we received about 1500 comments back then. We read through all of them, we reviewed them. We applied them or we looked at them against our purpose and need, and they did have some influence in what we put forward in this newsletter and we fully intend to do that again with this public comment period.

OK. Thank you. Thank you, Angie.
Yeah. And there will be additional opportunities. later in the process for public comment, but yes this scoping comment period, there's not is not going to be extended.

OK. So the next question? is for Blake.
This is a really interesting question. I'm curious about this myself. so is there any evidence of detrimental competition between horses and other wildlife within the park?

And so this is another two parter, like is there an estimate for how many bison and or elk could be supported on the resources that the feral horses are currently utilizing?

I would offer that there is a large body of evidence in the published research demonstrating that livestock in Native ecosystems or in places

where natural landscapes occur cause significant impacts. So, we know that they are out of place in terms of the ecosystem.
Otherwise, thinking about competition, from a range science standpoint, it's easy enough to understand based on metrics that are out there for horses and for other grazers that there is a certain amount of forage that's going to those animals and not available to native wildlife, so I think those are pretty simple explanations to provide.

In terms of estimates for how many bison or how many elk could be sustained on the range, that's not something I am prepared to provide as an answer here, but I think going back to my first response, where those other grazers occur there is less for the native wildlife to engage with on the landscape.

OK. Thank you, Blake. That's interesting. And then, you know, we're gonna switch gears here with our next question. UM. And this one is gonna be for Maureen.

So will the park consider the economic impacts of their decision to eliminate the entire herd of horses from the park on businesses in the state, specifically those in Medora and the surrounding communities?

Thank you. The economic impacts, right now we're in the scoping section and we'll be moving into an environmental assessment and the environmental assessment looks at a variety of impacts.

OK. Thanks Maureen.
So yeah, wide range of impacts would be considered in that environmental assessment. Understood. OK.

The next question is gonna be for Christine.
So Christine, Won't reducing the herd create environmental impacts?
That was our next question that we had come in.

Yes, they will and that really is the purpose of doing an environmental assessment. So, the reduction of the herd would be considered the action and the analysis portion of the environmental assessment will look into the consequences of that action on a variety of resources, and those resources would include natural resources and cultural resources, socioeconomic resources, etcetera.

OK. Yeah, that makes sense. Thanks Christine. Appreciate that. OK.

For our next question and boy, we are getting a lot of questions.
We really appreciate those. If you do have a question, remember go ahead and put it in the and a box so if you haven't found it yet, click that and at the top of the screen and enter your question.

OK. Our next question, we're going to go back to Angie again.
So Angie the main concern is impact on native species. Have you seen a decline in the native species in the South unit? And there's another part to this question also, which is why are the horses kept in the South unit only?

I will answer the second part first, which is that the horses, as Blake mentioned, they were inadvertently fenced in the South unit when we fenced that portion of the park when we reintroduced the bison. So, before the South unit was fenced, it was common practice for the local ranchers to run their horses and cattle through the area.
And then when the park was fenced, the cattle were all removed and there were some horses that remained. In the 50s they tried to get all the horses out. They were able to round up about 125 horses and most of those, more than 90% of those, were branded. So they were able to go back to the local ranch that they belong from. But, they even acknowledge back then that even though they got 125 horses, that there were still about 25 horses that remained. So that's kind of the genesis for why there's even horses in the park to begin with.

And so that's why they're only in the South unit.
And then is there a decline in native species at the south unit?
I guess I can't really answer that, but it's not really about declining native species as much as it is about allowing for some adaptability and for some resilience for our native species with the impacts of climate change that they're going to be seeing on the landscape. So by removing the non native species by, removing the livestock, our native species can be a little bit more resilient in the future.

OK. Yeah. Thank you, Angie and yeah.
and thanks for that answer is the first question. I certainly learned something.
So, thanks for the history of how the horses came to be in the South unit and so.

OK. Our next question is gonna be for Blake.
So Blake, as a result of mares treated with GonaCon, and you might wanna define what that is for folks on the phone who may not know what that is, how many have become sterilized or not returned to fertility.

Yeah. Thank you, Renee.
GonaCon is an immuno contraceptive. Basically it utilizes the animal’s immune system to attack or withhold hormones that allow them to be reproductive. So that's an explanation for GonaCon As far as the specific question of sterility, I'm not aware of any animals that have been sterilized by GonaCon. And from our evaluation and published research, we believe that it is a safe agent to use for purposes of population control.

I have observed that animals are released from the effects of the contraceptive and they require boosters, so that's at least some indicator there that we have not a completely lasting effect forever, but it is something that has to be maintained over time. Similar to other contraceptives that are used for horses elsewhere.

OK. Thanks, Blake boy, I am learning so much.
tonight. I appreciate that.

OK, our next question is gonna be for Maureen. Maureen, could some horses go to the North unit?

Thank you for that question. And thank you Angie for giving us a really good synopsis of why the horses are in the South unit. What we are looking at currently is livestock and it would be pointless to move livestock to the North unit. Moving livestock You're not dealing with the issue of livestock, You're not dealing with the planning or the code of Federal regulations that we are required to follow. So, we wouldn't be moving livestock.

OK. Yeah. Thanks for that clarification, Maureen.

OK. The next question is going to be for Christine.
About the alternatives. So Christine, could there be any other alternatives considered at this point?
Yes, this is probably the best point in the planning process for the public to give us additional ideas and feedback on what other possibilities may be out there that we haven't already considered. So I would encourage people who have ideas that weren't presented during the first round of civic engagement to go ahead and submit your comments and those ideas to us now.

Great. Thanks Christine. That's a great plug for getting your comments submitted. And just a reminder that the chat, the Q&A here in this meeting is not a forum for submitting comments during the scoping period. We are just here to answer your questions. So, make sure if you do have a comment that you wanna have formally considered that you visit parkplanning.nps.gov/LP.

When we come to the end of the of tonight's meeting, we'll provide all the different ways that you can provide your comments. So, be sure to get your comments in if you have any, alright.

Our next question is going to be for Angie. Again, Angie, you're very popular.UM. Have or is Theodore Roosevelt National Park planning to engage in consultation with the federally recognized tribes of North Dakota?

And then there's another part to this question, which is there an opportunity to have a Co management horse plan between the tribes? and the park?

We are in consultation with our eight affiliated tribes and that's a simultaneous process to this one. So, we have been engaging them and have been setting up meetings with each of them to get their feedback on these preliminary alternatives and our purpose and need and we have received some really good feedback from them.
Let's see, is there an opportunity for Co management?
Well, we are hoping that many of our tribes will be interested in taking some of these animals and providing a good healthy home for them for the long term.
So that's part of why we have offered for a tribe to have the first option to receive animals, and so there will be some kind of agreement or there will be some mechanism for us to be able to work with our tribes

regardless of whatever alternative is chosen coming out of this planning process.

Great. Great. Thank you, Angie.
OK. Our next question is gonna be for Blake.

Yeah, Blake, this is interesting. What would you say is the difference between the horses at Theodore Roosevelt National Park and the horses at Assateague Island and why can we not look at that management as a basis as a base for the Theodore Roosevelt national Park horses?

Thanks, Renee.
I can't speak to what's happening at Assateague. Each park has its own enabling legislation and local circumstances.
What I can offer is our understanding of our enabling legislation and the other NPS policies and regulations that have guided us to this point in this planning process; development of our purpose and need and the actions that follow in accordance with that evaluation.
So for Assateague, I think that's a question better addressed to the management there.

OK. Thanks Blake. Yeah, each is a bit different, so I understand.
OK.

We’re gonna jump right back to you, Angie?
But the bulk of the questions we've received are better answered by either Angie or Blake, so you'll probably see a lot of them here. shortly.

So Angie, what rules or laws need to be changed to allow the horses to remain in the park wild and free? And, would you please repeat why it is a necessity to remove these horses?

It would take a lot. It would basically take changing our enabling legislation which was enacted by Congress. It would also take a changing the NPS Organic Act, which would have far reaching impact not just on this park but the 424 National Park units. So really, again the Park Service has very limited ability to have livestock in any park and we don't have any basis for continuing to keep livestock here at this park.

All right. Thank you. Yeah. Thanks for reiterating and making it more clear for everyone, appreciate that, Angie. OK. Again, we're going to bounce back to Blake now. And we're getting down to the last few minutes of the meeting here. We're going to try to again get to as many questions as we possibly can in the time that we have allotted. And again, if we didn't get to your question tonight, be sure to check the FAQs on the Park’s website.

OK, Blake.
The park says the Big Horn sheep found there today are descendants of California bighorn sheep. Why then are bighorn sheep not managed as livestock the same with the bison?

I see. Thank you.

Bighorn sheep and other wildlife that have been repatriated to the park, that includes bison, that includes antelope, includes elk, these are animals that were wildlife where they occurred that were once here as wildlife. And I think if we look back at our definition of livestock that includes elements of animal husbandry and artificial selection, there's a clear distinction between what is wildlife and what is livestock and in the case of these species that were brought back to North Dakota and occur in the park today, they were repatriated as wildlife in response to their extirpation and in past history.

OK. Thanks Blake.
And I'm learning so much tonight. This is fantastic. OK.

So we're gonna bounce back to Angie again for another question here. Let's see here. So, could there be a process to seek assistance from non NPS groups in managing horses kept in the park to relieve park staff? And if so, how could volunteers best support the park in an effort to retain horses in the park?

Yeah. So I'll just say again that these are preliminary alternatives. We don't know what the outcome is going to be, but if we do end up with managing horses in the park, I think that we're open to having any sort of assistance.
Honestly, with any of the alternatives, we'd be happy to have partners and volunteers that would help us to meet the objectives of the alternative that's chosen. That's part of why we have this comment period.

All right, great. Thank you, Angie. OK. We've got very little time left in our hour here. We'll ask just one more question and that one is gonna be for Blake. So Blake Prairie dogs seem to have more impact on the landscape than horses, is there something being done about them?

Prairie dogs are a native species here at the park in North Dakota in North Americ. They are part of the natural ecology that we are working to preserve and that we're charged preserve as a National Park.
So, their role in grassland ecosystems is part of a healthy ecosystem that we are aiming for and we currently do not have Control in place for Prairie dogs. Instead, we view them and understand them to be native wildlife that contribute in a positive way towards native ecosystem sustainability and resiliency.

Great. Thank you, Blake. Appreciate that. OK, so that was the final question that we had time to answer tonight. I know we got a ton of questions this evening that we probably weren't able to get to.
Thank you so much for your engagement in this process and all the great questions that you asked. If your question was not answered tonight, make sure you check the FAQs on the parks website. Also, we had a question about how many participants we had tonight. We had around 160 participants and again the recording of the presentation will be available.

It's gonna take a little while to process, so it'll eventually be posted at parkplanning.nps.gov/LP.
Now I'm going to turn it over to Angie for some closing remarks.

And you're on. You're on mute, Angie.

I'm so sorry. That's twice tonight. My goodness, alright?
Thanks, Renee, and thanks for the reminder to turn my mic on.
I don't often do that, so again, we just really appreciate your time, attention and your questions tonight.
I realized that there were a lot of questions that came in that we didn't have time to get to. We will look through all of them and see if there's significant questions that we can add to our website, to our livestock page and we do have a number of frequently asked questions that are already answered on our livestock page. So please go to those for more information.
As I said, in the coming days, we will add questions that we received tonight and things that would add something previously unanswered or something significant to the conversation.

A reminder that this public comment period closes on January 31st, so there's still a couple weeks left to submit your comments and to provide a formal comment. You will want to submit them through PEPC page, which is the link listed on the slide here which is Park planning dot NPS.gov forward Slash, LP.

So you can either do it there or by US mail and you can direct it to me, to the Superintendent Theodore Roosevelt National Park, PO Box 7 in Medora, ND. 58645.

Again there will be a third opportunity for you to comment later this spring. And then lastly, I'll just say thank you again for joining us tonight and please enjoy the rest of your evening.

Thank you all.