



Photo by Kay Hodges

Columbian Ground Squirrels

RETURN OF BISON TO MANITOBA

Hon. Arthur Laing, Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources and Hon. Sterling R. Lyon, Q.C., Minister of Mines and Natural Resources of Manitoba, in a joint release, said today that a herd of 20 plains buffalo from Elk Island National Park in Alberta will be settled in the new 500,000-acre Mawdesley Wildlife Management area east of The Pas. This is a pilot project being carried out jointly by the Manitoba Department of Mines and Natural Resources and the Canadian Wildlife Service to find out if buffalo can survive in the wild again in Manitoba.

The area chosen for the release of the bison lies between Moose Lake and Mawdesley Lake. It was selected after reconnaissance surveys of several possible sites by federal bison experts. It contains habitat similar to that which supports plains bison in the Alberta portion of Wood Buffalo National Park. While climate and vegetation appear to be suitable, only a prolonged and intensive biological study can determine with certainty if bison can thrive in the area. Rather than wait for such a study, Mr. Lyon said, it was decided to

release a small experimental herd and observe how they adapt to their new surroundings.

If the first release is successful, a second and larger release will be made in future, the Ministers said.

There is evidence that bison did occasionally inhabit the area at one time. Buffalo bones have been found near where the release will be made and the native people can recall stories of buffalo hunts in the area told by their forefathers.

These buffalo are being selected from the anthrax-free Elk Island herd. The buffalo are being released in an isolated area where there is no chance of them coming in contact with domestic stock.

If successful this experiment will see the return to Manitoba of one of its largest and most exciting wildlife attractions, Mr. Lyon said. The original herds were shot out and their habitat destroyed during the early settlement of the Province. Mr. Lyon said the re-introduction of the buffalo will return it to its natural home. The first release of the animals is expected late next year.