BISON BRIDGE - AT A GLANCE

The Issue:

What will happen to the existing Interstate 80 bridge when a new replacement is built?

The Concept:

Inspired by other infrastructure repurposing projects and wildlife bridges around the country, the Bison Bridge Foundation was formed to develop a plan for retaining the bridge and repurposing it as the Bison Bridge. The Mississippi River crossing would be transformed into a pedestrian parkway on the eastbound lanes and a crossing for wildlife, including a small herd of American bison, on the westbound lanes.

The Goal:

The Bison Bridge Foundation was formed in 2020 during the Illinois Department of Transportation's initial study phase of the I-80 bridge. The foundation's short-term goal is to gain grassroots support for repurposing it into the Bison Bridge. The group's public announcement also kicked off its campaign to collect 50,000+ signatures of support. The long-term goal is to turn the Bison Bridge site into a national park – securing a designation that would create a public space on the Mississippi River for visitors to enjoy for generations.

Bridge History:

Completed in 1966, the bridge conveys Interstate 80 across the Mississippi River at the Quad Cities near LeClaire, Iowa, and Rapids City, Illinois. Now named the Fred Schwengel Memorial Bridge, it carries an estimated 42,000 vehicles daily. In 2020, the Illinois Department of Transportation began a preliminary study to replace the bridge.

The Bison:

The foundation plans to steward a small herd of American Bison to roam and live on the bridge as well as the 100 acres of grazing land located on the Illinois and Iowa sides of the river. The project would restore the ground to its native prairie as well as support repopulation of bison in the states where they once roamed by the millions. From an estimated 60 million animals in the 18th century to only a few thousand by the early 1900s, efforts nationwide have had a significant impact on bison advocacy for over 100 years.

Bison Bridge Foundation Team:

Led by Chad Pregracke, the Founder and President of Living Lands & Waters, the team spans the nonprofit, transportation, tourism, economic development, wildlife management and conservation sectors. Each team member brings a rich knowledge of their industry to the project, providing expert guidance and dedication to bringing the Bison Bridge to life.