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THE GREAT BISON BREAKOUT

MONIKA IJIA

When the truck's doors opened, they couldn't resist the fresh air. They had been stuck inside for two days. Since then, even experienced cowboys haven't been able to corral them. More than 60 bison are roaming about 10,000 acres in the southern edge of Monterey County. Seventy bison calves and four yearling bulls were being transported for the Chumash Indian tribe March 28 from South Dakota to a 500-acre, privately owned wilderness preserve on Bryson-Hesperia Road, northwest of Lake Nacimiento. As of Thursday, six bison had been corralled and two shot and killed, said Maiwo Agdeppa, a member of the tribe in Ventura County. Groups of bison have been spotted grazing.

The bison, estimated to be worth \$74,000, broke loose on Sapague Road after the truck they were in got stuck in some off-road mud. The intent was to lighten the truck by releasing some bison, but they all escaped instead, Agdeppa said. A team of cowboys on horses tried corralling the animals this past weekend but failed. Dogs and horses frighten bison, Agdeppa said, explaining that people must gather them on foot. "We've been trying to let them settle down," Agdeppa said. "They are herd-type animals. They are baby animals who are lost and confused." Bison are not a danger unless cornered, Agdeppa said. A group of experienced handlers will arrive today to corral the rest.

The bison have reportedly rammed through fences. Agdeppa said his tribe will pay for damage to personal property, estimating the animals are on about seven privately owned spreads. Agdeppa said the bison were bought to start four herds for the tribe's Chumash Bison Company, which sells bison meat.

The bison, which are not considered wild animals, have had shots as required by the Department of Agriculture, said John Foster, a game warden for the state Department of Fish and Game.