



Wild Lands Advocate 13(6): 29, December 2005

Wild Bison Return to Heart of Historic Range

American Prairie Foundation, in cooperation with World Wildlife Fund, released 16 bison today on a portion of 32,000 acres that they own or lease in the prairie south of Malta, Montana. This area is the core of their new prairie reserve intended to restore native wildlife, including genetically valuable bison.

APF's bison herd is one of only a handful of herds remaining anywhere that are free of bison-cattle hybrids; and is free from brucellosis. The director of World Wildlife Fund's Northern Great Plains Ecoregion Program, Dr. Curt Freese, notes that recent research on the bison genome has found that some of the genes that make bison "wild" are disappearing for other reasons as well. "Basically, bison are already largely ecologically extinct in their historic range and are becoming livestock through selective breeding," says Freese, whose program is providing scientific and technical support to the project.

"The need to establish new, large herds to conserve the wild bison genome is extremely important. The great news about today is that these bison are returning to the heart of their historic range, and we didn't have to do anything special to prepare the land except putting up fences. Decades of stewardship by local landowners has kept the land in very good shape. The bison will graze the land very differently from cattle, and we expect it will benefit other wildlife almost immediately."

APF and WWF are preparing for more bison and WWF is beginning monitoring programs to track the herd and the land's health. For more information, see www.americanprairie.org.

