Canadian Wild Buffalo Summit — Final Report

February 4–5, 2025 | Calgary, AB, Canada



Wild Buffalo Summit Team

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Alberta Wilderness Association
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Canadian Bison Association

MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

We want to thank everyone for taking the time out of their busy schedules to attend the inaugural Wild Buffalo Summit. We are grateful that elder Charlie Fox opened the gathering in a good way and for the warm welcome from our host, Alberta Wilderness Association.

The principle of "Nothing About Us, Without Us" was honored and put into action. We were included as planners and organizers, not as invited guests. We were presenters and facilitated the dialogue, not included as passive participants. The gathering included Indigenous voices in respectful and meaningful ways. Conversations about buffalo rematriation require Indigenous voices at the table, restoring our relationship to the buffalo is a part of coming back to who we are as Indigenous peoples.

We want to thank the organizing team for creating an open and safe space, it was clear that everyone that attended felt welcome, respected and had a voice at the table. Attendees expressed their views and perspectives on policy and legislation related to the rematriation of buffalo in open and honest ways and most importantly, were open to differing perspectives.

The gathering that took place is reconciliation in action, we experienced a diverse network of Indigenous peoples, Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics, NGOs, ranchers, and elders gathering to share space, and build relationships. This is positive change and a step towards breaking down silos.

It was clear that we are all dedicated to working together on policy and legislative changes that will benefit efforts in buffalo rematriation. Relationship-building is critical; our collective conversations will build a strong path forward in both the short and long term. Thank you everyone for participating!

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Wild Buffalo Summit Mission

The Wild Buffalo summit is seeking common ground on rematriating Plains Buffalo as a wild species on the Canadian Plains as part of a larger effort from Canada to Mexico.

Wild Buffalo Summit Concept

Rematriation of buffalo is an essential part of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples on the Canadian Plains. It is not a question of if we will have wild buffalo, it is a question of where and how we might accomplish that successfully.

To do that, we need to discuss:

- policy and legislation, including potential designation of Plains Buffalo as a Species at Risk federally, and designation of Plains Buffalo as wildlife provincially;
- public support (social license); and
- identification of the types of lands (e.g., existing protected areas; public lands; private conservancies; reserves) that would have the highest potential for Plains Buffalo rematriation.

Wild Buffalo Summit Process

The Wild Buffalo Summit was chaired by Dr. Tasha Hubbard and Candice Pete-Cardoso, Indigenous women from the Canadian plains.

The co-chairs oversaw a small workgroup that fleshed out the summit agenda, identified key participants, and dealt with logistics for the event.

The agenda focuses on Canadian needs (policy and legislation and potential land bases) while addressing concerns of Indigenous Peoples and the agricultural and ranching sectors.

Wild Buffalo Summit Context

Plains Buffalo are being successfully rematriated from northern Mexico to Canada, on private lands, Indigenous lands, and public lands.

Buffalo play or have played a vital role in grassland ecosystems and grassland people's cultures and economies.

The Buffalo Treaty was first signed in 2014. It has now been signed by more than 100 First Nations, tribes, NGOs, and individual supporters. The Buffalo Treaty recognizes buffalo as a practitioner of conservation. Buffalo Treaty signatories collectively agree to "*perpetuate conservation by respecting the interrelationship between us and 'all our relations' including animals, plants, and Mother Earth; to perpetuate and continue our spiritual ceremonies, sacred societies, sacred languages, and sacred bundles to perpetuate and practice as a means to embody the thoughts and beliefs of ecological balance.*"

Indigenous Peoples have asked Provincial Governments to designate Plains Bison as a wild species.

Canada is considering listing Plains Bison as a species at risk.

The Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management finalized a Letters of Intent in 2024 to promote coordinated conservation of grasslands and the American Bison (Bi*son bison*) in Canada, the United Mexican States, and the United States of America.

Following the Wild Buffalo Summit in Calgary, a North American Bison Summit was held in Colorado in April 2025 where the Wild Buffalo Summit's conclusions were presented to a North American audience. The work of the two summits will continue.

The Canadian Wildlife Service, Parks Canada, and Agriculture, and Agri-Food Canada as well as some provincial agencies are doing a variety of buffalo work with Indigenous Peoples.

Concerns from agricultural interests and the ranching community are typically associated with buffalo rematriation efforts.

Indigenous Perspectives

Indigenous Perspectives – Buffalo Rematriation

Buffalo bring people together. The nourishment and blessings they provide have been shared among our peoples since time immemorial. When we restore buffalo, we are also restoring these connections and relationships in our communities, that we as Indigenous people hold to one another through buffalo. Connections can take many forms: prayer, ceremonies, sharing traditional meals, the passing down of stories, songs, artistic expression, stewardship and caretaking practices, trade, and more. In turn, rematriating buffalo brings healing to our communities. They bring immeasurable value and their continuation is vital for the future of our lands and peoples.

Indigenous Peoples understand buffalo as relatives and not as resources to be managed. This is an important distinction to understand the following perspectives that were shared throughout the Summit. To help with guidance, the summit was gifted the name, *Iinnii kom moi taan* (Buffalo to overcome, to persevere) by Charlie Fox. Many Nations have stories and prophecies about difficult times ahead, this name reminds us to not be afraid, but to get ready–to best support Buffalo perseverance.

For many Indigenous people, our connections with buffalo are so deeply rooted that they are an inseparable part of us. Buffalo hold vital roles in many of our stories, ceremonies, governance, and lifeways. There are several reasons why we, as Indigenous peoples' wish to restore buffalo. It may look different from one Nation to the next, but ultimately, we work towards upholding commitments to reciprocity with more-than-humans, which can also result in care and benefit for our communities. Caring for our communities can mean many things: enhancing food security, returning to our ways, building our economies, and restoring the land.

Buffalo have sustained and provided for our people, ensuring our survival for thousands of years. Now it is our turn to take care of them and ensure their survival. To us, rematriation is an act of reciprocity and a way to carry out one of the greatest responsibilities, to be a good relative. We have a responsibility to care for our communities, including the communities that are often referred to from a Western Science perspective as "ecosystems," which we see ourselves inseparable from.

In our worldviews, we see everything as interconnected and recognize that humans are a part of nature. Every living being has their own responsibilities and instructions given by Creator and when these are followed, balance occurs. We honour that natural order when we make

space for buffalo to live and roam freely, as Creator intended, but whether they are wild or kept for other purposes (such as commercial herds) the most important thing is that Buffalo numbers continue to grow on their homelands.

Many Indigenous leaders here have said, "you cannot talk about grasslands without talking about buffalo." While buffalo are recognized as a keystone species for grasslands habitat and biodiversity by Western scientists, they are not talked about nearly enough as the grasslands continue to decline at an alarming rate. We would like to see buffalo's cultural significance and ecological importance be incorporated into action and policy transformation. The reality is that we cannot achieve this alone. We need allies. We are calling for greater unity and collaboration among the many rights' holders, contributors, and governments, so that bringing back buffalo is done in a good way; a way that benefits all our communities across the prairies.

What would successful rematriation look like? To us, the primary goal is to have more buffalo on the land; secondly, that some buffalo populations are able to move more freely on their own lands. On-going conversations need to happen around formal protected status and the implications of that on Indigenous cared-for herds. Navigating the path forward is where the challenge lies.

We are considering the Trilateral Agreement as a way to address some of these complexities on an international scale which is needed to support genetic diversity and Indigenous-led efforts and nationhood.

Limiting human influence on herds means buffalo retain their autonomy, body sovereignty, and natural behaviours. This allows natural selection and the passing of important adaptive qualities that otherwise may be lost due to artificial breeding and selection. When that level of autonomy is stolen from buffalo, their evolutionary path changes. As we move forward, a considerable amount of discussion must be had around what levels of human intervention is acceptable.

The path forward will require deep exploration of difficult topics such as this and may call for changes to how Canada and Western Science think about and approach conservation. We discussed the tension of rematriation and Indigenous initiatives being labelled as conservation. While recognizing the value of conservation efforts, we began unpacking the differences between conservation and Indigenous pathways to land, more-than-human, and relationship restoration. Although Indigenous worldviews are rooted in abundance, conservation often focuses on scarcity. This venue provided space to see where multiple efforts and models of buffalo restoration overlap and occasionally contradict, yet always with a focus on dialogue and respect.

Topics of conversation include navigating colonial barriers by using all the tools we have; one nations' experiences of cattle and buffalo co-existing together on the same land; legal complexities around moving buffalo across jurisdictions; distinguishing commercial and wild herds; and buffalo being the only animal native to North America that are constantly placed behind fences, with buffalo containment echoing efforts to contain us as well. Finally, and importantly, we also called special attention to the need for elders and youth to be a part of our collective buffalo initiatives.

It's through these conversations that we grow relationships and strategies that can benefit multiple groups of people simultaneously. We believe that by bringing together diverse perspectives and priorities, we can create meaningful change.

The Diversity of Buffalo in the Ranching Community

Buffalo (or bison) are vital in restoring cultural and spiritual connections with Indigenous peoples, revitalizing the grasslands, and improving food security and human health. Wild buffalo exist in scattered herds across the Great Plains, however, the majority of Plains Bison on the landscape today are in private herds and on ranches. These herds cannot be ignored in discussions about the future of buffalo in Canada and North America.

Buffalo are well-adapted to the grassland climate and can survive harsh temperature and weather extremes. Because of their adaptations, they require little handling, and there are many varying and successful ways of managing bison. Often, ranching bison is contingent on the land availability, and there was general support for introducing buffalo on the land.

For one Indigenous rancher, choosing to ranch buffalo was about cultural and spiritual connections, but also about the health benefits of consuming their meat. He spoke openly about the consequences of his diet without buffalo, and of dreams that had guided his choice to begin ranching. He spoke of learning the techniques of bison ranching with guidance from the older women of his nation, and relearning and adapting the wisdom of his ancestors. He also addressed the challenges in ranching buffalo, including political barriers and the impact of colonization, and the value of knowledge sharing with non-native ranchers and bison associations, and other buffalo managers.

Buffalo ranching has been growing. The Canadian Bison Association, along with regional affiliate organizations such as Bison Producers of Alberta, provide guidance to buffalo ranchers on a number of topics, including animal health, trade and conservation. They have indicated no desire to introduce cattle traits or impose selection for docile herds, and their testing has not found genetic differences between commercial and wild herds, though others argued this was an oversimplification. Although the herds of their members often prioritize commercial use, they recognize the role bison play as a keystone species. The bison associations are interested in seeing the growth of this industry, and in partnering or knowledge sharing which advances this goal.

The lack of a legal classification for many wild buffalo herds is a barrier to expanding Plains Bison in Canada. It can create complications in allowing movement of these animals, and in management plans for free-roaming herds. However, the bison associations expressed concerns that classifying bison as wildlife will affect trade and handling. They shared worries that an “Species at Risk” designation would affect border crossings between Canada and the

United States, and consumers may not react well if they know they are eating a listed animal. In response, discussion moved to dual status or exceptions that would allow buffalo ranching to continue while permitting wild, free-roaming herds.

Although there was disagreement about policy and the best path forward, all attendants supported removing barriers to bison reintroduction, and returning buffalo to the landscape for cultural, ecological, health or economic reasons.

The Federal, Provincial, and International Landscape

Historically, millions of wild Buffalo roamed across the continent, from Alaska to Mexico. While wild Buffalo were hunted to the brink of extinction by the end of the 19th century, thousands of wild Buffalo are once again roaming areas of North America in small herds, as are hundreds of thousands of domesticated Buffalo. However, they are still missing from most of what is left of Canada's grasslands habitats. They now find themselves restricted to a patchwork of areas with habitat that is fragmented both physically and legally. Among other challenges, their habitat is intersected by international borders, borders between states and provinces, and the boundaries between different land classifications. Legal protections exist for some herds, but the level of protection varies considerably depending on where a herd happens to roam.

More specifically, the legal protections available to wild buffalo depend on three main factors: 1) the jurisdiction in which they are found; 2) their legal status or classification within that jurisdiction; and 3) the specific lands on which they are found. As wild buffalo are a migratory species that evolved to freely roam across extensive, open landscapes, the level of legal protection available to them can be highly dynamic. For example, a herd may be legally protected within the boundaries of a national park, but if the herd migrates outside the park's boundaries, they may have little to no legal protections available to them.

> *"American Bison are a vagile species and need large, connected landscapes to conserve processes such as migration, and daily and seasonal movements in relation to resource gradients and fleeing from predators."*
>
> - *Plains Bison and Wood Bison: COSEWIC Assessment and Status Report 2013*

Legal protections within Canada

In Canada, responsibility and authority over the conservation and management of wild animals like buffalo is shared between federal, provincial, and territorial levels of government. Provincial and territorial governments take the lead role in managing and protecting wildlife, but the federal government has broad authority over the use of federal lands such as national parks, military bases, and weapons ranges. The federal government also has shared authority over species at risk. It plays the strongest role in protecting migratory birds, fish, marine mammals, and species at risk found on federal lands. However, the federal government can also have a responsibility to protect the critical habitat of species at risk on provincial lands where provincial governments fail to adequately protect them. To manage this complex situation, the federal, provincial, and territorial governments have committed to

maintaining complementary laws and programs to ensure effective protection for species at risk throughout Canada.

> *"Since time immemorial, hundreds of generations of the first peoples of the FIRST NATIONS of North America have come and gone since before and after the melting of the glaciers that covered North America. For those generations, BUFFALO has been our relative. BUFFALO is part of us and WE are part of BUFFALO culturally, materially, and spiritually. Our on-going relationship is so close and so embodied in us that Buffalo is the essence of our holistic eco-cultural life-ways. "*
>
> - *Buffalo Treaty*

Indigenous Peoples also play a key role in protecting wildlife, including species at risk. They hold constitutionally protected harvesting rights that may supersede federal, provincial, and territorial wildlife and species at risk laws when conflicts arise. Conservation is generally seen as a valid reason for federal, provincial, and territorial governments to regulate and limit Indigenous harvesting activities. However, these governments must consult Indigenous Peoples prior to doing so and must ensure they only limit Indigenous rights in proportional ways that are as minimally interfering as possible. As the federal, provincial, and territorial governments have constitutional obligations to consult Indigenous rights holders on regulations that would interfere with their harvesting activities, Indigenous Peoples play a key role in this area of regulation. In some cases, federal, provincial, or territorial governments have sought to regularize and clarify this role through joint management frameworks for select wildlife species.

First Nations in particular have federally recognized regulatory authority over wildlife on reserve lands. Of particular note, wildlife bylaws under the *Indian Act* and wildlife laws passed pursuant to a land code under the Framework Agreement for First Nation Land Management may prescribe special rules or protections for wildlife situated on reserve. For example, the Mistawasis First Nation in Saskatchewan has a bylaw under the *Indian Act* that prescribes rules for big game outfitting operations on its reserve lands, including Buffalo among the wild species for which it seeks to regulate on-reserve outfitting activities.

Indigenous Peoples in all three prairie provinces have started the process of rematriating Plains Buffalo to the prairie and aspen parkland ecosystems.

An independent committee of wildlife experts and scientists known as the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) provides recommendations to the federal, provincial, and territorial governments on what species should be protected based on the best available evidence from Western science and Indigenous knowledge. Species that are in the greatest need of protection are assessed as "endangered" species, the second most urgent ranking is "threatened" status, and the third most urgent ranking is "of special concern".

COSEWIC has recommended that Plains Buffalo should be classified as a threatened species within Canada and that Woods Buffalo should be classified as a species "of special concern." While federal, provincial, and territorial governments have taken action to adopt COSEWIC's recommendations for Wood Buffalo, they have not yet done so for Plains Buffalo.

Federal designations

The federal government exercises authority over species at risk through the *Species at Risk Act* (*SARA*). This Act helps Canada fulfill its commitments under the *United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity*. While COSEWIC provides evidence-based recommendations for the listing of species under *SARA*, the federal government has discretionary power to ignore COSEWIC's recommendations and its listing decisions under *SARA* reflect a mix of politics and science.

If a species is listed under *SARA* as threatened, endangered, or extirpated, this can trigger an obligation for the Government of Canada to prepare a recovery strategy in consultation with relevant provinces, territories, and Indigenous organizations. Recovery strategies must describe major threats to the listed species and its habitat, identify its critical habitat, and otherwise address what must be done to stop or reverse the decline of the species within Canada. There are also prohibitions set out in *SARA* that make it an offence to kill, harm, harass, capture, take, possess, collect, buy, sell, or trade wildlife that is listed as a threatened, endangered, or extirpated species. It is an offence to damage or destroy the habitat of these species as well. These prohibitions generally only apply to wildlife on federal lands or over which the federal government has more specific jurisdiction (i.e., migratory birds and aquatic animals). However, the federal government can apply these prohibitions to provincial lands through emergency protection orders where it is of the opinion that provincial laws do not effectively protect the species or its residences.

Plains Buffalo have twice been assessed by COSEWIC as needing protection as a threatened species (2004 and 2013). In 2005, the Government of Canada declined to list Plains Buffalo due to concerns over the potential economic implications for the commercial bison industry. At the time of writing, Environment and Climate Change Canada is still considering whether to list Plains Buffalo under *SARA* based on COSEWIC's 2013 assessment, which incorporated new information and addressed the establishment of new subpopulations. Plains Buffalo is not yet listed under *SARA* and therefore does not benefit from any of its protections.

Wood Buffalo were first assessed as endangered by COSEWIC in 1978. In 1988 they were reassessed as threatened due to an increase in their distribution and abundance. This status was confirmed by COSEWIC in 2000 and they were listed as threatened under *SARA* in 2003.

In 2013, COSEWIC reassessed Wood Bison as a species of special concern. However, they remain listed as threatened under *SARA* at this time.

Buffalo are recognized as a protected species through the *Canada National Parks Act*. This means harvesting, trafficking, or possession of Buffalo within a national park is subject to federal permits and regulation. This law does not distinguish between Plains Buffalo and Wood Buffalo. However, special regulations govern harvesting of Wood Buffalo in Wood Buffalo National Park.

While there is no special status for wild Buffalo on federal lands governed by Canada's *National Defence Act*, the *Defence Controlled Access Area Regulations* under this Act restrict access and hunting in certain areas, such as the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range that is intersected by the border between Alberta and Saskatchewan. This provides some area-based protection for a wild Plains Buffalo herd that migrates into this area, though Indigenous harvesting activities are facilitated by way of agreement between Canada and select First Nations.

At this time, Environment and Climate Change Canada's Canadian Wildlife Service is exploring a threatened species listing process for Plains Bison under *SARA*.

Parks Canada has been working with Indigenous Peoples to restore wild Plains Buffalo in Banff National Park and intends to allow the US-originating Chief Mountain herd to roam freely into some of Waterton Lakes National Park. Plains Buffalo have been established in Elk Island, Prince Albert, and Riding Mountain National Parks for decades.

In Manitoba, Agriculture and Agri-food Canada have done work with the Swan Lake First Nation bison herd as well as Sioux Valley Dakota Nation (SVDN) through capacity building partnerships. These supported the communities' efforts on biodiversity monitoring, improved pasture and riparian area management, and rotational grazing planning. In SVDN, they helped with field studies to identify pastures for buffalo.

Provincial and territorial designations

All provincial and territorial governments have laws in place that restrict when, where, how, and by whom any wildlife can be captured, harvested, possessed, and sold, as well as protections against the alteration or destruction of their habitats. Some provincial governments have their own specialized legislation for species at risk while others regulate species at risk through their ordinary wildlife statutes. Provincial designation of species as wildlife provides some level of

legal protection and regulation on provincial lands. Provincial designation of species as species at risk would provide even stronger legal protections for listed wildlife and their habitats.

At this time, Plains Buffalo are recognized as wildlife in Saskatchewan and British Columbia, giving rise to basic legal protections to govern harvesting and habitat protection. In British Columbia, it is possible to harvest Plains Buffalo through a limited entry hunt. In Saskatchewan, one Plains Buffalo herd is hunted by the Big River First Nations. In contrast, Plains Buffalo are not listed as wildlife in Alberta or Manitoba where they are instead considered to be livestock. This prevents those governments from regulating hunting of Plains Bison on provincial lands.

In contrast, Wood Buffalo have been recognized as species at risk under various provincial and territorial laws with comparable designations to *SARA*. In Alberta, select Wood Buffalo herds in specific areas are designated as endangered. Certain Wood Buffalo herds on provincial lands are nevertheless harvested under provincial hunting licences or Indigenous harvesting rights.

Leadership from First Nations in Alberta have asked for Plains Bison to be provincially designated as wildlife. The Alberta Wilderness Association has supported that request and has been in discussion with the Government of Alberta about forming a Plains Bison Policy in Alberta.

A private land conservancy NGO (Nature Conservancy of Canada) has rematriated Plains Buffalo on Old Man on his Back Plateau in Southern Saskatchewan and is pursuing other ways of effecting conservation and reconciling with Indigenous Peoples, while restoring Plains Buffalo.

Coordination and Collaboration across North America

As noted earlier, the historic range of Buffalo extends across the United States of America and into the United Mexican States as well. For this reason, there is a long-standing international dimension to the protection of Buffalo as a wild species. Buffalo were once fully extirpated from Canada and the wild herds that exist within Canada today have been established by importing wild Buffalo from protected areas in the United States, a practice that continues to support the genetic diversity of wild Buffalo in Canada to this day. Likewise, international migrations occur on occasion. For example, the reintroduction of wild Plains Buffalo by the Blackfeet in Montana led to migrations into southern Alberta in 2023, leading to the rounding up and return of these Buffalo across the international border. Coordination and collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments across North American is being pursued to share best practices and address international boundary-related challenges.

Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous Peoples across North America have taken significant steps towards coordination and collaboration across international borders by signing onto the Buffalo Treaty. At least 34 Indigenous Peoples with territories in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba have signed onto this treaty, as have more than 100 across North America as a whole. In doing so, they have agreed to pursue the following shared objective: *"It is our collective intention to recognize BUFFALO as a wild free-ranging animal and as an important part of the ecological system."*

United States

The Government of the United States of America has recognized Wood Buffalo under its *Endangered Species Act* since 1970. It was originally listed as endangered, but in 2012 it was reclassified as a threatened species. In contrast, Plains Buffalo are not recognized under the *Endangered Species Act*, but the government is considering whether to list the sub-population of Plains Buffalo in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem as either threatened or endangered.

The U.S. Department of the Interior's 2020 Bison Conservation Initiative explicitly affirms the Department's commitment to the "*restoration of wild bison herds and shared stewardship of those herds with Tribes and others.*"

Secretarial Order 3410, signed by former Interior Secretary Haaland, allocated $25 million from the *Inflation Reduction Act* to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge into bison restoration efforts. See also Secretarial Order 3342 regarding other collaboration opportunities.

A Bison Shared Stewardship Strategy was crafted under formal, national Tribal Consultation and follows up on Order 3410 to *"inspire, encourage, and empower the ecocultural restoration of large, new herds of wild bison by diverse partnerships across the country for generations to come."*

Multiple Indigenous-led partnership efforts (such as the Intertribal Buffalo Council and the Tribal Buffalo Lifeways Collaboration) are underway to facilitate bison herd expansion across the US Great Plains on public, private, and reserve lands.

Mexico

There are free roaming herds of Plains Buffalo in northern Mexico in Coahuila and Chihuahua. Indigenous Peoples are part of the process of reconnecting Plains Buffalo to desert grasslands. A Plains Bison Reintroduction and Restoration Assessment Tool is in draft form and is being reworked by the Great Plains Conservation Network Bison Working Group after input at the North American Bison Summit in Loveland Colorado in April 2025 as well.

International coordination and collaboration

The Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management (Canada, Mexico, USA) signed Letters of Intent on buffalo and grasslands in 2024 to further conservation efforts across these international boundaries.

The Wild Buffalo Summit presented its preliminary findings at the North American Bison Summit as the organizers indicated that it would be helpful to understand the current Canadian context.

The NGO Landscape

With some exceptions, until fairly recently there had been minimal involvement of conservation organizations with Indigenous Peoples on grassland conservation and Plains Buffalo rematriation. At times conservation was implemented without consultation and with great harms to Indigenous Peoples. That has changed significantly, and many NGOs are working to bring Indigenous perspectives into conservation, especially around grasslands and grassland species at risk, and are bringing resources and expertise to assist Indigenous Peoples with realizing their aspirations for their lands, skies, and waters.

There are many coalitions and networks working on grassland conservation now including the Great Plains Conservation Network and the Central Grasslands Roadmap across Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Regionally, Saskatchewan has the Prairie Conservation Action Plan, while Alberta has the Prairie Conservation Forum. In the Northern Great Plains, a coordinating group, the Transboundary Grassland Partnership, has brought together individuals, NGOs, First Nations, and tribes working on grassland conservation in northern Montana and southern Alberta, and southern Saskatchewan. These networks all provide opportunities for Indigenous Peoples, NGOs, and ranchers to work together on grassland conservation issues of mutual interest, including Plains Buffalo.

2026 will be International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (some NGOs are referring to IYRP more appropriately for Canada as the "International Year of Grasslands and Grasslands Peoples").

Globally, temperate grasslands are one of the most threatened bioregions and the most underrepresented in protected areas. The Northern Great Plains of North America are considered one of World Wildlife Fund's Global 200 priority areas for grassland conservation work. World Wildlife Fund USA is very active in the Northern Great Plains in the USA working with tribes and ranchers on grassland conservation. A significant part of that work is related to Plains Buffalo rematriation.

A diverse network of individuals, conservation NGOs, and Indigenous Peoples wants to ramp up rematriating Plains Bison back into their former haunts on the Canadian Plains.

Particularly promising areas include Canadian Forces Base Suffield (at least the Suffield National Wildlife Area portion); Canadian Forces Base Wainwright and surrounding protected areas on provincial public lands; and, more generally, federal and provincial public lands, including protected areas in southern Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. The Foothills Bison Restoration Society has been assessing the potential for rematriation in the Whaleback area of southwestern Alberta. The Alberta Wilderness Association and Nature Conservancy

of Canada (NCC) have been active in assessing opportunities for supporting Indigenous-led buffalo rematriation and grassland conservation efforts.

The NCC is developing a prairie-wide conservation plan with priority areas identified. Their current approach is to partner with other groups to be more effective, and support reconciliation and area-based grassland and Plains Buffalo conservation. There are mechanisms for NCC to transfer lands already owned into Indigenous ownership where stewardship of those lands would be best managed by partners, to have co-stewardship or co-management of grass lands, and to assist partners in finding and securing lands. NCC is actively working with several Indigenous communities to identify and ultimately acquire lands for conservation purposes. NCC has expertise in Plains Buffalo rematriation and management that includes wildlife friendlier fencing that is not a barrier to Pronghorn and other large migratory mammal movement.

Other NGOs like Y2Y, Nature Alberta, Nature Saskatchewan, and Nature Canada are involved in Canadian grassland conservation and have expressed interest in the Wild Buffalo Summit.

The Treaty Lands Sharing Network in Saskatchewan and Alberta has been active with farmers and ranchers that allow Indigenous People to gather medicines and use land. They are also looking at land trusts where people can bequeath land. The network wants to return Plains Buffalo to that land.

Major Themes for Action

A key message is the important role that partnerships among Indigenous Peoples, NGOs, governments, and private funders play in bringing back Plains Buffalo to the plains of North America.

1. *Options for policy and legislation; listing plains buffalo as threatened species federally; as a wild species provincially*

    - led by University of Saskatchewan, College of Law, perhaps with inputs from Environment Law Centre (Alberta)

2. *Area based rematriation of plains buffalo on larger landscapes*

    - Alberta Wilderness Association
    - Nature Conservancy of Canada
    - other NGOs, national, provincial, and regional, e.g., Foothills Bison Restoration Society

3. *Technical Assistance and Sources of Animals for Indigenous Peoples and Others Rematriating Plains Buffalo*

    - Government of Canada, e.g., Elk Island National Park
    - Bison Associations, e.g., Canadian Bison Association, Bison Producers of Alberta
    - possibly Provincial Governments (Government of Saskatchewan is considering)

4. *Need for an Inter-tribal Buffalo Council for Canada*

    - possibly as part of Plains Buffalo recovery strategy

5. *Next Wild Buffalo Summit(s)*

    - prepare for larger gathering(s)

Next Steps

More fully develop approaches to policy and legislation that will:

- facilitate listing Plains Buffalo as a wild species provincially;
- facilitate listing Plains Buffalo as a Threatened Species under Canada's Species at Risk Act;
- address concerns of agricultural interests; and
- avoid any unintended barriers to successful outcomes for Indigenous Peoples as well as bison and cattle ranchers.

Work with the Great Plains Conservation Network Bison Working Group to improve the applicability of the Plains Bison Reintroduction and Restoration Assessment Tool for Plains Buffalo rematriation in Canada.

Have Canadian representatives from the Wild Buffalo Summit continue to attend future North American Bison Summits.

Develop fact sheets and identify legal approaches that will address concerns from agricultural interests and dispel misinformation.

Continue to press Canada's provincial governments to list Plains Buffalo as a wild species.

Support processes for listing Plains Buffalo as a Threatened Species under Canada's Species at Risk Act with clear safeguards for Indigenous Rights. This will necessitate recovery planning where we can advocate:

- support for rematriation by Indigenous Peoples;
- the need for an Indigenous buffalo caretakers' organization/council/working group; and
- area-based approaches to rematriate Plains Buffalo, e.g., military bases/National Wildlife Areas at Suffield and Wainwright in Alberta, and other federal and provincial public lands in southern Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

Appendix A: Participants

Co-Chairs

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Kyle Bobiwash, Mississauga First Nation; Office of the Chief Science Advisory of Canada

Matt Braun, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Saskatchewan

Diandra Bruised head, Kainai Nation; Manager of Indigenous Learning and Impact at University of Lethbridge; Fellow, Environmental Justice and Traditional Ecological Knowledge; designated rep of Leroy Littlebear

Justin Bruised Head, Kainai Nation; Blackfoot Guardians of the East Slopes of the Rockies Project

Madeline Burns, Métis, University of Victoria - Indigenous Governance

Patrick Cross Child, Kainai Nation; Piikani Nation Lands Development

Debborah Donnelly, Alberta Wilderness Association

Bruce Downey, Bison Producers of Alberta

Charlie Fox, Kainai Nation Elder; buffalo rancher

Dan Fox (Big Eagle), Kainai Nation Elder

Paulette Fox (Holy Walking Woman), Kainai Nation

Tim Gompf, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Manitoba

Cheyenne Ironman (Blue Butterfly Woman), Sioux Valley Dakota Nation; Coordinator Indigenous Kinship Circle, Central Grasslands Roadmap

Lisa Ladouceur, Cree/Métis; University of Alberta Faculty of Native Studies

Keara Lightning, Samson Cree Nation; University of Alberta Wildfire Analytics Lab

Dale Kirkland, Parks Canada--Elk Island National Park

Ruiping Luo, Alberta Wilderness Association

Jeremy Hogan, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Alberta

Benjamin Ralston, University of Saskatchewan College of Law

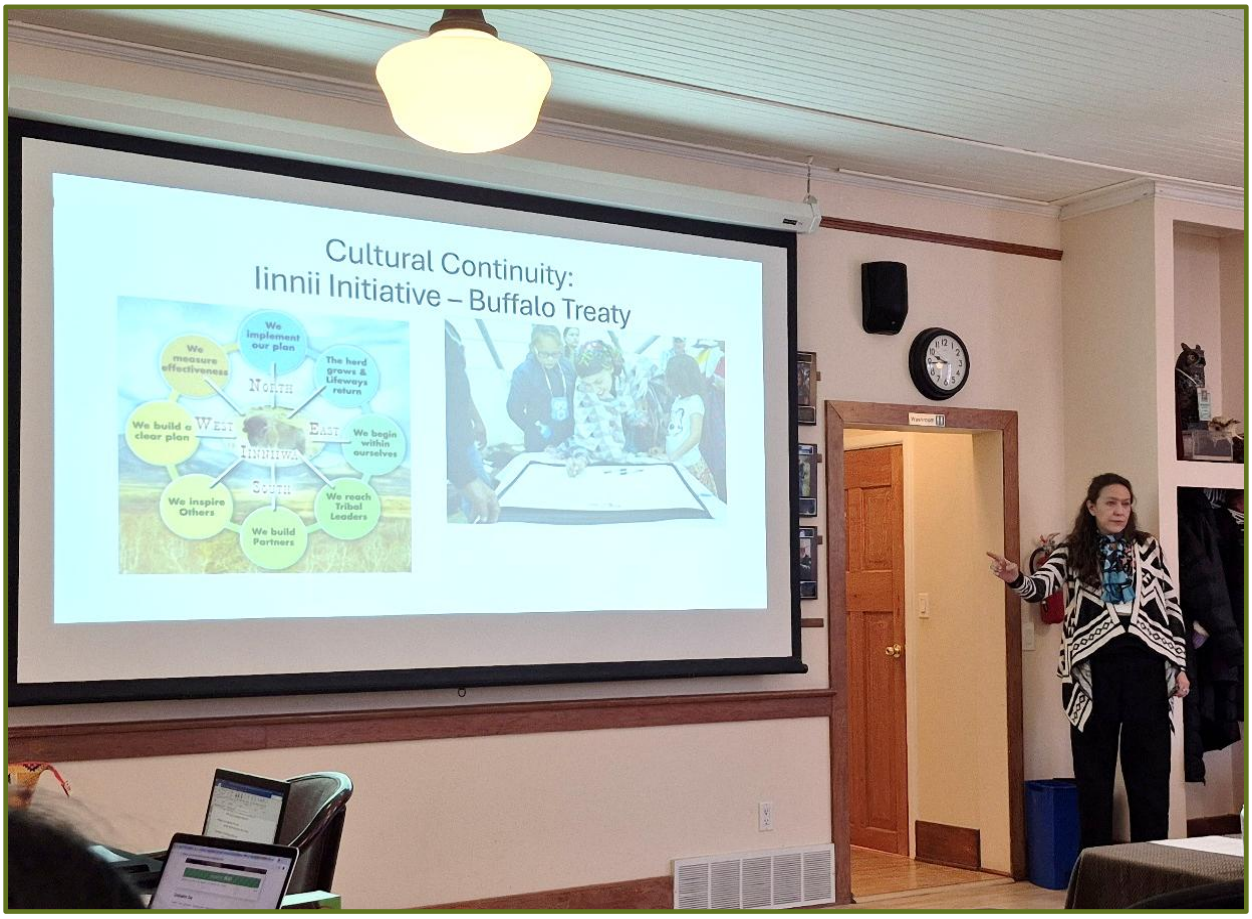
Cody Spencer, Métis; International Buffalo Relations Institute; buffalo rancher

Tanya Stone, Chief, Mosquito Grizzly Bear's Head Lean Man First Nation

Leonard Tipewan, Witchekan Lake First Nations; Saskatchewan Aboriginal Lands Technicians
Donna Van de Velde, Métis/Lakota; University of Saskatchewan kihci-okāwīmāw askiy Knowledge Centre
Cliff Wallis, Alberta Wilderness Association
Scott Yule, Canadian Bison Association

Photos from Wild Buffalo Summit February 2025




Cultural Continuity:
Iinnii Initiative – Buffalo Treaty
We implement our plan
The herd grows & Lifeways return
We begin within ourselves
We reach Tribal Leaders
We build Partners
We inspire Others
We build a clear plan
We measure effectiveness
North
East
South
West
Iinnii


Cattle Introgression


Washroom


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Appendix B: Agenda

February 4, 2025 – Day 1

Opening in a Good Way: Elder Charlie Fox

Welcome and Housekeeping from AWA: Debborah Donnelly

Welcome from Co-chairs: Dr. Tasha Hubbard, Candice Pete-Cardoso

Indigenous Perspectives – Buffalo Rematriation

- Chief Tanya Stone, Mosquito Grizzly Bear's Head Lean Man First Nation, Saskatchewan
- Diandra Bruised Head, Kainai Nation, Alberta
- Cheyenne Ironman, Sioux Valley Dakota Nation, Manitoba
- Discussion

Group Conversations

- Wild versus Domestic from an Indigenous Perspective
- Economic Development – Economic Revitalization, Food Sovereignty
- Keepers of the Buffalo - Restoring Relationships and Cultural Revitalization (led by Joely Big Eagle)
- Indigenous Conservation Perspectives

February 5, 2025 – Day 2

Welcome Back

Buffalo and the Trilateral Agreement

- Paulette Fox

The Diversity of Buffalo in the Ranching Community

- Dan Fox – Ranching perspectives
- Scott Yule and Bruce Downey – Bison Association Perspectives

The Federal, Provincial, and International Landscape

- Benjamin Ralston – Policy and Law
- Dale Kirkland – Elk Island National Park
- Kyle Bobiwash – Tribal and First Nation Partnerships and Projects

Discussion

Lunch
Video Presentations

Reporting on Group Conversations from Day 1

The NGO Landscape

- Cliff Wallis – Alberta Wilderness Association
- Jeremy Hogan – Nature Conservancy Canada
- Discussion

Next Steps for Expanded Buffalo Rematriation

Closing: Elder Charlie Fox

Appendix C: Background Papers

The following materials were provided to participants prior to the summit:

The Buffalo Treaty
Briefing Note - Cultural Context of Buffalo
Briefing Note - Legal and Policy Issues for Designation of Wild Buffalo
Briefing Note - What Does Wild Mean?
Briefing Note - Wild Buffalo and Livestock
Briefing Note - Wild Buffalo from Canada to Mexico
Briefing Note – Lands for Buffalo Rematriation
Tribal Buffalo Lifeways Collaboration
Bison-Industry-Profile: October 5, 2024

The Buffalo Treaty

Treaty

Creator gave us many gifts and teachings to survive this world. One of those teachings is everything is interrelated. In the Indian practice, the interrelated world is realized through Treaty-making with all my relations.

RELATIONSHIP TO BUFFALO

Since time immemorial, hundreds of generations of the first peoples of the FIRST NATIONS of North America have come and gone since before and after the melting of the glaciers that covered North America. For those generations, BUFFALO has been our relative. BUFFALO is part of us and WE are part of BUFFALO culturally, materially, and spiritually. Our on-going relationship is so close and so embodied in us that Buffalo is the essence of our holistic eco-cultural life-ways.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE OF THE TREATY

To honor, recognize, and revitalize the time immemorial relationship we have with BUFFALO, it is the collective intention of WE, the undersigned NATIONS, to welcome BUFFALO to once again live among us as CREATOR intended by doing everything within our means so WE and BUFFALO will once again live together to nurture each other culturally and spiritually. It is our collective intention to recognize BUFFALO as a wild free-ranging animal and as an important part of the ecological system; to provide a safe space and environment across our historic homelands, on both sides of the United States and the Canadian border, so together WE can have our brother, the BUFFALO, lead us in nurturing our land, plants and other animals to once again realize THE BUFFALO WAYS for our future generations.

PARTIES TO THE TREATY

WE, the undersigned, include but not limited to BLACKFEET NATION, BLOOD TRIBE, SIKSIKA NATION, PIIKANI NATION, THE ASSINIBOINE AND GROS VENTRE TRIBES OF FORT BELKNAP INDIAN RESERVATION, THE ASSINIBOINE AND SIOUX TRIBES OF FORT PECK INDIAN RESERVATION, THE SALISH AND KOOTENAI TRIBES OF THE CONFEDERATED SALISH AND KOOTENAI INDIAN RESERVATION, TSUUT'INA NATION, along with other nations.

ARTICLE I – CONSERVATION

Recognizing BUFFALO as a practitioner of conservation, WE, collectively, agree to: perpetuate conservation by respecting the interrelationship between us and 'all our relations' including

animals, plants, and Mother Earth; to perpetuate and continue our spiritual ceremonies, sacred societies, sacred languages, and sacred bundles to perpetuate and practice as a means to embody the thoughts and beliefs of ecological balance.

ARTICLE II – CULTURE

Realizing BUFFALO Ways as a foundation of our ways of life, We, collectively, agree to perpetuate all aspects of our respective cultures related to BUFFALO including customs, practices, harvesting, beliefs, songs, and ceremonies.

ARTICLE III – ECONOMICS

Recognizing BUFFALO as the centerpiece of our traditional and modern economics, We, collectively, agree to perpetuate economic development revolving around BUFFALO in an environmentally responsible manner including food, crafts eco-tourism, and other beneficial by-products arising out of BUFFALO's gift to us.

ARTICLE IV – HEALTH

Taking into consideration all the social and health benefits of BUFFALO ecology, We, collectively, agree to perpetuate the health benefits of BUFFALO.

ARTICLE V – EDUCATION

Recognizing and continuing to embody all the teaching we have received from BUFFALO, We, collectively, agree to develop programs revolving around BUFFALO as a means of transferring intergenerational knowledge to the younger and future generations and sharing knowledge amongst our respective NATIONS.

ARTICLE VI – RESEARCH

Realizing that learning is a life-long process, We, collectively, agree to perpetuate knowledge-gathering and knowledge-sharing according to our customs and inherent authorities revolving around BUFFALO that do not violate our traditional ethical standards as a means to expand our knowledge base regarding the environment, wildlife, plan life, and the role BUFFALO played in the history, spiritual, economic, and social life of our NATIONS.

ARTICLE VII – ADHESION

North American Tribes and First Nations, and NATIONS, STATES, AND PROVINCES may become signatories to this treaty providing they agree to the terms of this treaty.

ARTICLE VIII – PARTNERSHIPS AND SUPPORTERS

WE, collectively, invited NON-Governmental organizations, Corporations and others of the business and commercial community, to form partnership with the signatories to bring about the manifestation of the intent of this treaty. Organizations and Individuals may become signatories to this treaty as partners and supporters, providing they perpetuate the spirit and intent of this treaty.

ARTICLE IX – AMENDMENTS

The treaty may be amended from time-to-time by simple majority of the signatories.

Briefing Note - Cultural Context of Buffalo

Purpose
Indigenous people of North America share the belief that the buffalo is a keystone species and have lived and adapted alongside them for thousands and thousands of years. We honor the buffalo as family and respect them because we depend on them for life and sustenance.
Recommendations
Culture is the collection of shared beliefs, values, and behaviors that define a group of people. There were over 120 million wild buffalo pre-colonization in North America. [Orally shared to author from Paulette Fox, Iinnii Initiative] Indigenous people that lived where the buffalo lived sustainably hunted the buffalo to ensure their good health and well being. Indigenous people used every part of the buffalo such as their hides for shelter coverings, meat and organs for their food, bones for functional uses, and skulls for ceremony. They were more than an animal, they were intrinsically connected and there were legends and origin stories shared from various tribes detailing how the buffalo came to the people to save them from starvation or to teach them how to live on the land. The Lakota people share a story of how the buffalo originated and this occurred at a place called the Wind Cave in South Dakota. "The Creator instructed them to follow that bison. From the bison, they could get food, tools, clothes, and shelter. The bison would lead them to water. Everything they needed to survive on the earth could come from the bison." https://www.nps.gov/wica/learn/historyculture/the-lakota-emergence-story.htm The emergence and discovery of a buffalo skull in Oklahoma and carbon dated to be 10,500 years old reveals a connection with Indigenous people through ceremony. Titled the Cooper site, "The skull, adorned with red zigzag lines, was apparently painted… The mineral composition of the paint (hematite) withstood the ravages of time. This painted skull is the oldest such item known for North America and is the earliest documented evidence of hunting ritual for the Plains region." https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=CO050 Today, our understanding of the symbol of a painted zig zag on a buffalo skull would connect it to ceremonies such as sun dance or sweat lodge. The significance of using a zig zag is related to the thunder symbols used by a certain society considered to be healers and medicine people. Vine Deloria Jr., a respected Indigenous author and lawyer, stated that Indigenous people have always been here (on the North American continent) since time immemorial in his book, Red Earth, White Lies. This statement was further confirmed with ancient human footprints

discovered in White Sands National Park, New Mexico dated between 21,000 and 23,000 years old. https://www.llnl.gov/article/50431/study-confirms-age-oldest-fossil-human-footprints-north-america

The buffalo were always here with us. They were and are our everything. Our identity is as Tatanga Oyate [Buffalo People].

Although the buffalo are no longer in the millions due to colonization consequences. Indigenous peoples look to the buffalo as a reflection of a similar, parallel existence. Indigenous people suffered from starvation, disease and warfare for the sake of colonization. In this new era of truth and reconciliation we seek out these truths and how to move forward in an equitable way to not only survive but thrive. We look to the buffalo and their matrilineal society and resilience to carry on hoping for the future health and well-being. Some of the ceremonies may have been banned and forgotten but using blood memory [a term coined by M. Scott Momaday] and ceremony Indigenous people are reconnecting to the buffalo and the teachings of resilience to understand their identity and ways of being.

Key Considerations and Options

Buffalo Treaty: ARTICLE II - CULTURE

Realizing BUFFALO Ways as a foundation of our ways of life, We, collectively, agree to perpetuate all aspects of our respective cultures related to BUFFALO including customs, practices, harvesting, beliefs, songs, and ceremonies.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Indigenous people value the buffalo and want them to remain wild, because of these connections and a promise of a revival of identity as buffalo people. We heal the people through the return of the buffalo and the land benefits as well. The land has memory and can be activated again to be rejuvenated.

Prepared by:	Joely BigEagle-Kequahtooway
Originated:	January 13, 2025

Briefing Note – Legal and Policy Issues for Designation of Wild Buffalo

Purpose
To describe key legal and policy issues related to the status of Wild Plains Buffalo under provincial and federal law.
Recommendations
Wild Plains Buffalo should be listed as a threatened species under the federal *Species at Risk Act* and its provincial counterparts in Western Canada. Doing so would trigger stronger protections against poaching and habitat destruction and support funding and collaboration in conservation of wild herds.
Key Considerations and Options
The legal protections available to Wild Plain Buffalo from federal and provincial designation as a threatened species or equivalent can vary based on the lands inhabited by a specific herd and be further adapted to meet the needs of specific herds.
Background
Today wild buffalo occupy only a small fraction of their historic range, with free-roaming wild herds within parks and other discrete areas spread across Canada and the United States. In addition to these wild herds, private and commercial herds of buffalo are farmed across Canada and the United States as well. The legal protection available to wild buffalo depends on three main factors: the jurisdiction in which they live; their status/classification in that jurisdiction; and the specific lands on which they live. Many jurisdictions across North America classify buffalo as livestock regardless of whether a herd is wild or farmed, greatly limiting the level of protection they receive. The differing objectives and needs for stewardship of wild herds compared to farmed herds complicate efforts towards recovery of wild buffalo across their historic range. In Canada, regulatory authority over conservation and management of wild buffalo is shared between the federal and provincial levels of government. Provincial governments claim regulatory authority over wildlife based on their law-making powers over local matters, property, and civil rights within their provincial boundaries.[1] Provincial

[1] Stéphane Wojciechowski et al, "SARA's Safety Net Provisions and the Effectiveness of Species at Risk Protection on Non-Federal Lands" (2011) 22:3 Journal of Environmental Law and Practice 203 at 204.

governments also claim ownership of most public lands and resources within their boundaries and this extends to wildlife as part of the land under the common law.[2] Based on these sources of authority, all provincial governments have laws in place that restrict when, where, how, and by whom wildlife can be captured, harvested, possessed, and sold, as well as protections against the alteration or destruction of their habitats.[3] However, wild buffalo will only benefit from these legal protections in provinces where they have been formally classified as wildlife.

Canada's federal government has regulatory authority over interjurisdictional and international populations of wildlife, as well as wildlife on federal lands. It can therefore exercise regulatory authority over wild buffalo on federal lands, such as national parks. However, this does not mean that the federal government has *exclusive* regulatory authority over wildlife on federal lands. Provincial wildlife laws may still apply in relation to the protection of wildlife on federal lands where there is no direct conflict with federal law.[4]

Additional legal protections exist for wildlife recognized as species at risk of extinction or extirpation. The federal government exercises regulatory authority over species at risk through the *Species at Risk Act* (*SARA*). This law aims to help fulfill Canada's commitments under the *United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity*. An independent committee of wildlife experts and scientists known as COSEWIC (the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada) provides recommendations to the federal government as to what species should be protected under *SARA* based on the best available evidence from Western science and Indigenous knowledge. However, the federal government has the discretion to reject these recommendations and its decisions on the protection of species reflect a mix of politics and science.

If a species is listed under *SARA* as threatened, endangered, or extirpated, this triggers an obligation on the part of the Government of Canada to prepare a recovery strategy in consultation with relevant provinces, territories, and Indigenous organizations.[5] Recovery strategies must describe major threats to the listed species and its habitat, identify its critical habitat, and otherwise address what must be done to stop or reverse the decline of the species within Canada.[6] There are also prohibitions set out in *SARA* that make it an offence to kill, harm, harass, capture, take, possess, collect, buy, sell, or trade wildlife that is listed as a threatened, endangered, or extirpated species.[7] It is an offence to damage or destroy the habitat of these species as well.[8] These prohibitions generally only apply to wildlife on federal lands or over which the federal government has more specific jurisdiction (i.e., migratory birds and aquatic animals).

[2] Priscilla Kennedy & John Donihee, "Wildlife and the Canadian Constitution" (2006) Canadian Institute of Resources Law – Canadian Wildlife Project at 4.
[3] See Monique Passelac-Ross, "Overview of Provincial Wildlife Laws" (2006) Canadian Institute of Resources Law.
[4] *Ibid* at 7-9.
[5] *Species at Risk Act*, SC 2002, c 29, s 39.
[6] *Species at Risk Act*, SC 2002, c 29, s 41.
[7] *Species at Risk Act*, SC 2002, c 29, ss 32(1) & 32(2).
[8] *Species at Risk Act*, SC 2002, c 29, s 33.

However, the federal government can apply these prohibitions to provincial lands through emergency protection orders where it is of the opinion that provincial laws do not effectively protect the species or its residences.[9]

Some provincial governments have their own specialized legislation for species at risk while others regulate species at risk through provincial wildlife statutes. Provincial designation of wildlife as species at risk provide another source of legal protections for these species and their habitat that applies on provincial lands.

Indigenous peoples across Canada have constitutionally protected harvesting rights that could supersede federal and provincial wildlife and species at risk legislation where they conflict. Conservation is seen as a valid reason for federal and provincial governments to regulate and limit Indigenous harvesting activities. However, federal and provincial governments must consult with Indigenous peoples prior to doing so and must ensure that regulations and limits are proportional and only limit these harvesting rights as much as necessary.[10] Some federal and provincial laws contain provisions that clarify the limits of their application to Indigenous harvesting activities (e.g., exemption from licence requirements). In other provinces, there may be policies that limit the enforcement of these laws against Indigenous harvesters. As constitutional rights can override legislative provisions, the wording of federal and provincial laws is not always determinative.

SARA authorizes use of agreements for collaborative approaches to conservation efforts between federal, provincial, territorial, and Indigenous governments, among others.[11] Agreements between First Nations and the federal government are in place to support conservation efforts for boreal caribou, for example, and one is in place for federal and provincial collaboration for conservation of two herds of Wood Buffalo in Alberta. Likewise, the Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management has a Letter of Intent in place for collaboration between Canada, the United States, and Mexico for Buffalo conservation.

Plains Buffalo have been assessed by COSEWIC as warranting protection under *SARA* as a threatened species. Environment and Climate Change Canada is currently considering whether to list Plains Buffalo under *SARA* based on this advice. Plains Buffalo does not yet benefit from any of SARA's protections as a result. It has not been listed as a species at risk under any provincial or territorial law either. It is recognized as wildlife in Saskatchewan and British Columbia, but treated as livestock in Manitoba and Alberta, with limited exceptions.

[9] *Species at Risk Act*, SC 2002, c 29, s 34.
[10] See e.g., *R v Sparrow*, [1990] 1 SCR 1075.
[11] *Species at Risk Act*, SC 2002, c 29, s 11.

Wood Buffalo are listed as threatened under *SARA* and recognized as a species at risk under various provincial and territorial laws. Yet there are wild Wood Buffalo herds on provincial lands that are harvested pursuant to provincial licences or Indigenous harvesting rights.	
Prepared by:	Benjamin Ralston
Originated:	January 16, 2025

Briefing Note – What Does Wild Mean?

Purpose
To describe what "wild" means for Plains Buffalo.
Recommendations
A wider range of interpretations of wild are needed to enable the greatest amount of Plains Buffalo rematriation. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature's, Bison Specialist Group and others will provide a way of more clearly defining the range of possibilities for "wild" Plains Buffalo. Wild Plains Buffalo are needed to restore cultural and spiritual relationships with Indigenous Peoples while revitalizing grassland ecosystems and increasing access to buffalo for food security, human health, and wildlife viewing.
Key Considerations and Options
Wild occurs across a spectrum of possibilities. Wild Plains Buffalo means more free-ranging, with less management interventions, on larger areas of open space that have minimal or no interior fencing.
Conclusions and Next Steps
Wild Plains Buffalo exist in scattered herds in landscapes across the Great Plains of North America even though they may be legally considered domestic livestock. They have been described variously as presentation herds, cultural herds, and free-ranging herds. The lack of legal status for wild Plains Buffalo is a barrier to expanding the hoofprint of Plains Buffalo on the Great Plains of Canada and providing benefits to Indigenous Peoples and grasslands. The work of IUCN will assist in further defining what "wild" means for Plains Buffalo.
Background
The legal limbo of not having wild as well as species at risk status for Plains Buffalo is hampering attempts to rematriate the species, and creates barriers to the ecological recovery of this iconic keystone species in the wild. In the United States, the National Bison Legacy Act in 2016, cites, among many other findings, the bison's importance as a "historical symbol of the United States," its "benefit to grasslands," and its

"historical, cultural and economic significance...to the heritage of the United States".[12] Despite this, few jurisdictions recognize wild status for Plains Buffalo. In follow-up to the IUCN 2022 American Bison Green Status Assessment, the committee is developing a deeper dive application of the Green Status process for specific American bison sub-populations, including Plains Buffalo. This will result in a scorecard for bison herds. The herd must score 80% or higher to be considered "wild." There are 7 criteria with different weights and this process does allow for the inclusion of subpopulations as aspirational and open to future management as wildlife. *See also Policy Briefing Note*	
Prepared by:	Cliff Wallis, Dan Fox, Candice Pete-Cardoso
Originated:	January 13, 2025

[12] American Prairie Reserve Bison Grazing Proposal – Scientific Basis and References

Briefing Note – "Wild" Buffalo and Livestock

Purpose
To describe how livestock and wild Plains Buffalo provide different benefits and challenges.
Recommendations
There is a need for maintaining the genetic diversity of Plains Buffalo and preventing further introgression with cattle genes. There is a need to continue disease testing prior to Plains Buffalo rematriation. Option 1: Wild Plains Buffalo should remain separated from cattle for both genetic and disease issues. Option 2: Wild Plains Buffalo and domestic cattle can be stocked on the same landscape. *See also "Wild Buffalo From Canada to Mexico" Briefing Note*
Key Considerations and Options
Wild Plains Buffalo need larger areas of open space with minimal interior fencing. Management of wild buffalo and cattle are not always compatible with logistical considerations and management approaches. Wild Plains Buffalo will be year-round ("continuous") grazers in sufficiently large landscapes. Current practices for disease testing prior to Plains Buffalo rematriation are effective in preventing disease transmission.
Conclusions and Next Steps
There is room on the Great Plains for domestic livestock including cattle and Plains Buffalo as well as for free-roaming wild Plains Buffalo. Plains Buffalo are a keystone species, uniquely adapted to Great Plains grasslands, and are capable of providing ecological services with the least amount of management and fencing. There are issues with disease transmission that can be and are being addressed to ensure Plains Buffalo stay healthy and to alleviate the concerns of Indigenous Peoples as well as those of the agricultural and conservation communities.

Large native grasslands are needed to conserve a variety of biodiversity, including Plains Buffalo.

Areas for Plains Buffalo rematriation must be identified and secured.

Partnerships are needed to ensure successful Plains Buffalo rematriation.

Background

Properly stocked, both domestic livestock and Plains Buffalo can play a role in grassland biodiversity conservation but Plains Buffalo evolved since time immemorial on the Great Plains of North America and are adapted to the extremes of climate in this natural region.

Plains Buffalo, properly tested and quarantined prior to rematriation, have not been known to transmit disease to domestic livestock.

The US Natural Resources Conservation Service concluded that stocking rate and weather account for the majority of variability associated with plant and animal production on grasslands and there were minimal differences on wildlife and vegetation resulting from rotational versus continuous grazing.[13]

Allowing Plains Buffalo to graze across larger landscapes contributes to vegetation and wildlife diversity and, compared to cattle, reduces pressure on riparian habitats. *See Footnote 1*

In contrast to cattle, Plains Buffalo are adapted to forage in deep snow and they create wallows. There are secondary benefits from Plains Buffalo trails through deep snow that allow Pronghorn and deer to more easily move through the grasslands after heavier snowfalls while the wallows support wetland species, species of conservation concern, and increased forb growth. Plains Buffalo and cattle can coexist on the same landscape and there are no reports of Plains Buffalo attempting to breed cattle in open range. *See Footnote 1*

Plains Buffalo consume proportionally more grass than cattle, exhibit greater daily movements over larger areas, spend less time at water, and forage at greater distances from water.[14]

Buffalo herds undergoing purposeful selection for commercial purposes, such as docility and body conformation, can develop genetic differences in morphology, behavior and physiology compared to wild buffalo and may affect cold hardiness[15] Genetic conservation remains a conservation priority.

[13] American Prairie Reserve Bison Grazing Proposal – Scientific Basis and References
[14] Plumb, G.E., and J.L. Dodd. 1993. Foraging ecology of bison and cattle on mixed prairie: implications for natural area management. *Ecological Applications* 3:631-643.
[15] Boyd, D.P., G.A. Wilson, J.N. Derr and N.D. Halbert. 2010a. Chapter 4, Genetics. Pages 19-25 in C.C. Gates et al. (eds), *American Bison: Status Survey and Conservation Guidelines 2010*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.

Large areas of native grassland are preferred for Plains Buffalo rematriation. Conservation of Plains Buffalo will contribute to biodiversity goals through native grassland conservation.	
Prepared by:	Cliff Wallis, Dan Fox
Originated:	January 13, 2025

Briefing Note – "Wild" Buffalo from Canada to Mexico

Purpose
We are seeking common ground on rematriating Plains Buffalo as a wild species on the Canadian Plains as part of a larger effort from Canada to Mexico.
Recommendations
To do that, we need policy and legislation including designation of Plains Buffalo as a Species at Risk federally, and designation of Plains Buffalo as wildlife provincially, public support (social license), identification of the types of lands (e.g., existing protected areas; public lands; private conservancies; reserves) that would have the highest potential for Plains Buffalo rematriation.
Key Considerations and Options
Rematriation of Plains Buffalo is an essential part of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples on the Canadian Plains. Plains Buffalo are being successfully rematriated from northern Mexico to Canada, on private lands, Indigenous-managed lands, and public lands. They play or will play a vital role in grassland ecosystems and grassland people's cultures and economies. A Plains Bison Reintroduction and Restoration Assessment Tool is in draft form (Great Plains Conservation Network Bison Working Group). The Trilateral (Canada, Mexico, USA) signed Letters of Intent on buffalo and grasslands in 2024 to further their conservation. A North American Bison Summit will be held in Loveland Colorado April 1-4, 2025 and the organizers have indicated that it would be helpful to receive a Canadian position statement there.
Conclusions and Next Steps
It is not a question of if we will have wild Plains Buffalo, it is a question of where and how we might accomplish that successfully. *Next Steps:* Work with the Grassland Conservation Network Bison Working Group to improve the applicability of the Plains Bison Reintroduction and Restoration Assessment Tool for Plains Buffalo rematriation in Canada. Have Canadian representatives from the Wild Buffalo Summit attend the North American Bison Summit.

Continue to press Canada's provincial governments to list Plains Buffalo as a wild species.

Support the process of listing Plains Buffalo as a Threatened Species under Canada's Species at Risk Act with clear safeguards for Indigenous Rights.

Address concerns from agricultural interests to dispel misinformation and identify approaches to mitigating mutually agreed upon issues.

Background (What is Currently Happening with Plains Buffalo?)

All signatories to the Buffalo Treaty, including at least 34 from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, agree to the purpose/ objective of the Treaty: "It is our collective intention to recognize BUFFALO as a wild free-ranging animal and as an important part of the ecological system."

Canada

- There are small herds of buffalo, commercial, cultural, and wild in scattered areas across the Canadian Plains but they are missing from most of Canada's grasslands habitats.
- Environment and Climate Change Canada/Canadian Wildlife Service is pursuing a Threatened Species listing process for Plains Bison under Canada's Species at Risk Act.
- Parks Canada has been working with Indigenous Peoples to restore wild Plains Buffalo in Banff National Park and appear to be open to the idea for Waterton Lakes National Park.
- In Manitoba, Agriculture and Agri-food Canada have done work with the Swan Lake First Nation bison herd as well as Sioux Valley Dakota Nation (SVDN) through capacity building partnerships. These supported the communities' efforts on biodiversity monitoring, improved pasture and riparian area management, and rotational grazing planning. In SVDN, they helped with field studies to identify pastures for buffalo.
- Leadership from First Nations in Alberta have asked for Plains Bison to have a wild designation.
- A private land conservancy (Nature Conservancy of Canada) has rematriated Plains Buffalo on Old Man on his Back Plateau in Southern Saskatchewan
- Indigenous Peoples in all three Prairie Provinces have started the process of rematriating Plains Buffalo to the prairie and aspen parkland ecosystems.
- The Blackfeet in Montana reintroduced Plains Buffalo adjacent the Canadian Border and individuals made it into southwestern Alberta in 2023 before being rounded up and sent back to Montana.
- Alberta Wilderness Association is in discussion with Alberta about a Plains Buffalo Policy.

United States

- U.S. Department of the Interior's 2020 Bison Conservation Initiative explicitly affirms the Department's commitment to the "*restoration of wild bison herds and shared stewardship of those herds with Tribes and others.*"
- Secretarial Order 3410, signed by Secretary Haaland will provide $25 million from the Inflation Reduction Act to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge in bison restoration efforts. (Also see Secretarial Order 3342 regarding other collaboration opportunities.)

- A Bison Shared Stewardship Strategy was crafted under formal, national Tribal Consultation and follows up on Order 3410 to "in*spire, encourage, and empower the ecocultural restoration of large, new herds of wild bison by diverse partnerships across the country for generations to come.*"

Mexico
There are free roaming herds of Plains Buffalo in northern Mexico in Coahuila and Chihuahua. Indigenous Peoples are part of the process of reconnecting Plains Buffalo to desert grasslands.

Prepared by:	Cheyenne Ironman, Cliff Wallis, Dan Fox, Joely BigEagle
Originated:	January 10, 2025

Briefing Note – Lands for Buffalo Rematriation

Purpose
Much has changed since large buffalo herds last roamed the Canadian Prairies, and rematriation efforts must account for factors such as land tenure, fragmentation, and competing land uses.
Recommendations
Participants should consider key rematriation principles and objectives that will allow land use planning decisions (i.e herd sizes, management conditions) and identify suitable lands.
Key Considerations and Options
Herd size • Herd sizes vary greatly, from only a few animals to hundreds or thousands. Yellowstone National Park has one of the largest herds of Plains Bison at roughly 5,400 while around 3,000 wood bison roam in Wood Buffalo National Park. A smaller herd of 5 to 20 individuals has been kept in Waterton National Park historically. From 16 animals introduced to Banff National Park in 2017, the herd has now grown to over 130. • Average herd size of commercial bison was 151 (Canadian Bison Association, 2021). • Minimum viable population of bison determined through western science to be self-sustaining is 400 (Gates et al. 2001, Gross et al. 2006). For conservation, a minimum 5,000 individuals is suggested for long-term persistence, regardless of species (Traill et al. 2010), although this is strongly debated (Curtis et al. 2011). Area • Bison generally graze over a much larger area than cattle. Area required to house bison depends strongly on land quality/type, herd size, and management. • Bison have been recorded moving about 3 km per day (McHugh et al. 1958, Meagher 1986), though movement depends on seasonality and environment (McMillan et al. 2021). • American Prairie has a goal of maintaining 5,000 bison across 3.2 million acres. Social Factors • Bison rematriation often plays into reconciliation and social justice factors, in addition to their importance to plains Indigenous cultures. They have been described to provide a reconnection to the land and a healing of the community. • Conflicts can arise with ranchers and producers over land availability, grazing and crop destruction, disease and destruction of property. Conflicts also arise with other land

users, including through human-wildlife conflict and concerns for public safety and infrastructure. In order for herds to be able to roam, these conflicts need to be resolved.

Management Objectives

- Cultural herds – herds managed by Indigenous nations to support a variety of objectives, including for restoration purposes, traditional use and harvest.
- Conservation herds – usually managed by organizations to protect and preserve bison and their genetic diversity. The main purpose is generally to maintain the health of the herd, and/or to restore their ecological function on the landscape. These objectives can overlap significantly with cultural herds.
- Livestock – the main purpose of raising bison as livestock is for their meat, and the occurrence of these herds can be strongly influenced by market factors. While these herds can still support conservation objectives for land, they are primarily economy driven.

Lands

- The Canadian prairies consist of mainly (~75%) privately owned lands and are highly fragmented. Only a few larger sections remain (i.e., CFB Suffield).
- Federal: National Parks, National Wildlife Areas, Canadian Forces Bases.
- Provincial: Public lands, community pastures, Parks and Protected Areas.
- Indigenous lands: Buffalo Treaty nations, options for land acquisition.
- Private lands: land trusts, collective ownership.

Conclusions and Next Steps

There remain lands available for bison rematriation, including largely intact tracts of native prairie, and bison return provides many ecological benefits. There is not a single solution to where bison reintroduction could occur, and the land requirements may change depending on herd size and management objectives.

Questions for discussion:

1. What are the land requirements for a self-sustaining bison herd (i.e., area, ecosystem conditions)?
2. What does tenure look like (i.e., can it be mixed cattle/bison)?
3. What are the social factors that need to be considered?

4. What are the options for partnerships or management (i.e., Indigenous guardianship)?
5. What are the difficulties that need to be solved or may be encountered in approaching landowners/governments?
6. Are there any areas that may be easier to open for bison grazing? Prioritize these regions.

Background

Canada's landscape has changed extensively since massive herds of bison once roamed freely across North America. Roads and fences cross the land, and most of the grasslands have been converted for crop farming, housing, infrastructure or industrial development. What remains of native prairie is limited and fragmented. Still, larger landscapes of grassland persist. These areas are found on federal, provincial and private lands. They could be considered and prioritized for rematriation projects.

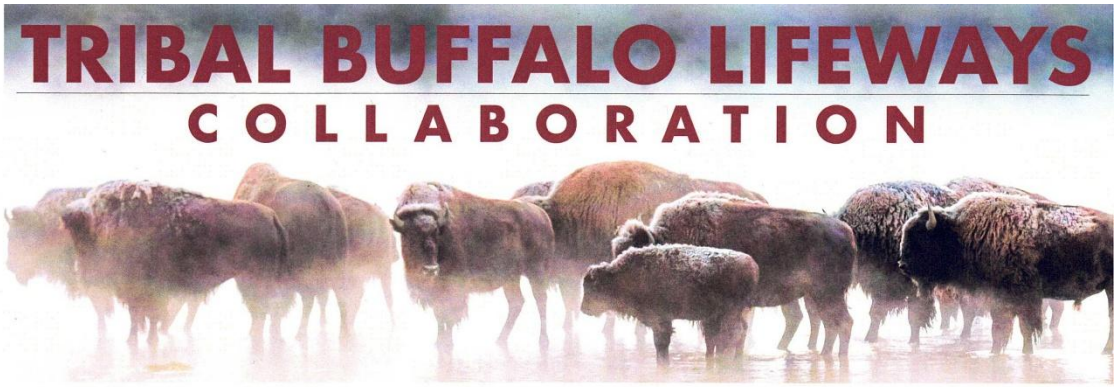
Appendices

Resources

- Defenders of Wildlife has been working on a tool to identify ideal lands for bison reintroduction.
- *Enhancing the Reintroduction of Plains Bison in Banff National Park Through Cultural Monitoring and Traditional Knowledge*
- *Social and Ecological Dimensions of Restoration through Bison Reintroduction by the Amskapi Piikani*
- Parks Canada on Indigenous leaderships and bison
- Alberta Parks and Protected Areas
- Saskatchewan Protected and Conserved Areas Network
- Manitoba Parks and Protected Spaces

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Originated:	Dec. 20, 2024

Tribal Buffalo Lifeways Collaboration



In a historic public-private partnership, the Department of the Interior (DOI) and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is collaborating with the InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC), Native Americans in Philanthropy (NAP), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to bring lasting structural change and national commitment to Tribal-led buffalo restoration, while leveraging historic federal investments and policy changes. The Tribal Buffalo Lifeways Collaboration (TBLC), a new philanthropic and non-profit endeavor founded by ITBC, NAP, TNC, and WWF officially signed its charter in June 2024. This historic alliance was created to stabilize, establish, and expand Tribal-led buffalo (bison) restoration, while fostering cultural, spiritual, ecological, and economic revitalization within Native communities.

VISION:

TBLC's vision is to increase awareness, advocate for, and mobilize resources in support of Tribal-led buffalo programs within the United States. The Collaboration offers an unprecedented opportunity to support Tribal-led buffalo programs for generations to come. Collaborators respect the Indigenous values of buffalo restoration and support the establishment, stabilization, and expansion of each unique, sovereign Tribal buffalo program for cultural, spiritual, ecological, and economic revitalization.

BACKGROUND:

On March 3, 2023, the Secretary of the Interior issued Order 3410—"Restoration of American Bison and the Prairie Grasslands." This order directs all DOI bureaus to work to restore wild and healthy populations of American (plains) bison and prairie grassland ecosystems through collaboration among the DOI bureaus, states, other federal agencies, and Tribes. The DOI also challenged non-governmental organizations to collaborate on strategies to implement Tribal buffalo restoration and enhancement.



On right: © Bruce Flareau, Above: © Thomas Sjazner

In response to this order and the DOI's challenge, the Collaboration brought together ITBC Tribal herd managers at a gathering in September 2023. Forty-one participants from 31 Tribes across 13 states convened to discuss the status of ITBC member Tribes' buffalo programs and their priorities. The values, goals, and needs articulated by herd managers during that gathering have been integral to the formation of the Collaboration and are reflected in its charter.

GUIDING VALUES:

Cultural Preservation: Buffalo have and will always be a part of Native culture and traditions. As buffalo are restored, Native lifeways will be restored for future generations.

Tribal Sovereignty: All funding initiatives will support eligible entities and Tribal Governments as sovereign nations, in each Tribe's determination of Tribal buffalo program priorities, cultural practices, and services to Tribal membership.

Strong Communities: Bringing buffalo back will support food sovereignty and healthy diets for Native children, elders, and relatives so that they can live long and happy lives.

Economic Development: The return of the Tribal buffalo economy allows for self-sustaining, revenue generating communities and Native-owned businesses.

Buffalo Herd Health: The Collaboration must support and fight for the survival of buffalo herds by balancing their wild natural behaviors with disease prevention, genetic diversity, and by earning their trust through excellent handling and management.

Spiritual Relationship: Buffalo must be respected as our relatives. Restoration of the buffalo on Tribal lands will help heal the spirit and ensure the survival of both Tribal people and the buffalo.

Ecological Restoration: Buffalo are keystone species that repair and heal our lands. Regionally specific conservation and restoration must be lead with Indigenous knowledge.

COLLABORATION GOALS:

TBLC partners will work towards achieving the purpose of this Collaboration by focusing on four primary goals:

1. **Stabilize existing Tribal buffalo programs and ITBC.**
2. **Establish new Tribal buffalo program and expand current programs.**
3. **Support Tribal Buffalo Lifeways through economic development, community engagement, and policy efforts.**
4. **Develop culturally-appropriate, accurate, and inspiring communications that generate collective impact and widespread support for Tribal buffalo restoration.**

FUNDING FOCUS AREAS:

In order to meet the Collaboration Goals and in balance with the Guiding Values, the Collaboration funding focuses on four main areas:

1. **Tribal Herd Stabilization:** Tribal herd managers emphasize the importance of an equal distribution of funds among Tribes to ensure that each has a strong base to protect the buffalo already in their care.
2. **Infrastructure & Grasslands Management:** Taking good care of current herds and expanding new herds requires building and maintaining infrastructure such as fencing, water infrastructure, and grasslands management and restoration.
3. **Land & Leasing:** Interest in conserving grasslands and growing herds in Indian Country is boundless but limited by access to land.
4. **Food Sovereignty:** Ensuring the culturally appropriate processing of buffalo for community nourishment and income stabilization is key for Tribal communities and herd health maintenance.

EARLY ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Although the collaboration is still early in its tenure, some impressive accomplishments have already been achieved. These include:

1. **Infrastructure & Grasslands Management:** With support from the Collaboration, ITBC applied for and won more than $62 million from the USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). This program reimburses for conservation activities done for the Tribal herds and will cover: 1) water infrastructure, 2) fencing, 3) prescribed fire, 4) prescribed grazing, and 5) grasslands restoration/management and conservation infrastructure projects. To our knowledge, this is the largest federal investment ever received for Tribal buffalo programs.
2. **Land & Leasing:** Under TNC's leadership, the Collaboration worked together to purchase and protect the Dakota Partnership Ranch. The 26,276-acre ranch, which is located near the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and the South Unit of the Badlands National Park in South Dakota and is of great cultural and ecological significance to the Lakota. With WWF's support, the matriarchs of the ranch's existing buffalo herd were protected and will remain on the land to lead future members of the herd. This historic purchase was made to further Tribal buffalo conservation. In the future, the ranch and herd will be transferred to Indigenous leadership for management.



Bison Industry Profile: October 5, 2024

Bison Industry Profile October 2024

The Canadian Bison Association

The Canadian Bison Association (CBA) is a national not-for-profit organization that was registered under the Canadian Livestock Pedigree Act in 1984. The CBA is an umbrella organization for the regional affiliate associations who appoint members to the board. Provinces from Quebec to British Columbia have an association with producers in Atlantic Canada and the Territories choosing one of the regional organizations in which to participate. Each region appoints two Board members with Alberta and Saskatchewan appointing three members to the 15-member Board. Because of the close working relationship with the National Bison Association (NBA) in the US, an international board member is appointed by the NBA.

The Canadian Bison Association is member driven (approximately 500 members) and represents the interests of the bison industry. The CBA is responsible for providing guidance on a number of issues including marketing, animal health, research, animal identification, government liaison, trade, traceability, the bison registry, conservation and other developmental initiatives.

The Canadian Bison Association is led by a President who is elected from one of the board members appointed by the regional associations. The CBA office is managed by an Executive Director, an Office Administrator and a Project Coordinator with contract staff hired when required.

Industry Overview

Most bison in Canada are raised commercially on private lands. Some bison exist in public herds on public lands and on land controlled by organizations whose objective is to increase bison number through conservation herds.

The Canadian bison population according to the 2021 census was 149,539 head on 989 farms which was above the 119,314 bison reported on 975 farms in the 2016 census.

Table 1. Canadian Bison Population Estimates, Statistics Canada

	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021	2021 % Change from 2016
BC	6,245	8,964	12,656	9,206	6,504	14,888	**+228.9%**
AB	22,782	79,821	97,366	57,483	54,907	65,405	**+19.1%**
Sask.	7,006	34,781	57,395	39,334	40,418	52,860	**+30.7%**
MB	4,621	13,473	19,609	14,116	14,025	11,725	**-16.4%**
ON	2,344	3,755	4,106	2,320	1,843	2,974	**+61.4%**
QC	2,236	4,192	4,322	2,380	1,538	1,682	**+9.4%**
Atlantic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	79	n/a	**n/a**
National	**45,235**	**144,950**	**195,728**	**125,142**	**119,314**	**149,539**	**+25%**

In Canada, 96.9% % of the bison are raised in the four western provinces where 92.0% of the producers are located.

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Table 2. Farms and Ranches Reporting Bison

	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021	2021 % Change from 2016
BC	57	98	121	71	55	48	**-12.7%**
AB	334	950	869	571	445	472	**+6.1%**
SK	175	562	597	352	303	308	**+1.6%**
MB	73	157	166	108	86	82	**- 4.6%**
ON	46	58	71	60	49	52	**+6.1%**
QC	56	58	69	45	34	26	**-23.5%**
Atlantic	n/a	n/a	3	2	2	n/a	**n/a**
National	**745**	**1,887**	**1,898**	**1,211**	**975**	**989**	**+1.4%**

The Commercial Bison Industry

Although bison have roamed the North American Plains for centuries, the bison industry in Canada is less than 50 years old. It is served by an infrastructure that includes feed companies, transport companies, veterinarians, handling equipment manufacturers, slaughter facilities and marketers. The industry is comprised of cow/calf, backgrounding, and finishing operations with some producers raising and marketing breeding stock. Producers and industry stakeholders have developed a code of practice for the care and handling of bison.

Bison are harvested in Canada for the domestic, U.S. and European markets. Presently, about 80% of the bison produced in Canada are exported to the US for harvesting or as feeder animals. The US is the strongest bison market in the world. Over the last five years the slaughter numbers in Canada have been relatively stable. The growth in Canadian bison numbers has been absorbed by the U.S. marketplace. In 2019, just over 20,000 animals were exported to the US. By 2023 exports almost doubled to 39,170 head. Total farm gate bison sales for 2023 are estimated at $125 - $150 million.

Table 3. Commercial bison industry Data # Of Bison/Year

Category	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Federal Slaughter, CAD	8,088	5,853	7,276	8,255	7,198
Provincial Slaughter, CAD	1,411	1,925	2,522	2,537	2,463
Federal USA Slaughter	54,051	63,056	66,093	71,701	74,849
USA State Slaughter Est.	5,700	6,500	8,000	8,000	7,000
Total Slaughter North America	69,250	77,334	83,891	90,493	91,510
Total Canadian bison slaughter as % of total North American slaughter.	13.7	10.0	11.7	11.9	10.6
CDN Finished Bison Exports to U.S.	14,598	19,447	19,468	22,743	27,470
Export of Feeder Bison from Canada to U.S.	5,471	5,127	8,518	9,572	11,700
Total Live Bison Exports to U.S. from Canada	20,060	24,574	27,986	32,362	39,170

Plains and Wood Bison

Wood and plains bison are indigenous to North America. Plains bison significantly outnumber wood bison in North America. Commercial producers raise plains, wood, and/or plains/wood crosses.

Until recently, the commercial producers and the conservation community used historical records and phenotypic assessment to differentiate wood and plains bison. Through research and development initiatives lead by the Canadian Bison Association and supported by the academic community and several bison stakeholders, genomic tools have been developed to differentiate wood and plains bison and measure the composition of crosses. These tools are invaluable for producers to understand the genetic inventory of their herd. It gives producers the ability to maintain the segregation of subspecies and more accurately contribute to subspecies growth. Also, bison genetics would be available as required to maintain the genetic diversity of public herds or to replace herds that may be affected by disease.

Bison Producers are Conservationists

Bison producers understand the value of a keystone specie. They recognize the importance of healthy soil, healthy pastures, clean water, biodiversity and bison's contribution to the ecological landscape. They also recognize the important contribution that livestock can make to slowing climate change.

Bison producers taking care of their resources is the foundation of their businesses. Producing healthy animals sustainably for consumers allows them to grow their business and the commercial bison herd. From the brink of extinction with less than 1,000 animals in the late 1800s, the herd has grown to an estimated 425,000 - 450,000 head in North America. What an amazing conservation success story.

For More information on the Canadian Bison Association go to:

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