

Bison



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Most people in the United States call these animals buffalo, but bison is their scientific name. True buffalo are found in Africa and Asia.

Bison are the largest land animals in North America. An adult bison stands about six feet tall at the shoulders and can weigh as much as 2,000 pounds. About 150 years ago, 30 million of these huge animals wandered the American plains.

Native Americans depended on bison to live. They used bison for food, clothing, tools, shelter, and fuel. The bison also played a central part in the religion and stories of many Native Americans.

Centuries of hunting by Native Americans did not reduce the country's bison population. That's because Native Americans hunted only for what they needed. But between 1800 and 1900, white settlers and hunters killed almost all of the bison. Bison became endangered, and their numbers fell to about 2,000 animals. Settlers shot bison to make room for cattle, which they wanted

to raise on the plains. Hunters sold bison hides for high prices, so they shot as many bison as they could.

In 1894, Congress banned bison hunting. Over the next century, bison began to make a comeback. About 20,000 bison now live freely on the plains, where millions once roamed. Wild herds also live in several national parks, such as Yellowstone National Park.

Native Americans are bringing bison back to their tribal lands, too. The bison may help to restore some land in that ecosystem. All of the plants, animals, and nonliving things in an area work together to make up the area's ecosystem. Bison help the ecosystem by moving continuously while they are grazing. In this way, they don't overgraze the tall grasses that protect smaller animals, such as prairie dogs.

In the early 1900s, bison almost became extinct. Today, their numbers are growing. This animal of the American West is once again grazing and roaming the prairie.



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