

THE NORTH AMERICAN BISON: NATIONAL MAMMAL OF THE UNITED STATES



While less than 5% of bison truly run wild today, where they roam they help recover lost grasslands and biodiversity.

On May 9, 2016, President Barack Obama signed the [National Bison Legacy Act](#) (NBLA), which officially adopted the North American bison as the National Mammal of the United States. Our country's largest land animal, the bison stands up to six feet tall at the shoulder and can weigh up to a ton. Its place in American history is unrivaled among species. Support for bison by the [American Bison Coalition](#) (ABC) is based upon three **guiding principles**: **resilience**, respecting the bison's rebound from near extinction; **unity**, recognizing that they brought together so many diverse interests to save the species; and, as bison return to the places where they serve a critical role in the wellbeing of the land and the people who live on it, **healthy landscapes and communities**.

ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL MAMMAL

Bison are America's most iconic mammal. Native prairie and wood bison live on ranches in all 50 states and in herds located in parks, refuges, national forests and grasslands, Tribal lands, and private conservancies. They are vital to the cultural identity of many Native Americans and continue to serve as a source of sustenance and economic security. Bison are profiled on coins, represented on State flags, depicted on the Department of the Interior's seal, and are used by many organizations and businesses as a bold symbol of American ideals. **National Bison Day**, honored the past four years by a [Senate resolution](#), is also celebrated every year on the first Saturday of November with events held across the country.

Passage of the NBLA was the culmination of a four-year effort led by the ABC, Senators John Hoeven (R-ND) and Martin Heinrich (D-NM), and Representatives William Lacy Clay (D-MO), Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE), Kristi Noem (R-SD), and José Serrano (D-NY). The NBLA passed without opposition, as legislators recognized the bison's historical, cultural and economic value to Americans in the 21st Century.

AMERICAN BISON COALITION

Championing the National Mammal is the ABC, a collaborative organization approaching 100 members, uniting rural communities, Native American Tribes, wildlife conservationists, ranchers, recreationists, zoos, educators, hunters and others dedicated to promulgating the three principles of unity, resilience, and healthy landscapes associated with the National Mammal. ABC leadership is composed of the [InterTribal Buffalo Council](#), with 62 tribes in 19 states restoring bison to tribal lands, the [National Bison Association](#), with over 1,000 producers, processors, and



National Bison Association's (NBA) Dave Carter, WCS' John Calvelli, Rep. Noem, Rep. Fortenberry, Sen. Hoeven, Rep. Clay, Sen. Heinrich and Rep. Serrano announce NBLA's passage.

marketers in 49 states, and the [Wildlife Conservation Society](#), an international NGO based at the Bronx Zoo that has worked on recovering bison populations since co-founding the American Bison Society with President Theodore Roosevelt over a century ago.

THE STORY OF THE AMERICAN BISON

Tens of millions of bison roamed from Alaska to Mexico, and coast to coast. Integral to Native American sustenance, spirituality and customs, they also fed and clothed early settlers. By nature, bison also regenerate landscapes, producing homes and food for wildlife. But by 1876, **bison were all but gone**, concluded by a dark chapter where 1 million bison were killed in just 3 years—the piles of rotting carcasses a haunting vision of pillage and waste that also cost many Native American lives.

In 1905, visionary ranchers, Tribes, industrialists, hunters and conservationists joined President Roosevelt in a monumental effort to reverse the bison's demise. A handful of the remaining bison were sent to the [Bronx Zoo](#), where they were bred to replenish herds on public lands. Two years later, 15 animals traveled by train to Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma; and, in 1913, several more went to Wind Cave National Park. This early campaign to save the last few hundred bison evolved into the first major return of a nearly extinct species back into its natural habitat and is one of the **first great successes of the modern conservation movement**.



Interior Secretary Sally Jewell joined NBA President Roy Liedtke and other leaders to celebrate our new National Mammal at the National Museum of the American Indian.



Steve Zack © WCS

A Blackfoot Indian performs the Buffalo Dance.

A NEW CHAPTER FOR BISON

The small population secured in states like South Dakota, Montana, and Oklahoma helped spawn today's **5,000 privately ranched herds** of bison that provide meat, wool and leather to growing markets. Bison production on private ranches in rural areas across all 50 states is strong, with the economic value of bison an estimated \$336 million and ranchers doubling their proceeds from production over the last four years.

Zoos, Federal and state public land managers, and Tribes are striving to increase healthy and abundant populations of bison in America. Native Americans are regaining opportunities to re-center their way of life on the buffalo through ITBC efforts to restore bison to about a million acres of Tribal lands. Several have signed the historic [Northern Tribes Buffalo Treaty](#). As bison return to the land, they create rural employment, stimulate business opportunities, and serve many Americans with opportunities to retain traditional rural lifestyles, hike, bike, and tour treasured landscapes with bison, enjoy the challenges of hunting, eat a healthy, lean meat, and generally weave bison into everyday American life. The future for America's National Mammal is bright.

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