

THE BUFFALO AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

An Abstract of a Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the

Department of History of

Western Illinois University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

By

DAVID J. SPRUNG

May 2010

## ABSTRACT

The American buffalo in United States history has had a turbulent relationship with Euro-Americans. This thesis examines the years 1820 to 2009 and the dual roles of economics and culture and how Euro-Americans' relationship with the animals was driven by these two factors. By doing so, a larger context of how Americans interacted with one of the North American continent's most dominant land animals comes into focus. While existing studies tend to analyze profit-making and cultural heritage preservation as separate Euro-American motives, this thesis examines the interplay between the two concepts over a long period of time, illustrating that these two ideas were not fleeting or short lived. Over the course of this study, the ideas behind killing the animals are examined in addition to the motives behind preserving them. Furthermore, a study of the controversies over how to manage what has become an iconic animal are also included in this thesis. Finally, prevailing trends in larger American society are seen too, such as the unrestricted resource use of the Gilded Age and earlier, the development of the conservation movement in the Progressive Era, and the modern public acceptance of the concepts of environmental sustainability and cultural preservation. Throughout all this, the buffalo has played a key role in the Euro-American mindset.

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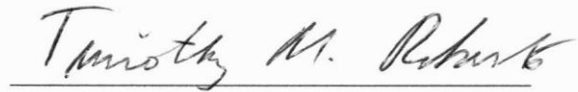
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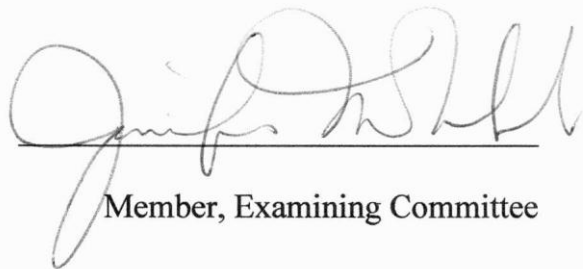
This thesis by DAVID J. SPRUNG is accepted in its present form by the  
Department of History of Western Illinois University as satisfying the thesis requirement  
for the degree of Master of Arts.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Greg Hall", written over a horizontal line.

Chairperson, Examining Committee

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Timothy M. Roberts", written over a horizontal line.

Member, Examining Committee

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jeff M. Hall", written over a horizontal line.

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Date

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(Photo by Frank Walker, 1978, courtesy of the National Park Service)



## INTRODUCTION

The American bison is an animal that evokes strong feelings in Americans today. Not long ago, the bison, more commonly known as buffalo, was the most prolific land mammal on the North American continent.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps more than any other animal on the continent, buffalo played a central role in numerous demographic groups' lives, including Native Americans, Mexicans, and Euro-Americans.<sup>2</sup> Due to such active human involvement, the animals were brought to the verge of extinction by the end of the nineteenth century. Despite their active involvement in the destruction of the animals, some individuals felt guilt for the role people played in destroying an American icon. This shift in thought at the turn of the twentieth century has had a profound effect on the American psyche ever since. While the relationship between the buffalo and man is long and complex and involves numerous ethnic and cultural groups, the focus of this thesis is on Americans' economic and cultural relationship with the animal. The relationship in this case is important to examine, because it shows simultaneously how one species in nature, in this case the buffalo, could come to be important on both a cultural and economic level to a group of people, in this case Americans, who were relative newcomers to interact with the animals. This thesis seeks to prove that cultural and economic motives in tandem were, and continue to be, critical when examining how

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<sup>1</sup> The issue of what to call the animals is discussed shortly. For the purposes of this thesis, the term buffalo is used.

<sup>2</sup> From this point on, the term "Euro-Americans" will be shortened to "Americans." If a different ethnic group is examined, such as Native Americans, that term will be used to clarify which group is being referred to.

Americans deal with an animal they regard (and regarded) as both a source of income and as a symbol of a past era in American history.

My thesis is that cultural and economic factors worked in tandem to shape how Americans have and continue to view buffalo. In three chapters, the thesis examines specific periods of time and the prevailing opinions and worldviews of particular eras in regards to the animals. Chapter One studies the economic and cultural relationship from 1820-1890 from the angle of exploitation. Chapter Two shows the connection between economics, American cultural values, and the buffalo from 1871 to 1914, as individuals were forced to deal with the ramifications of the cultural and economic exploitation of the animals discussed in Chapter One. Chapter Three analyzes how Americans deal with their past relationship with buffalo while balancing economic and cultural ideals and the emergence of new land use and wildlife management techniques from 1914 to the present.

Prior to any further discussion of what each chapter entails, some definitions and scale of the scope of the buffalo's prominence in North America is necessary. The issue of what to call the animal, a bison or a buffalo, is one that has puzzled Americans and scholars for a long time. Scientifically, the animal known as a buffalo is a different species from the animal found in North America. The animal known as a buffalo is found in Africa and Asia. A representative example of this species would be an African Cape Buffalo.<sup>3</sup> The species of animal present in North America is known scientifically as a *Bison bison*.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the technical term for the animal in this thesis is bison.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> J.A. Rorabacher, *The American Buffalo in Transition: A Historical and Economic Survey of the Bison in America* (St. Cloud, MN: North Star Press, 1970), 1.

However, the issue of naming, like the animal's relationship with humans, is far more complex. There is no certain date for when the term "buffalo" became synonymous with the animal, due to numerous terms such as "wild cattle," *cibola*, *boeuf sauvage*, and *buffelo*, among others, all being used at one time or another to describe the animal. The last term, "buffelo," was modified into "buffalo" and adopted by the English early in colonial history, leading to the designation that would forever follow the animal.<sup>6</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, the term was firmly entrenched. Richard I. Dodge, an army officer on the Great Plains in the 1860s and 1870s, wrote soon after his tour of duty, "As buffalo he is known everywhere, not only on the plains but throughout the sporting world; as buffalo he lives and moves and has his being; as buffalo he will die; and when, as must soon happen, his race has vanished from [the] earth, as buffalo he will live in tradition and story."<sup>7</sup> William T. Hornaday, a prominent naturalist of the twentieth century, claimed, "sixty millions of people in this country unite in calling him a 'buffalo,' and know him by no other name..."<sup>8</sup> Even the prominent buffalo biologist, Tom McHugh, resigned himself to being unable to change the popular name of buffalo for

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<sup>4</sup> *Bison bison bison* is the animal found on the Great Plains and throughout most of the historic range of buffalo in North America and the species most Americans are familiar with. *Bison bison athabasca* is another species of bison, commonly known as wood buffalo. Historically, the range of this animal has been much smaller. Physically, there are hardly any differences between the two species. The main differences lie in the habitat of the animals, with wood buffalo preferring more forested areas compared to their plains relatives. For more information about the difference between the two species, see Frank Gilbert Roe, *The North American Buffalo: A Critical Study of the Species in Its Wild State*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951), 26-68.

<sup>5</sup> Tom McHugh, *The Time of the Buffalo* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 5.

<sup>6</sup> J.A. Allen, *The American Bisons, Living and Extinct* (Cambridge, MA: University Press, 1876), 51. For a more complete list of different names given to buffalo by different groups of people, see Roe, *The North American Buffalo*, 681-702.

<sup>7</sup> Richard I. Dodge, *The Hunting Grounds of the Great West: A Description of the Plains, Game, and Indians of the Great North American Desert* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1878), 119.

<sup>8</sup> William Temple Hornaday, *The Extinction of the American Bison* (1889; repr., Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 371.

bison.<sup>9</sup> Dale Lott, another buffalo biologist, sums up this attitude when he describes the scientific side of himself as wanting to call the animal a bison. Lott goes on to say that the sentimental side of him does not agree with this term though, stating that the term buffalo, “honors its long, intense, and dramatic relationship with the peoples of North America.”<sup>10</sup>

The numbers of buffalo prior to European contact are another source of debate among scholars. This issue is important to this work because it places the dramatic decline of the buffalo in a larger context. Any estimation of buffalo population totals always involves some element of guesswork, as the task of counting buffalo was impossible in early America. Buffalo had a range that covered most of the North American continent, from the Atlantic Coast to the Rocky Mountains in the West. The range then extended from the vicinity of the Great Slave Lake in Canada to northern Mexico, with the highest density of animals on the Great Plains.<sup>11</sup> Using this range as a base, Ernest Thompson Seton, an early naturalist, became one of the first people to venture to guess how many buffalo existed prior to European contact. Seton believed that there were approximately 60-75 million animals in North America before Europeans arrived. Seton based his numbers on a scientific application of the numbers of domestic animals on the plains per the 1910 census. Seton then applied those numbers throughout the entire former range of the buffalo to come up with his total.<sup>12</sup> Writing some years

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<sup>9</sup> McHugh, *The Time of the Buffalo* 5.

<sup>10</sup> Dale F. Lott, *American Bison: A Natural History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), xiv-xv.

<sup>11</sup> Allen, *The American Bisons*, 54-55, 71-175. Allen’s work is regarded as the best compilation of the former range of buffalo that exists.

<sup>12</sup> Lott, *American Bison*, 70-73.

later, Martin Garretson would use the figure of 60 million, based on the accounts of hunters and travelers who spoke of the “countless” herds and masses of buffalo.<sup>13</sup> These figures would come under scrutiny by biologists in later years. Biologists Tom McHugh and Dale Lott are the two figures most responsible for the revision of the estimate of the total numbers of buffalo. McHugh uses a figure of thirty million animals, based on the approximate carrying capacity of the land over a 1.25 million square mile range that the buffalo lived on historically on the Great Plains. McHugh accounted for drought conditions too, using the lowest carrying capacity of the land to come to his conclusions.<sup>14</sup> Lott also uses carrying capacity in his work. Despite using the number 30 million, he believes that even this figure may have been too high because buffalo would have required several years to recover from natural catastrophes, such as fire, floods, and drought, leading to an unstable population base.<sup>15</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, the 30 million figure is used due to its more scientific origins.

Another area where more explanation is needed is in defining the terms “culture” or “cultural” and “economic.” For the term “economic” a relatively straightforward definition is used throughout this thesis. “Economic” is meant to imply anything dealing with financial loss or gain. In other words, how people made their money or factors that could either negatively or positively effect how people drew their income are encompassed in this definition. Economic can also be understood to mean the commodification of the buffalo into a mere resource to be used, rather than to be admired

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<sup>13</sup> Martin S. Garretson, *The American Bison: The Story of Its Extermination as a Wild Species and Its Restoration under Federal Protection* (New York: New York Zoological Society, 1938), 58.

<sup>14</sup> McHugh, *The Time of the Buffalo*, 16-17. Carrying capacity is the ability of the land to sustain a certain number of animals over a given area.

<sup>15</sup> Lott, *American Bison*, 73-76.

for its sentimental value alone. In this regard, the theory of conservation, in which a resource is meant to be used and managed for human gain, albeit with limitations, is certainly applicable to this thesis, especially in the latter two chapters.<sup>16</sup>

“Culture,” on the other hand, is a more nebulous and difficult term to define, especially when dealing with buffalo and Americans. In this thesis, culture refers to symbolic importance. In this regard, buffalo tend to manifest themselves as the ultimate symbol of American wilderness in the eyes of many Americans from the time of their first encounters with the animals to the present day. This does not mean that buffalo are the only symbol of the North American wilderness, but one that by virtue of sheer numbers, physical size, and accessibility over an immense geographic area came to be perceived as the personification of the “wild” itself. In this regard, the dichotomy of needing to “conquer” nature and the United States’ interior contrasts sharply with the need to preserve these areas as a representative sample of what America “once was.” By placing buffalo upon such a lofty pedestal, Americans assigned the animal an almost “mythological” status, which has led to stormy and complicated relationships and to conflicting conceptual understandings of the animal. In many ways, the understanding of buffalo in this way, in which they needed to be protected for the sake of posterity, is indicative of the turn of the twentieth century preservation movement, which emphasized the protection of nature for the pure enjoyment of nature, not for any commercial gain. The interplay between multiple concepts and relationships is what is meant by “culture” in this thesis.

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<sup>16</sup> For a greater discussion of the concept of conservation and its inconsistencies, see Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature’s Role in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

The primary focus in Chapter One is the cultural and economic significance of buffalo to Americans as they expanded their settlements across North America. Although the scope of the chapter is from 1820 to 1890, that does not mean Americans had no contact with buffalo before this period. It is just that the relationship was one of subsistence rather than the more commercial and value laden relationships with the animal during the bulk of the nineteenth century. Even during the period under consideration, the extant cases of cultural and economic interactions of Americans and the buffalo are uneven, meaning that more emphasis is placed on the latter part of this time period than the earlier.<sup>17</sup> In particular, the period from 1870 to 1883 is of interest, since this is the period in which the most extreme examples of cultural and economic exploitation occurred. During this period, buffalo were hunted to the verge of extinction, which led to the efforts to preserve buffalo based on cultural and economic motives examined in the second chapter.

The relevant historiography that deals with the exploitation of buffalo during the time period covered varies. For the most part, the historiography that developed about buffalo began in the 1960s and 1970s, or approximately one hundred years after the animals had been nearly wiped out. Even into the 1980s, the historiographical patterns established earlier prevailed. The distinguishing characteristics of this era of historiography places buffalo in the context of a changing America, in which the animals stood in the path of progress. These works are more concerned with the numbers and how the animals died, not necessarily why they died. In doing so, many of these books

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<sup>17</sup> Much of the reason for the uneven nature of the history is because most buffalo lived west of the Mississippi River. Therefore, as people moved west and more people came into contact with buffalo, the relationship with the buffalo developed as time went on and as more people lived and traveled through the plains.

also focus on the Great Plains Indians, who came to be synonymous with the buffalo. Most secondary works prior to the 1950s that deal with buffalo have a more personal tone to them, as the individuals writing them had a direct connection with saving the animals at the turn of the century. Martin S. Garretson's *The American Bison: The Story of Its Extermination as a Wild Species and Its Restoration under Federal Protection* is a notable example of this type of scholarship, as he discusses how the animals were killed, as well as the earliest efforts to save them, which he took part in personally.<sup>18</sup>

The first book to really appear that was not written by someone directly tied in with the buffalo preservation movement was by Frank Gilbert Roe in 1951. Roe's book, *The North American Buffalo: A Critical Study of the Species in Its Wild State* was designed to critically examine the earliest works about buffalo, including those by J.A. Allen, William T. Hornaday, and Ernest Thompson Seton. Roe literally takes every issue that these three authors bring up and dissects their logic line by line in his massive volume.<sup>19</sup> The works of David A. Dary, J. Albert Rorabacher, and Larry Barsness all have general historical approaches to buffalo and were written in the same vein, examining the extermination of the buffalo and the subsequent efforts to save them, but also in the process examining the role of Native Americans too.<sup>20</sup> Books by biologists, such as Lott and McHugh, mostly analyze the biological aspects of the buffalo, although any books of this nature have to deal with the slaughter of the buffalo, due to the

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<sup>18</sup> See Garretson, *The American Bison*.

<sup>19</sup> Roe, *The North American Buffalo*.

<sup>20</sup> David A. Dary *The Buffalo Book: The Full Saga of the American Animal* (Chicago: Sage, 1974); Rorabacher, *The American Buffalo in Transition*; and Larry Barsness, *Heads, Hides, and Horns: The Compleat Buffalo Book* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1985).



significance of this event in the history of the animal.<sup>21</sup> One other book that takes a wider approach to buffalo is by Andrew Isenberg. Isenberg's book is more recent than any of the aforementioned books, being published in 2000. Isenberg argues that blaming any one category of people for the destruction of the buffalo is nonsense. Instead, Isenberg argues that a growing list of natural and human induced causes helped to make the late nineteenth century especially difficult for the buffalo, so that when industrial hunting occurred, the animals' fate was sealed.<sup>22</sup>

The other relevant historiography that is applicable to this section of thesis takes a specialized look at specific groups or individuals. The first such book is by Don Russell, who wrote a biography of William "Buffalo Bill" Cody. Russell attempts to sort through the myths and legends that are associated with Cody, who gained his fame because of his exploits with buffalo and the West.<sup>23</sup> The second category of specialized history that is relevant to this study focuses on the buffalo hunters. The first book to do this was by Mari Sandoz, published in 1954. Sandoz looks at various hunters of the era, the dangers they faced, and their role in settling the Great Plains. Her study focuses mostly on the region around Dodge City, Kansas. The other book that studies the hunters is by Charles

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<sup>21</sup> Lott, *American Bison*; McHugh, *The Time of the Buffalo*.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Other books also take a wider approach to the Great Plains and the western United States. In many of these books, the relationship between people who lived in the West and those who lived in the East are examined. In these books, though, the role of the buffalo in American development is only visited briefly. When buffalo are mentioned, it is only to tell how they died and not their subsequent roles in later American history. For more examples of these types of histories, see Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987); William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991); Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

<sup>23</sup> Don Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960).

Robinson III. Robinson puts together a history in the vein of Sandoz, only in his case, he focuses on the southern hunting grounds in Texas and the Southwest. This study is important because of the lack of scholarship that actually examines this area, rather than merely lumping it in with the hunting around Dodge City.<sup>24</sup> Another author, Ida Ellen Rath, presents a biography of her relative, Charles Rath, who was one of the preeminent outfitters for the buffalo hunters on the southern plains. Rath's book is a valuable addition to the historiography of this topic, since it focuses solely on one of the outfitters, who allowed the hunters to continue their profession by providing them with supplies.<sup>25</sup>

In Chapter Two, the cultural and economic significance of buffalo to Americans as it related to saving the animals is examined. The period in question here, from 1880 to 1914, marked the shift in consciousness among Americans. During this time period, the development of buffalo as a cultural icon of the fading "Wild West" took place on the East Coast. The people driving this impetus towards cultural significance saw the buffalo in a romantic light as part of a passing age in American history. To completely allow the animals to disappear would be irresponsible and irreparable to the image of America. Propagating this view were wealthy easterners like Theodore Roosevelt and George Bird Grinnell and naturalists such as William T. Hornaday. The buffalo, by virtue of having been decimated on such a vast scale unseen in modern history, provided another reason for a new outlook, in that if buffalo could disappear so quickly, then other aspects of the American wilderness could too. The cultural movement to save the buffalo would lead to

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<sup>24</sup> Mari Sandoz, *The Buffalo Hunters: The Story of the Hide Men* (New York: Hastings House, 1954); Charles M. Robinson III, *The Buffalo Hunters* (Austin, TX: State House Press, 1995).

<sup>25</sup> Ida Ellen Rath, *The Rath Trail* (Wichita, KS: McCormick-Armstrong, 1961).

increasingly stronger steps to preserve the animal, culminating in the creation of national parks and wildlife refuges to house buffalo in the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>26</sup>

The second change that is examined in this chapter is the different attitude regarding buffalo as an economic resource. During this time period, the people who would, in effect, save the buffalo from extinction, went out on the plains and captured a few buffalo calves prior to the animals completely disappearing. While some would be partially motivated by an urge to save a part of America's wild past, the main reason to save the animals was out of the belief that the animals would make them money in the future. Whether this was by organized hunts, selling animals, or by cross breeding the animals, the ranchers did not care as long as they made some financial gain. Their reason for saving the buffalo was a desire for money, which would combine with the need of the romanticists to save the buffalo, which in turn combined to preserve the animals when they most needed rescue.

The relevant historiography of this chapter is of a wider nature than that in Chapter One. The general histories of buffalo listed for Chapter One are applicable here too, but for the most part, books that deal with preserving buffalo are more cursory in nature. As such, a much more individualized look at the movement to save buffalo is necessary. Again, two divisions in the historiography are seen, based on whether the person was motivated by cultural or economic motives. For the ranchers who actually had the buffalo, the works of Wayne C. Lee and Nancy Veglahn are important for

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<sup>26</sup> For more information about the federal government and the nature of reform at the turn of the century, see Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955); Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1977); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003); Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959).

focusing on James “Scotty” Philip, who would grow to be one of the most prominent buffalo ranchers. These books trace Philip’s life, as he moved towards saving the buffalo.<sup>27</sup> The other book that examines a rancher is by J. Evetts Haley, who chronicles the life of Charles Goodnight of Texas. Haley’s book is one of the only records about Goodnight, who was known for not granting interviews and being a private person who focused on his own business. Haley’s book attempts to show the importance of Goodnight on the history of the Southwestern United States.<sup>28</sup>

While the historiography that focuses on the ranchers is limited, those that focus on the preservationists are more numerous. The first books deal with sportsmen and the evolution of the belief that wildlife was worthy of being saved. James B. Trefethen presents a history of the movement to save American wildlife through the eyes of the Boone and Crockett Club, the first national sportsmen’s group to actively push for wildlife conservation on a national scale. Following in this mold is the work of John F. Reiger, who argues that sportsmen provided the real power behind the movement to conserve wildlife in America. Reiger focuses in particular on the role of George Bird Grinnell, who as editor of the national periodical, *Forest and Stream*, had the power to influence thousands of affluent readers like Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot, who later adopted his ideas about conservation and preservation of America’s natural resources. A more recent biography of Grinnell, by Michael Punke, shows how Grinnell’s love of the West would play a huge role in his subsequent fight to save the

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<sup>27</sup> Wayne C. Lee, *Scotty Philip: The Man Who Saved the Buffalo* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1975); Nancy Veglahn, *The Buffalo King: The Story of Scotty Philip* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971).

<sup>28</sup> J. Evetts Haley, *Charles Goodnight: Cowman and Plainsman* (1936; repr., Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949).

buffalo from extinction.<sup>29</sup> Another recent book, by Mary Ann Franke, focuses on Yellowstone National Park. Because Yellowstone was the only national park until the 1900s that had buffalo, it became a center of attention in the fight to preserve the animals. Franke's work examines the buffalo's role in the park, both in helping to create legislation to protect the park and to prevent its animals from being destroyed.<sup>30</sup>

Beyond Franke and works about Grinnell, much of the historiography that deals with this time period focuses on the role of Theodore Roosevelt in creating the conservation movement in America. Paul Russell Cutright was one of the first writers to focus on Roosevelt's environmentalist policies. The most recent book to tackle the environmental side of Roosevelt is by Douglas Brinkley, which examines who influenced Roosevelt's way of thinking about nature, and what he did for the natural world in America.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, Chapter Three focuses on the period from 1914 to the present day, and the shift from creating national parks and refuges for the buffalo into actually managing the animals. The most pressing issues with buffalo today are the disease brucellosis and breeding and feeding programs designed to manage the animals efficiently. The brucellosis problem centers on Yellowstone National Park and what should be done with the buffalo as they leave the confines of the park. The fear in this case is that the disease,

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<sup>29</sup> James B. Trefethen, *An American Crusade for Wildlife* (New York: Winchester, 1975); John F. Reiger, *American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation* (New York: Winchester, 1975); Michael Punke, *Last Stand: George Bird Grinnell, the Battle to Save the Buffalo, and the Birth of the New West* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> Mary Ann Franke, *To Save the Wild Bison: Life on the Edge in Yellowstone* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> Paul Russell Cutright, *Theodore Roosevelt: The Making of a Conservationist* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1985); ---, *Theodore Roosevelt: The Naturalist* (New York: Harper, 1956); Douglas Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

which causes cattle to abort their calves, will spread from infected buffalo in Yellowstone into the neighboring cattle population. The issue has taken on a life of its own as ranchers in the area want the animals confined or killed as they cross the park border, while protectionists want the animals preserved at all costs.

The other issue in this chapter is the idea of genetic purity and its impact on the buffalo meat industry. At issue is how much selective breeding can be done to domesticate the animals before the animals cease to be a “wild” buffalo anymore. From a cultural viewpoint, the producers, the most prominent of which is Ted Turner, know that the “wildness” of buffalo is what drives their meat market and that to destroy that would kill their market. Conversely, the owners of the animals want to make the most money on their products with the least amount of trouble to themselves from the animals. This chapter also explores the issue of creating a market on a widespread scale and the image of the animals as free ranging.

The relevant historiography to this chapter is of a more limited nature than the other chapters. This historiography is of a recent nature and focuses more on scientific issues, such as genetics and disease control, rather than a historical background of the animals. Again, Franke’s work is valuable for discussing the role of Yellowstone’s buffalo population in America. Ruth Rudner studies how the buffalo in Yellowstone are able to create such strong feelings when it comes to brucellosis, crediting the problems to a cultural schism in which those who live near the park fight with others who do not live there and only visit the area.<sup>32</sup> Harold Danz, a former director of the American Bison Association, examines the economic dilemma that faces buffalo producers, as they attempt to make their operations more efficient, while also balancing the cultural

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<sup>32</sup> Ruth Rudner, *A Chorus of Buffalo* (Short Hills, NJ: Buford, 2000).

significance that makes their product popular. Following the example of Danz, Ken Zontek and Sebastian Braun offer updated examinations of the buffalo industry and how it is faring today, focusing on the role of Indians in this new and still developing industry.<sup>33</sup>

In the following pages, all of the aforementioned ideas will be expounded upon and examined in greater detail. While specific issues, such as Native American perspectives on the buffalo, the larger nature of the Progressive Era, and a wider look at Western history are only examined briefly in this thesis, all of these concepts do converge at some point when dealing with buffalo. In the process, the close cultural and economic relationship Americans have had historically and currently have with the buffalo comes into greater focus. By taking a long range approach to this study, prevailing trends in society are shown, which in turn helps to indicate the inherent contradictions and patterns in American history, especially when dealing with one of the largest and most important wildlife species in North America, the buffalo.

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<sup>33</sup> Harold P. Danz, *Of Bison and Men: From the Annals of a Bison Yesterday to a Refreshing Outcome from Human Involvement with America's Most Valiant of Beasts* (Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1997); Ken Zontek, *Buffalo Nation: American Indian Efforts to Restore the Bison* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); Sebastian Felix Braun, *Buffalo Inc.: American Indians and Economic Development* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008).



This map appears in William Hornaday's *Extermination of the American Bison* and shows the decrease of the species from the eighteenth century to the late nineteenth century. (Photo courtesy of the National Park Service)



## **CHAPTER 1: TO THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION**

The purpose of this chapter is to examine American economic and cultural motives that led to the extirpation of the buffalo as wild free-range animals in the nineteenth century. In just a few decades, the great North American herds vanished, with only a small number of animals remaining. The scope of this chapter covers the years 1820 to 1890, with special emphasis placed on the period from 1870 to 1883, which were the chief years of the industrial hide hunting that nearly wiped out the species. Furthermore, this chapter examines particular cases that illustrate the evolution of hunting over time. In addition, the ability of Americans to exploit the relationship between Native Americans and buffalo, both as an avenue to secure hides and to force the tribes onto reservations by destroying their livelihood economically and culturally is studied in this chapter. As will be seen, while economic motives for hunting buffalo were driven by the pursuit of wealth, cultural motives for Americans were more diverse, varying from a desire to be part of the Great Plains “experience,” to exploiting the relationship between buffalo and Native Americans, to achieving American goals of “manifest destiny.” In each case, the end result for the buffalo was death.

### **Hunting for Survival and for “Sport”**

During the colonial era and the early national period of American history, the primary reason to hunt buffalo was as a subsistence game animal on the frontier. Naturalist William T. Hornaday categorized this form of hunting as “desultory destruction.” It helped to fuel the westward movement of Americans as they fulfilled

their “manifest destiny.” While Hornaday classified these types of hunts as taking place east of the Mississippi River in the period from 1730 to 1830, he never explained why he chose these dates or this location for this categorization.<sup>1</sup> Hornaday, using the terminology of his time, believed that buffalo hunting played a key role in expanding the United States because it allowed American settlers to travel across North America without bringing domestic livestock as their only source of meat. In this case, Hornaday attributed no malicious intent or wastefulness to the settlers. What Hornaday does not mention is that subsistence buffalo hunting continued long after this period, as settlers and explorers traveled across the plains from the time of Lewis and Clark through the 1880s. In fact, the Lewis and Clark expedition made great use of the animals, using them as one of their primary food sources on their journey across the West from 1804 to 1806.<sup>2</sup> In the early 1870s, W. E. Webb, a railroad surveyor, noted the practicability of buffalo as a food source for not just travelers, but if managed properly, for the entire nation, stating, “These wild cattle of Uncle Samuel’s if called upon, could supply the whole Yankee nation with meat for an indefinite period.”<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, some measure of why buffalo were killed for cultural reasons was evidenced in this type of hunt too. The overwhelming numbers and great size of the

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<sup>1</sup> William Temple Hornaday, *The Extinction of the American Bison* (1889; repr., Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 484-86. One possible reason that Hornaday used these dates was that hunters eliminated the buffalo east of the Mississippi River by 1830.

<sup>2</sup> J. Albert Rorabacher, *The American Buffalo in Transition: A Historical and Economic Survey of the Bison in America* (St. Cloud, MN: North Star Press, 1970), 34; Michael Punke, *Last Stand: George Bird Grinnell, the Battle to Save the Buffalo, and the Birth of the New West* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 45. Punke points out that Lewis and Clark’s journals included 707 journal entries that discussed buffalo.

<sup>3</sup> W. E. Webb, *Buffalo Land: An Authentic Narrative of the Adventures and Misadventures of a Late Scientific and Sporting Party upon the Great Plains of the West* (Cincinnati, OH: E. Hannaford, 1872), 125.

buffalo made them natural targets for most hunters who had never seen anything like buffalo before in Europe, or for that matter in the eastern United States after the early nineteenth century. Horace Greeley, traveling across the Great Plains in 1859 to plot a possible route for a transcontinental railroad, offered a plausible reason for why people felt the need to kill buffalo. According to Greeley, travelers were awestruck by the sheer numbers of the animals. In this respect, killing or shooting at a buffalo made them feel like they helped in the conquest of the region.<sup>4</sup> Captain Howard Stansbury, who led a wagon train of settlers along the South Platte River noted what the effect of the first sight of buffalo had for his party, stating, “The effect upon our hunters, and in fact upon the whole party, was that of a sudden and most intense excitement, and a yearning, feverish desire to secure as much as possible of this noble game.”<sup>5</sup> Even after the herds had nearly been extinguished in the late nineteenth century, this desire persisted.<sup>6</sup> Buffalo scholar Larry Barsness sums up the attitude of many settlers that traveled on the Oregon Trail and later settled the region when he stated, “A pilgrim had to kill his buffalo as part of his Western Experience or at least shoot, even at an impossible distance ‘just so that I might say I had one shot at a buffalo.’”<sup>7</sup>

While the numbers of buffalo killed as a food source by American hunters is impossible to determine due to a lack of data, the reasons why Americans killed the

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<sup>4</sup> Horace Greeley, *An Overland Journey, From New York to San Francisco in the Summer of 1859* (1860; repr., Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1966), 87.

<sup>5</sup> Howard Stansbury, as quoted in Punke, *Last Stand*, 50.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Russell Cutright, *Theodore Roosevelt: The Naturalist* (New York: Harper, 1956), 38, 40-42. Theodore Roosevelt provided one of the most noticeable examples of the need to kill a buffalo. In his case, he felt urgency due to the scarcity of buffalo when he finally went west in 1883.

<sup>7</sup> Larry Barsness, *Heads, Hides, and Horns: The Compleat Buffalo Book* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1985), 99.

animals for cultural reasons are more easily discerned, especially the phenomena of a “hunter’s mentality.” For most Americans at the time, the initial sight of a buffalo was something to behold. When railroads, such as the Union Pacific, Kansas Pacific, and Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe pushed onto the Great Plains, the owners saw a way to promote their respective lines while drawing upon cultural wants and needs of citizens of the East. These eastern citizens wanted to experience what settlers were experiencing. To them, the best way to do this was to shoot or see a buffalo. W. E. Webb noted this reaction among riders on a train he traveled on to Hays City, Kansas. Upon sighting three lone bulls on the plains around the track, the passengers rushed to the windows to get a glimpse of the plain’s denizens.<sup>8</sup>

The Kansas Pacific in particular drew upon the awe that visiting Americans to the Great Plains felt upon seeing buffalo. Advertisements for buffalo excursions appeared throughout eastern cities after the completion of the railroad to Sheridan, Kansas, in 1868, then the heart of buffalo country. St. Louis, Chicago, and Cincinnati were popular starting points from which people rode west to Lawrence, Kansas. Once there, these people bought a round trip ticket from the Lawrence station to the Sheridan, Kansas, station for ten dollars. Beginning on a Tuesday and ending on a Friday, the excursionists were immersed in Great Plains life.<sup>9</sup> The excursionists, upon seeing buffalo, shot at the animals on the plains surrounding the tracks, whether the train stopped or not. If the excursionist felt especially ambitious, the person might cut the tongue out of the buffalo he killed, if the train stopped long enough. Rudolph Keim, a traveler on one of these

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<sup>8</sup> Webb, *Buffalo Land*, 124-25.

<sup>9</sup> Mari Sandoz, *The Buffalo Hunters: The Story of the Hide Men* (New York: Hastings House, 1954), 83-84.

expeditions, did just this, killing one buffalo, but only taking the tongue and a few choice pieces of meat.<sup>10</sup> More often, though, the buffalo rotted where it fell with nothing collected. In other instances, the animal was only wounded. Whatever happened to the animal was of no concern to the excursionist who had successfully killed or shot at what he perceived to be dangerous, wild game. The railroads did nothing to discourage this waste of animals, reaping profits from these mobile hunting trips. Sheridan benefited from these excursions, becoming a boom town as the trains ended their tours there. While not as destructive to the total buffalo population as the commercial hunts that came a few years later, these railroad excursions help to show the merging of the cultural and economic goals of Americans in regards to the animal.

Americans were not alone in killing buffalo for cultural reasons. Wealthy Englishmen and other foreign elites, learning of the vast herds of buffalo and other wildlife present in the United States, came to the Great Plains to take part in hunts for no other reason than to kill the animals. One of the most famous of these hunters was the Englishman Sir George Gore, who led a hunt in 1854. Gore financed an expedition guided by Jim Bridger, which hunted along the Yellowstone, Powder, and Tongue rivers, taking 6 wagons, 21 carts, 112 horses, 14 hunting dogs, and 40 servants to assist him. Gore killed 2,500 buffalo on his expedition, leading the government to step in to halt his hunt, not on the behalf of the buffalo, but to stop a general Indian war from breaking out due to the excesses of Gore.<sup>11</sup> Yet, Gore's was not the last large scale hunt. In 1871,

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<sup>10</sup> Edward Douglas Branch, *The Hunting of the Buffalo* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), 133-34.

<sup>11</sup> Martin S. Garretson, *The American Bison: The Story of Its Extermination as a Wild Species and Its Restoration under Federal Protection* (New York: New York Zoological Society, 1938), 101-02. Garretson noted that in addition to the buffalo killed, Gore was also responsible for killing forty grizzly bears and a large number of elk, deer, antelope, and other game.

Grand Duke Alexis of Russia arrived in the United States and wished to partake in a buffalo hunt. In this case, the army under the command of Philip Sheridan hosted the Grand Duke as he hunted buffalo under the direction of one of the most famous hunters and scouts of the time, William “Buffalo Bill” Cody. Alexis was not disappointed, killing several buffalo with the help of Cody.<sup>12</sup>

While Gore’s and the Grand Duke’s expeditions were not the last expeditions, they were two of the largest and most popular of what could be termed “cultural” hunts.<sup>13</sup> In 1871, Sheridan and Buffalo Bill led another famous cultural hunt, often called “the millionaire’s hunt.” In this hunt, publishers James Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald*, Charles Wilson of the *Chicago Evening Journal*, and New York financier Leonard James all participated and reportedly felt satisfied by the results of their expeditions.<sup>14</sup> More typical of the times was the hunt of Sir William Butler in 1867. Hunting along the North Platte River in 1867, Butler killed over thirty buffalo. Unlike most hunters, Butler expressed some remorse for killing the buffalo to the army commander of the region, then Major Richard Irving Dodge. Dodge’s reply to Butler’s remorse foreshadowed what would become of the buffalo in a few short years.

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<sup>12</sup> Colonel W.F. Cody, *An Autobiography of Buffalo Bill Cody* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1920), 226-38. Cody served as a guide on several other hunts, including those of Lord Flynn and Sir George Watts Garland of Great Britain. For more information on Cody’s sole earning of the moniker “Buffalo Bill,” in which he defeated William “Buffalo Bill” Comstock in a well publicized hunt sponsored by the Kansas Pacific, see Colonel William F. Cody, *The Adventures of Buffalo Bill* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1904), 163-64.

<sup>13</sup> In this instance, the author defines “cultural hunt” as a type of hunt in which the participant, usually a white American, felt that killing a big game animal, such as a buffalo, allowed him to assist in the conquest of nature and to exert the will of man.

<sup>14</sup> Charles M. Robinson III, *The Buffalo Hunters* (Austin, TX: State House Press, 1995), 39-41.

According to Butler, Dodge replied, “Kill every buffalo you can, every buffalo dead is an Indian gone.”<sup>15</sup>

The hunters who came for cultural reasons to hunt buffalo in the mid-nineteenth century often times came not only to say that they had killed a buffalo, but because they perceived the animal to be some sort of dangerous game. The validity of this statement depended on the person being questioned though. To Homer Wheeler, an army officer who escorted some of the wealthy hunters, the hunts could be dangerous. Wheeler attributed the danger in hunting buffalo to the high speed and confusion of a horseback chase of buffalo across the plains. He noted that horses could step in prairie dog holes and break their legs. In the process, the horse could throw their riders into a running herd of buffalo. Also, due to the inexperience of many of the hunters who were anything but skilled at loading and shooting a gun on horseback while traveling at high speeds, the hunt could prove deadly to an unwanted target: the horse. Webb, when he was just a newcomer to the plains, participated in a hunt of this type and confirmed the difficulty of shooting and controlling a horse at the same time, claiming his shots went everywhere.<sup>16</sup> In addition, Wheeler remarked on a personal experience in which his horse ran into an Englishman’s horse, knocking the man off the horse.<sup>17</sup> The thrill of the hunt and chasing buffalo across the prairie was a major influence on why the wealthy felt a cultural connection to this type of hunting of America’s largest game animal. Other individuals

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<sup>15</sup> Sir William Butler, as quoted in Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 155. A more complete discussion of the role that the buffalo played in subjugating the Indians occurs later in this chapter.

<sup>16</sup> Webb, *Buffalo Land*, 255-56.

<sup>17</sup> Colonel Homer W. Wheeler, *Buffalo Days: Forty Years in the Old West; The Personal Narrative of a Cattleman, Indian Fighter, and Army Officer* (New York: A.L. Burt, 1923), 83.

of the time did not see the buffalo hunt as a great cultural achievement. Richard Irving Dodge would write later that he did not consider buffalo a game animal. Dodge attributed his assessment to the fact that buffalo would not run from man until the last moment unless spooked before hand. As further evidence of his belief in this matter, he cited the ability of still hunters, or hunters who hunted bison on foot from a single point, to kill numerous animals from a stationary point while the buffalo milled around and did not flee.<sup>18</sup> Horace Greeley offered another reason why he personally did not hunt any buffalo, while the members of his party did. According to Greeley, shooting at the abundant herds of buffalo would be like hunting the “neighbor’s geese.”<sup>19</sup>

Thus far, only the cultural reasons for Americans hunting buffalo have been profiled. While these cultural hunts were certainly harmful to the buffalo population of the Great Plains, they did not reach a large enough scale to negatively impact the buffalo population. The desultory destruction of buffalo that Hornaday described did in fact have an impact on the total number of animals. Prior to 1830, buffalo had existed east of the Mississippi River; yet, they no longer were found in that region by the antebellum period. Applied on a larger scale to the entire nation, hunting buffalo for food did have a limited impact on the total buffalo population. The limit imposed in this respect was that travelers moving west across the Great Plains did not have the time to venture far beyond whatever route they were traveling. For instance, a traveler on the Oregon Trail would be able to go off the trail to hunt buffalo only for a limited period before having to head back to his or her wagon to continue the journey. The focus on hunting along trails and later

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Irving Dodge, *The Plains of North America and Their Inhabitants*, ed. Wayne R. Kime. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 129.

<sup>19</sup> Greeley, *Overland Journey*, 89.



the railroads led to wide swaths of land being devoid of buffalo. According to one of the first buffalo scholars, J. A. Allen, by 1849 the buffalo were effectively split into two herds, a northern and a southern, on each side of the trail.<sup>20</sup> In the case of the Union Pacific Railroad, which followed roughly along the route of the Oregon Trail, there were no buffalo to be found on either side of the tracks for twenty miles.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Red River Hunts**

While culture and hunting for food were important factors in Americans' relationship with the buffalo, economic reasons for hunting buffalo were equally if not more important. The first such instance of hunting buffalo for commercial gain had its origins in the Red River Settlement of Manitoba, Canada.<sup>22</sup> Much of what is known about the Red River Settlement comes from Alexander Ross, a frontiersman who settled in the colony in 1825. Originally established in 1811 by Lord Thomas Selkirk, the colony would become an important factor in the history of buffalo across a large area along the Red River in Canada and the Dakota Territories of the United States. According to Ross, Selkirk had many reasons for wanting to start this colony. One of the reasons was to bring Christianity to the indigenous people of the region. Another reason

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<sup>20</sup> J. A. Allen, *The American Bisons, Living and Extinct* (Cambridge, MA: University Press, 1876), 144.

<sup>21</sup> Rorabacher, *The American Buffalo*, 38.

<sup>22</sup> Histories of the slaughter of buffalo in Canada are much more limited than those that exist about the United States. Unlike the United States, much of the destruction of Canada's herds of buffalo was accomplished by indigenous people, such as the Cree and Blackfeet, descendants of the Red River settlers, and Hudson's Bay Company operatives. The chief reason that individuals of European descent did not play as significant role in the destruction of the species in this region was due to inadequate transportation to move the bulky hides to market. Furthermore, the western Canadian plains did not endure the same settlement pressures as quickly as the Great Plains of the United States. For more information about the destruction of the Canadian herds of buffalo, see Frank Gilbert Roe, *The North American Buffalo: A Critical Study of the Species in Its Wild State* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951), 489-520.

was to bring “civilization” to an area that was unsettled by whites. Ross’s other observations of the settlement were more economic. Selkirk had vested interests in the Hudson’s Bay Company, one of the chief fur corporations of the region. By establishing a colony in an area that would compete with the company’s rival, the North West Company, Selkirk helped Hudson’s Bay Company to control a greater share of the fur market. Finally, the colonists of the area had to buy their supplies from the company, further promoting Selkirk’s own interests.<sup>23</sup>

While the original purpose of Selkirk’s colony was to be an agricultural community of Scottish immigrants, the success of the settlement ended up relying on other means of support. Crop failures and the great numbers of buffalo in the region led the settlers to hunt as a vocation instead of strictly farming. Debts to the Hudson’s Bay Company had to be paid, leading the settlers to develop a hunting society that relied on the buffalo. The settlers would turn the buffalo meat into pemmican, which could be sold as rations wherever the company deemed necessary.<sup>24</sup> In addition, the company also accepted buffalo robes, although the market for them was never large or cost efficient due to transportation expenses. Ross detailed the organization of the hunting groups by the

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<sup>23</sup> Alexander Ross, *The Red River Settlement: Its Rise, Progress, and Present State, With Some Account of the Native Races and Its General History to the Present Day* (1856; repr., Minneapolis: Ross and Haines, 1957), 10, 17-19.

<sup>24</sup> Pemmican is sun dried meat and fat mixed with berries. The meat has a texture similar to jerky, and, at the time of the Red River hunts, preparers made one hundred pound squares for ease of transport. For more information about the creation of pemmican, see Roe, *The North American Buffalo*, 854-55 and 604-05.

settlement that went out on the plains in multiple directions. Even though the colony was located in Canada, buffalo in the United States were hunted as well.<sup>25</sup>

During the hunts, the entire colony participated, including men, women, and children. Using two wheeled carts that could hold up to one thousand pounds of meat, the settlers hunted until their carts were full or the changing of the seasons forced them back to their home base along the Red River. Once a herd was found, hunters rode their horses into the herds of buffalo, shooting as many as they could in the shortest amount of time possible, moving from one buffalo to the next. To Ross, a good hunter could kill ten to twelve animals in one run.<sup>26</sup> As time went on, the number of carts taken on the trips grew larger too. In 1820, 540 carts were present. Five years later, there were 680. In 1830, there were 820, in 1835, 970, and in 1840, the largest year that Ross chronicled, there were 1,210 carts to haul back the dead buffalo. In the 1840 hunt, Ross wrote that there were 620 hunters, 650 women, 360 boys and girls, 655 cart horses, 586 oxen, and 403 horses used for hunting in the two month long expedition. In 1840 alone, Ross thought that the colonists had killed at least 2,500 animals in the first two runs of the season. Of these animals, 1,750 were not used in any way. The total weight of the meat harvested from the entire hunt that season was approximately 1,089,000 pounds if each cart held 900 pounds or the equivalent of harvesting 200 pounds per person for each person present in the entire colony after figuring in the waste of some animals. In his account, Ross emphasizes the extreme waste of the colonists, figuring that in the total

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<sup>25</sup> Ross, *The Red River Settlement*, 243-44. Ross considered the impact of hunting to be detrimental on the colony as a whole, since it detracted the colonists from focusing on agriculture for months at a time.

<sup>26</sup> Ross, *The Red River Settlement*, 257, 272.

hunt, only about one third of the animals were properly made use of.<sup>27</sup> Despite the apparent gains made in the buffalo business at Red River, Ross noted that the buffalo were already becoming less prevalent, predicting that they would not last long as the Americans hunted the animals further south and the British hunted them in the north. Caught in this pincer, the buffalo could only retreat west in a temporary respite from the relentless pressure of the hunters.<sup>28</sup>

### **The American Fur Company and the Native American Partnership**

The next instance of American involvement with buffalo for economic reasons originated with the American Fur Company. First established by John Jacob Astor in the early nineteenth century, the American Fur Company by the 1820s had established trading posts in the upper Missouri River region to tap into lucrative fur harvesting opportunities. In 1831, the transportation of furs down the Missouri became exponentially easier when the steamboat *Yellowstone*, operated by the American Fur Company, began to handle the fur trade. The steamboat allowed trappers and hunters to

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<sup>27</sup> Ross, *The Red River Settlement*, 243-44, 264, 272; Hornaday, *Extirpation*, 436. According to Ross, the settlers utilized only one out of every two and one-third cows. In reality, if the waste numbers that Ross gave are correct, the numbers of animals killed by the Red River settlers must have been immense, although no figure can be given with any degree of certainty. Writing much later and using Ross's figures, Hornaday figured that with only 39 carts and a value for the buffalo products of \$5.00, then the value of the buffalo products was \$238,850. In addition, Hornaday postulated that the settlers could have killed over 47,000 animals total in this one season, if the numbers that Ross gave for the one incident were applied uniformly for the rest of their hunting season.

<sup>28</sup> Ross, *The Red River Settlement*, 267; Roe, *The North American Buffalo*, 408; Branch, *The Hunting of the Buffalo*, 83. Roe reasons that the natural wanderings of buffalo could make them appear scarcer than what they really were in any given locality. Roe disputes the assertions of Hornaday about the uniformity of the kills, claiming that natural conditions and the uncertainty surrounding the hunts made assigning values to the Red River hunts difficult to prove. Branch argues that the hunters could have killed upwards of 650,000 buffalo total for the twenty years from 1820 to 1840.

ship not only the lighter furs from animals such as beavers, but also the heavier buffalo robes, which previously did not have a large market in the East.<sup>29</sup>

The methods that the American Fur Company used to obtain robes differed sharply from those of the Red River hunters. The people who managed the forts and trading posts did not do most of the hunting to obtain the robes that they would later market. Instead, the company established a trade network with the Native Americans of the region, such as the Sioux, and traded with them to obtain buffalo products. These products came to mean robes and tongues, which were luxury items for elites back east. In 1831, the steamboat *Yellowstone* transported over ten thousand pounds of tongues to St. Louis alone.<sup>30</sup> Robes, on the other hand, were used as coats, decorative rugs, or wall hangings. Despite the company's best efforts, no market for the robes ever developed on a scale that was satisfactory to the company.<sup>31</sup>

Native Americans did not prosper in this economic relationship and were introduced to the socially destructive trade item of whiskey. Introduced to whiskey on a limited scale at first, Native Americans soon found themselves needing more and more of the drug to whet their desires. However, in order to gain the whiskey and other consumer goods, Native Americans had to trade the one thing that they could gain value from after the disappearance of the beaver: buffalo robes. Hence, in order to get the whiskey they desired, the tribes killed the animal that was the lifeblood of their society and in the process, integrated themselves in the American commercial economy. John C. Fremont,

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<sup>29</sup> David A. Dary, *The Buffalo Book: The Full Saga of the American Animal* (Chicago: Sage, 1974), 73-74; Dale F. Lott, *American Bison: A Natural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 172-73.

<sup>30</sup> Dary, *The Buffalo Book*, 73.

<sup>31</sup> Dary, *The Buffalo Book*, 73. The American Fur Company hoped that buffalo robes would supplant the ebbing beaver pelt trade and become even more popular than beaver pelts had been.

who traveled and mapped the region in the 1840s using American Fur Company posts and forts as bases, noted that originally the company had avoided trading whiskey with the native peoples due to the corrupting influence of the product. However, as smaller and less ethical traders moved into the region, they took advantage of the company's reluctance to trade in whiskey. In some cases, they used a few gallons of whiskey as the sole trade item for everything an Indian had of value to trade. Seeing the trade blossoming in this manner, the company relented and took advantage of alcohol as a trading item.<sup>32</sup> George Catlin, traveling the Great Plains in the 1830s, noted one instance of the corruptibility associated with using alcohol as a trading chip. While visiting with fur company officials and Sioux Indians in the Upper Missouri region, Catlin learned of an instance where 600 Sioux Indians came into Fort Pierre with 1,400 fresh buffalo tongues, having left the rest of the buffalo to rot where they died. In return for these tongues, the Sioux were given a few gallons of whiskey.<sup>33</sup>

The scale of the hunts sponsored or supported by the American Fur Company and other smaller traders until the Civil War remains relatively undocumented in the historical record. Reasons for the lack of data may have to do with the questionable ethics of the trade, in which Indians were given products that were of an inferior or corrupting quality, such as watered down whiskey, sugar with sand mixed in, or old guns

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<sup>32</sup> John Charles Fremont, *Narratives of Exploration and Adventure*, ed. Allan Nevins (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1956), 132. Fremont likely gave too much credit to the benevolence of the American Fur Company in not trading initially with whiskey. Fremont admits the company acted as a regulator of whiskey, since it feared the Indians would trade everything they had for whiskey, leaving the American Fur Trading Company without a trade partner if this happened.

<sup>33</sup> George Catlin, *North American Indians: Being Letters and Notes on Their Manners, Customs, and Conditions, Written during Eight Years' Travel amongst the Wildest Tribes of Indians in North America, 1832-1839* (1841; repr., Edinburgh, MA: John Grant, 1903), 289.

which were antiquated by the time of trading.<sup>34</sup> Despite this, the value of the trade goods, especially whiskey, remained incredibly high. Catlin notes that a gallon of whiskey could sell for \$16.00 per gallon when he traveled the plains. In a few short years, Fremont stated that the value of the gallon had risen to \$36.00 per gallon.<sup>35</sup> Economics, in this case driven by the dependency of the Indians on trade goods regardless of their quality, allowed Americans to further their own bottom line in pursuit of the buffalo, the chief trade item that the Indians could provide.

Fremont, curious about the scale of business in buffalo robes that the American Fur Company conducted, was fortunate enough to ask and receive figures from the company that detail the scale of the buffalo slaughter. Fremont wrote that a partner in the American Fur Company, a Mr. Sanford, replied to his request in 1845. Sanford broke down the trade in robes at the time, claiming that his company shipped an average of 70,000 robes per year. According to Sanford, the total of 70,000 was an annual total for the eight or ten years prior to that as well. Sanford compared the American Fur Company's competitors to his own company's dealings too. The Hudson's Bay Company carried on an estimated trade of 10,000 robes per year while he thought all other competitors traded for 10,000 robes annually on average. In the case of the Hudson's Bay Company, Sanford qualified his numbers by stating that the company was limited to trading only in Canada and that transportation costs hampered the efficiency of

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<sup>34</sup> Robinson, *The Buffalo Hunters*, 30; Garretson, *The American Bison*, 157. Garretson points out that the whiskey was at least four parts water for one part alcohol. The robes which the Indians traded for this product were worth five to ten dollars each.

<sup>35</sup> Catlin, *North American Indians*, 289; Fremont, *Narrative*, 132.

the trade. As such, the Hudson's Bay Company was unable to ever have a high profit margin when it came to the trade in buffalo robes.<sup>36</sup>

Sanford had more information in his letter about the buffalo trade from approximately 1835-45. According to Sanford, his numbers represented only one third of the total number of buffalo killed on the northern plains during this period. Sanford explained that hides were only good enough to be turned into robes for five months of the year from November to March. The rest of the year, the robes were not fit and as such, worthless, from a marketing perspective. Sanford claimed that after Native Americans killed the buffalo, no more than one third of the viable robes were taken even when they were of good quality, due to the intensive labor that dressing the animal demanded in order to sell the robe to the company. Sanford noted that "it is seldom that a[n Indian] lodge trades more than twenty skins in a year." Finally, Sanford ended his letter to Fremont by stating that the Indians did most of their hunting during the summer and early autumn months when the hides were not meant to be taken for trading, due to the poor quality of the robe during the hot summer months.<sup>37</sup>

While Fremont made no further assertions regarding the numbers that Sanford provided, subsequent investigators did.<sup>38</sup> J. A. Allen, the first bison scholar, upon seeing the numbers provided by Fremont, estimated that the total number of buffalo killed annually for the years covered was somewhere in the neighborhood of 1.8 to 2 million animals in the buffalo robe trade. Allen then pointed out that this figure did not include

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<sup>36</sup> Fremont, *Narrative*, 235.

<sup>37</sup> Fremont, *Narrative*, 235.

<sup>38</sup> Fremont, *Narrative*, 235.



white hunters or American Indians in other regions, such as in the southern plains.<sup>39</sup> As time went on, the buffalo trade increased in frequency up until approximately 1850. At this point, the number of buffalo robes coming down the Missouri River to St. Louis from the American Fur Company was approximately 100,000 robes per year.<sup>40</sup> This figure represented a high point for the numbers of buffalo shipped by the American Fur Company; shortly after this the numbers shipped diminished by approximately 10,000 to just under 89,000 in 1853.<sup>41</sup> According to Allen's source with the American Fur Company in 1857, F. F. Gerard, approximately 75,000 robes were shipped annually. Moreover, if it was true only about one third of the animals killed had their hides taken, the actual numbers of buffalo killed rises dramatically, up to over a million again in 1857 alone.<sup>42</sup>

Together, the Red River hunters and the American Fur Company represented a change from a survival mode of hunting into one for economic gain.<sup>43</sup> While the Red River hunters were wasteful, their expeditions were a transition from hunting for personal use into hunting to pay for other goods, in their case by marketing pemmican made from the buffalo's meat to the Hudson's Bay Company. The American Fur Company, lacking the manpower that the Red River hunters had, took a different approach, relying on

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<sup>39</sup> Allen, *The American Bisons*, 185-87.

<sup>40</sup> Allen, *The American Bisons*, 186.

<sup>41</sup> Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, 106.

<sup>42</sup> Allen, *The American Bisons*, 188. Allen's figures actually add up to 96,000, with 36,000 coming from Fort Benton, Montana, 30,000 from Fort Union, 10,000 together from Forts Clarke and Berthoud, and 19,000 from Fort Pierre. Here the author uses the smaller number of 75,000, as that is what Allen wrote in his text as being the total. Since the numbers of buffalo were decreasing, this would make more sense than a sudden spike, although this was certainly possible.

<sup>43</sup> For a more in depth discussion of the role of the buffalo in Native American societies, see Roe, *The North American Buffalo*, 601-670, 860-862, 878-888.

Indians to do the hunting for them, and trading goods of lesser value for the more valuable robes and tongues, which they could then sell at a larger profit. In the larger history of the cultural and economic relationship between Americans and the buffalo, these two events were important movements towards the large scale hunts that occurred after the Civil War. Another noteworthy aspect of these hunts is that they were located on the northern plains, leaving the southern herds largely unmolested. As will be seen, however, interest in hunting the southern herd began in earnest after the Civil War which brought ruin to the southern herd. Once that herd was decimated, what was left of the northern herd after the Red River and American Fur Company sponsored hunts met their doom too.

### **The Southern Plains Hunts, 1850-1870**

The period from approximately 1850 to 1870 on the southern plains is one that is difficult to track in terms of how many buffalo were being killed for economic gain or for cultural reasons. Despite this, the period served as a transitory period for the hunts that would soon happen in the 1870s and 1880s. The people on the plains doing the hunting in this region were chiefly hunting the buffalo for their hides. Yet, hostility from the local Indian tribes, such as the Cheyenne, Comanche, and Arapahoe, made hunting buffalo in this region exponentially more dangerous than the northern hunts, which were performed at the behest of fur agents by the local Indian tribes, such as the Sioux and Blackfeet. The southern hunts were not supported by the tribes and, according to novelist and historian Mari Sandoz, were one of the chief reasons why the Indian war of 1864

with the aforementioned tribes happened.<sup>44</sup> During this period, hunters such as “Wild Bill” Hickok and William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody would do most of their hunting. One key distinction during this period was the transition in hunting techniques from horseback to the still-hunt mode. While horseback hunting was considered to be more “sporting” than still hunting, the truth that could not be denied was that still hunting was more efficient. This method was allegedly developed by the frontiersman Jim White in the late 1860s and involved sneaking up on a herd of buffalo on foot until within rifle shot.<sup>45</sup> Then, from one stationary point, the shooter propped his rifle on a tripod or a stone and from a crouching position, and shot at the herd of buffalo. The result of the kill was called a “stand” and came to be the form of hunting employed by nearly all of industrial hide hunters. In the best case scenario, the animals would mill about the dead buffalo, allowing the hunter to kill multiple animals in close proximity to each other, helping the skinners to complete their work after the hunters were done.<sup>46</sup> By 1868, the hide market was glutted, with not enough demand to sustain the market for buffalo. As will be seen,

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<sup>44</sup> Sandoz, *The Buffalo Hunters*, 23. Sandoz also attributed travelers and miners shooting at buffalo and the tribes, friendly or not, as causes of the war too. One of the results of this war was the temporary closure of the Overland and Smoky Hills Trails in Texas, due to the lack of military manpower to guard the trails while soldiers were tied up fighting in the Civil War. Also adding to the pressure was increased traffic across the southern plains to the gold mines in Colorado. For more information about these mines, see Elliott West, *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1998).

<sup>45</sup> Robinson, *The Buffalo Hunters*, 55.

<sup>46</sup> Frank H. Mayer, and Charles B. Roth, *The Buffalo Harvest* (Denver, CO: Sage, 1958), 21, 44. According to Mayer, the gun needed to be approximately thirty inches off the ground to avoid making more noise from the sound of the gunshot reverberating off the ground and into the air. Another point that Mayer makes is that even though still hunters stayed in one place to make their kills, they still preferred to call themselves buffalo runners or runners for short. This choice of name belies the fact that the still hunters wished to be seen as “sporting” individuals, much like their horseback mounted counterparts.

after 1871, there would be again plenty of impetus for hide harvesting for both economic and cultural reasons.<sup>47</sup>

### **Technological and Infrastructure Breakthroughs**

Beginning around 1850, technological and societal developments in the United States played critical roles in the future of the buffalo in North America. One of the single largest issues holding back the harvesting of buffalo was a lack of adequate transportation to get the products to market. With the railroad boom of the post Civil War era, the nation moved towards creating a more connected infrastructure. As early as 1859, Horace Greeley had called for a transcontinental railroad, citing the benefits of faster, safer transportation, an ability to move freight and the mail more conveniently and safely, and the added bonus of being able to shift the military might of the country overland from coast to coast quicker than by trekking overland or by sailing around South America to get to California.<sup>48</sup> While many people might have shared the same sentiments with Greeley about the railroad, the Civil War made building the railroad a secondary endeavor. With the conclusion of the war, Greeley's dream was realized with the completion of the first transcontinental railroad by Central Pacific and the Union Pacific railroad companies in 1869. However, this was just the beginning of railroad building on the Great Plains. The Kansas Pacific soon followed the Union Pacific in 1868. The Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad would reach Dodge City, Kansas, in

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<sup>47</sup> Sandoz, *The Buffalo Hunters*, 56-7.

<sup>48</sup> Greeley, *An Overland Journey*, 373-79. The entire purpose of Greeley's trip was to gather support for a transcontinental expedition and to suggest a possible route the railroad could take.



This painting shows the still hunt method of hunting. In the painting, note the dead buffalo as the hunter makes a stand. Furthermore, see how the hunter is lying on the ground. According to hunters, the gun's report upon being fired would have reverberated, potentially scaring the animals away in the process. Instead, hunters would have crouched down and used some form of tripod to balance the weight of the heavy gun. (Photo of J. H. Moser Painting, courtesy of the National Park Service)

1872. In the north, the Northern Pacific reached Miles City, Montana, in 1881.<sup>49</sup> The role of the latter two railroads would be especially important in the coming years in the history of the extermination of buffalo from the plains.

While the railroads provided the means to haul away buffalo hides in the coming years, they first needed to be built. In this case, the Kansas Pacific provides the perfect example of how the railroads were able to advance across the plains. In the late 1860s, the Kansas Pacific began building west from Lawrence, Kansas. Employing 1,200 men to build the “iron road,” the Kansas Pacific needed a large quantity of food to supply its workers. Buffalo, available in great numbers near the construction sites, were a perfect source of fresh meat that was free for the taking. The only problem for the railroad was that it did not want to divert workers from their primary task to that of hunting.

Therefore, the company contracted its meat needs out to the Goddard Brothers. The firm was to supply the railroad workers with twelve buffalo per day. Once the Goddard Brothers had the contract, they needed someone to undertake the dangerous task of hunting buffalo in a region where the American Indian population was hostile to any person invading their territory and killing their game. In this case, the contractors were fortunate to find a person to do just this, William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody. Cody claimed that he was paid five hundred dollars per month for eighteen months to deliver fresh meat for the Goddard Brothers, riding out ten to twelve miles from the railroad construction

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<sup>49</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 493, 507-08. The building of the railroads tended to be staggered over a number of years. This can be attributed to the ebb and flow of the availability of money and manpower to expand the railroads at any given point, as well as the financial panics that occurred after the Civil War during the 1870s and 1880s.

site. Over this period of time Cody claimed that he killed 4,280 buffalo for the railroad, earning the nickname by which he would become famous throughout the world.<sup>50</sup>

Another development around this time that would impact the buffalo population was an innovation in the leather manufacturing industry. In 1850, this industry was the fifth largest in the United States behind lumber, flour, boot and shoe manufacturing, and blacksmithing. However, to fuel the industry, cattle hides needed to be imported from overseas, in this case from Latin America. Despite finding the cheapest source available, the leather industry's costs remained too high. For example, hides usually cost \$2.20 each in 1850 for the Adirondack tanneries, which controlled a large portion of the tanning business. By 1870, the costs had doubled as the demand for leather increased in the wake of the Civil War.<sup>51</sup> In the quest to find the cheapest source of leather available, tanneries from around the world began to look longingly at the huge herds of bison on the Great Plains. If they could be tapped, the herds would provide a cheaper source of leather for a

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<sup>50</sup> Cody, *An Autobiography*, 117-21; Branch, *The Hunting of the Buffalo*, 138; Don Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 88-89. Russell disputes Cody's numbers because if Cody had killed twelve buffalo per day for eighteen months, he would have killed 6,570 not 4,280 animals. There would be no reason for Cody to brag about killing less than he was supposed to. Instead, Russell reasoned that there is an error in Cody's account. Instead of an eighteen month contract, Russell thought a misprint in the book's original publishing should have made the contract for eight months. Using this figure, Cody would have exceeded his contract for 2,980 buffalo by killing 4,280. Cody would have competition for the moniker "Buffalo Bill." Another hunter, William Comstock, claimed the nickname was his. In a well publicized hunt sponsored by the Kansas Pacific, Cody and Comstock hunted buffalo for a day and whoever had the most animals "won" the title "Buffalo Bill." Cody killed 69 animals to Comstock's 46, the former earning the nickname. The Kansas Pacific then took the heads of the slain buffalo and distributed them throughout the country to popularize the West and their line. For more information about this hunt, see Cody, *An Autobiography*, 125; Branch, *The Hunting of the Buffalo*, 142.

<sup>51</sup> Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, 130-31. The British army switched over to leather accoutrements around 1870, which coincides with their increased interest in experimenting with buffalo hides as a source of leather, since they too would have needed to import the expensive domestic stock hides. Hence, their interest in the "free" buffalo hides on the Great Plains of America.

variety of needs, including industrial belting for factories and accoutrements for the British army.<sup>52</sup>

Prior to 1871, no successful tanning process existed that allowed tanners to make use of the porous hides of the buffalo. Beginning in 1870, tanneries from Germany, Great Britain, and the United States began to test hides in different ways to see if a proper technique could be found to adequately cure the hides. In 1870, an English tannery placed an order with its agents at Fort Leavenworth, the W. C. Lobenstein Company, to secure five hundred hides to test. In return, this company contracted the hunt out to their agents in the region, Charles Rath and Charles Myer who in turn contacted hunter J. Wright Mooar to fill the quota. Mooar exceeded his kill by fifty-seven hides, which he gave to his brother, John in New York to sell, which he did to a firm from Philadelphia. Simultaneously, German firms ordered hides from their agent in Kansas City, J. N. DuBois. In 1871, a tanning technique was finally found nearly simultaneously among all three countries. Using a strong lime solution, the hides became more workable and pliant.<sup>53</sup> The Philadelphia firm immediately requested two thousand more hides.<sup>54</sup> This development was of critical importance to the tanneries and the economic health of the industry, since now a cheap, plentiful source of hides had been found and in the process, an overnight industry in buffalo hunting for hides alone formed. Fortune seekers from

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<sup>52</sup> Barsness, *Heads, Hides, and Horns*, 112; Robinson, *The Buffalo Hunters*, 53-4.

<sup>53</sup> J. Wright Mooar, *Buffalo Days: Stories from J. Wright Mooar As Told to James Winford Hunt*, ed. Robert F. Pace (Abilene, TX: State House Press, 2005), 17-19; Dary, *The Buffalo Book*, 94. Mooar would go on to sell meat from buffalo he killed to the workers on the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad, in the process helping to feed the workers who created the infrastructure which allowed him to transport hides more efficiently to the eastern markets.

<sup>54</sup> Barsness, *Heads, Hides, and Horns*, 112.



across the nation flocked to the Great Plains. One hunter, Frank Mayer, summed up the attitude of many of the hunters when he called the buffalo, “walking gold pieces.”<sup>55</sup>

While the development in the tanning process and the building of railroads can be considered the two greatest factors in the development of the “buffalo economy,” a few other factors need to be examined in their relationship with buffalo hunting. The first development was in firearms. With the conclusion of the Civil War, an array of weaponry was available to the buffalo hunters. Despite this, only a few guns would be chosen for the task of industrial buffalo hunting. In this case, Frank Mayer provides one of the best explanations of weaponry available to kill buffalo. According to Mayer, the rifles to kill buffalo had to be powerful enough to kill the buffalo with one shot from several hundred yards away. Two rifle manufacturers gradually came to dominate the field of buffalo hunting: the Remington Rifle Company with its .44 caliber rifle and the Sharp’s Rifle Company with its .40 and .45 caliber rifles. According to Mayer, most hunters chose one of these two companies and models for their hunting needs, with each hunter swearing by his choice. Despite this, Mayer believed that approximately eighty percent of all rifles used in hunting buffalo were Sharp’s models, due to the weapon’s superior firepower. These rifles were single breech loaders that could hit targets several hundred yards away. Due to the high demand and quality of the rifles, the price tag on the guns was high. From 1871 to 1875, Mayer thought that Sharp’s rifles sold for \$100.00 to \$150.00 a piece, with his own Sharp’s model purchased second hand from Richard Dodge for \$125.00. In 1875, Sharp’s introduced an even more powerful .45 caliber rifle, called the “Sharp’s Old Reliable” or “Sharp’s Buffalo,” which Mayer claimed was the best rifle ever developed for hunting buffalo. The cost of this rifle was

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<sup>55</sup> Mayer, *The Buffalo Harvest*, 15.

nearly twice the cost of the older Sharp's model, commanding \$237.60 for the one that Mayer purchased in 1875.<sup>56</sup> The superior firepower of these rifles, developed and modified after the Civil War to meet the demands of buffalo hunting was another reason why the industrial hunts of 1871 to 1883 were so successful and so devastating.

The industrial hide hunting of buffalo was confined to the years 1871 to 1883. During this time period, the buffalo in North America were nearly wiped off the face of the earth. Technological developments allowed the marketing of buffalo hides to expand greatly, with transportation infrastructure and weapons supporting the near extermination of the animal. As will be seen later, cultural considerations lent credence to these hunts as well, with the federal government tacitly accepting and encouraging the harvesting of buffalo as a way of controlling and ending the conflict with American Indians on the Great Plains, forcing them onto reservations. The hunts accomplished these goals in a series of stages, with none lasting over a few years. The first area to be cleared of buffalo was around the Dodge City, Kansas, from late 1871 through approximately 1874. The hunts then shifted south and west into Texas and the Southwest until 1878, when the focus again shifted to the northern plains where the slower pace of the construction of the Northern Pacific delayed the most extreme hunting until 1880-84.

At this point, it is necessary to note the approximate numbers of buffalo in the United States around 1871 in order to demonstrate the drastic effect of the hunting of the animals and why hunters, such as Frank Mayer, thought they could make fortunes hunting buffalo for an indefinite period. The critical factor to remember when examining any estimation of herd sizes is that there is no definitive scholarly agreement. Due to the

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<sup>56</sup> Mayer, *Buffalo Harvest*, 40, 49-54. Mayer's account goes into a great deal of detail about the exact specifications of each rifle. Even at the end of his life, Mayer still considered the Sharp's Old Reliable to be one of the best guns ever manufactured.

fact that poor records were kept regarding the slaughter and shipment of hides, it is impossible to come up with a definitive number of buffalo in existence at the time or the number killed either, leading to a wide range of possibilities. All guesses at herd sizes are based on personal observations of people who, in most cases, remained in shock at the numbers of buffalo present on the Great Plains. At the low end of the spectrum is historian E. Douglas Branch, who estimated that by 1865, the northern herd, defined as the herd north of the Union Pacific Railroad line, had diminished to 1.5 million head, while the southern herd had dropped to approximately 5 million head. Branch uses the figures provided by Richard Dodge, which will be given later, to come up with this estimate.<sup>57</sup> Other guesses put the figures much higher, allowing for other natural causes of death to take a toll on the buffalo population too. Robert Wright, a founder of Dodge City and resident of the region for the fifteen years prior to 1872, personally thought there were 25 million buffalo on the plains prior to the great hunts of the 1870s. In an assessment with General Philip Sheridan and Major Henry Inman in which the three men traveled fifty miles west and fifty miles east of Fort Dodge, Kansas, and were always in the presence of a huge herd of buffalo, Wright relates that Sheridan confided that he thought that there were 100 million buffalo on the plains but was afraid of publicly admitting that this large of a number of animals existed. For Sheridan, whose task it was to control the Indians of the region, this must have been a sobering thought, since while the buffalo existed, the Indians would always have a food source.<sup>58</sup> The truth of the

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<sup>57</sup> Branch, *The Hunting of the Buffalo*, 128.

<sup>58</sup> Richard M. Wright, *Dodge City: The Cowboy Capital and the Great Southwest in the Days of the Wild Indian, the Buffalo, the Cowboy, Dance Halls, Gambling Halls, and Bad Men* (Wichita, KS: Wichita Eagle Press, 1913), 75.

matter is that a figure somewhere between Wright's and Branch's is most likely correct, with at least two thirds of the animals being in the southern plains herd, where hunting pressure had been felt less over the course of the previous several decades.

### **Industrial Hunting in the Dodge City Region**

The first area in which hunting buffalo for economic reasons on a large scale took place was near Dodge City, Kansas. Dodge City, which was founded in 1872 when the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe Railroad reached the town, instantly became the hub of the buffalo trade.<sup>59</sup> Thousands of hunters flocked to the plains to hunt buffalo, with some estimates of the numbers of the people involved in hunting approaching twenty thousand.<sup>60</sup> The chief draw in this case was the potential to earn money. The newcomers who came to the plains and took up the career of a buffalo hunter came because they heard about the vast herds of buffalo and about the price paid for the hides. Shortly after J. Wright Mooar delivered his initial hides to his brother at the same time the hide curing process had been perfected, the price of hides was \$3.05 per hide. Mooar, who was one of the most successful hunters, employed his brother John, his cousin Charles Wright, and another man, Mike McCabe, in his new outfit. The size of this outfit was typical of many of the groups that developed to hunt buffalo. J. Wright Mooar acted as the lone hunter, while his brother John and Wright skinned the buffalo. The fourth person served

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<sup>59</sup> Sandoz, *The Buffalo Hunters*, 145-152. Dodge City was originally founded as Buffalo City. The post office informed the citizens that Kansas already had a Buffalo City and Buffalo recorded in their records, so townspeople changed the name of the city to reflect the name of Fort Dodge, the nearby fort.

<sup>60</sup> Mayer, *Buffalo Harvest*, 21; Dary, *The Buffalo Book*, 97. Mayer heard the twenty thousand figure from another person. He personally thought the figure excessive, believing the total to be closer to 10,000, which included skinners and camp attendants in addition to the hunters. Dary quotes from an issue of the *Newton Kansan*, which made a note in its issue of December 26, 1872, that there were about 2,000 hunters on the western Kansas plains, killing an average of fifteen buffalo per day.

as a camp attendant, who cared for the hides once they were in camp. Wright Mooar paid his workers \$50.00 per month to do these tasks. One atypical aspect of the Mooar outfit was that it harvested the meat from the buffalo too. Most hunters avoided this task, since it was time consuming and the price for the meat, for which Mooar received 2.5 cents per pound, was deemed not worth the trouble to smoke, salt, and cure.<sup>61</sup> William Hornaday, writing some years later, determined that nine tenths of the value of the buffalo was in its hide, hence the waste of the rest of the animal.<sup>62</sup> In one month, Mooar's outfit harvested 305 hides and 20,000 pounds of meat.<sup>63</sup> While these figures are large, Mooar's group became more efficient, larger, and deadlier as time went on.

Hunters Frank Mayer and Emmanuel Dubbs demonstrate how other hunters fared in the Dodge City region. Mayer, as noted earlier, had come to the plains seeking his fortune. He, like other would-be hunters, figured that he could kill one hundred buffalo a day. With a value of \$3.00 per hide and taking out a quarter for the price of ammunition, Mayer determined he could net \$200 per day. At this rate, he would make \$6,000 per month, or more than one hundred times what other men of his day were making. Even the salary of the President of the United States was only one-third of what Mayer made as a hunter. What Mayer did not figure in were the expenses of hunting beyond bullets. After these expenses, which included paying the men in his outfit and purchasing supplies, he made only \$100.00 per month.<sup>64</sup> One thing that kept him going was the

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<sup>61</sup> Mooar, *Buffalo Days*, 31; Dodge, *The Plains of North America*, 137. Dodge noted that meat spoiled quickly. In one instance, he had some of his soldiers shoot several buffalo just before sunset. By morning, when they went to butcher their kills, the meat had already spoiled.

<sup>62</sup> Hornaday, *Extirpation*, 441.

<sup>63</sup> Mooar, *Buffalo Days*, 31.

<sup>64</sup> Mayer, *Buffalo Harvest*, 56, 61-2, 64.

pursuit of the “silk robe.” These robes, valued at \$50.00 a piece and renowned for their silky texture, were incredibly rare, with Mayer placing the odds of shooting a buffalo with this type of hide at one in five hundred or one in a thousand. In his entire nine-year career, Mayer would only shoot twenty of these animals.<sup>65</sup> After his career was over, Mayer provided a breakdown of his career as a hunter. In his first two years of hunting, he netted \$6,000. In 1874, he branched out and harvested meat too, making over \$5,000 gross, but netting only \$3,124. After his nine years of hunting, despite his earnings, Mayer had less than \$5,000 in the bank to show for his entire career of hunting.<sup>66</sup>

While the Mooars and Mayer were considered successful hunters, the case of Emmanuel Dubbs represents the pitfalls and problems that hunters faced while seeking their fortunes. Dubbs, unlike many hunters, did not hunt year round, choosing to hunt the buffalo in the winter and fall when the hides were at their peak value. The rest of the year, Dubbs ran a farmstead in the Dodge City area. Dubbs made it a practice in his hunting to make use of both the meat and the hides of the buffalo. In 1874, he received \$2-2.50 per hide depending on its quality. Yet, the allure of more money eventually drove Dubbs to hunt in the summer. In 1874, Dubbs broke many rules, besides his own, by crossing into lands promised by the federal government to various Indian tribes, including the Cheyenne, Comanche, and Arapahoe, to hunt with 110 other hunters from Dodge City. They made Adobe Walls, now in the panhandle of Texas, their base of operations. In a three-week period, Dubbs and his crew of three men harvested 1,000 hides, leaving the remains of the meat to scavengers. Later, while out on another hunt, his entire crew was captured, tortured, and killed by Indians. Because of this, Dubbs was

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<sup>65</sup> Mayer, *Buffalo Harvest*, 66.

<sup>66</sup> Mayer, *Buffalo Harvest*, 63-4.

forced to abandon his thousand hides and retreat from the area. In June, the entire Adobe Walls site was closed down in the wake of Indian hostility in the region.<sup>67</sup> Dubbs still pushed his luck, hiring another three man crew at \$75.00 per month to go south into “No Man’s Land” south of the Arkansas River, where he again lost a man to Indian attack. Dubbs continued to hunt until 1878, but his string of bad luck illustrates the hardships and dangers that buffalo hunting entailed in the quest for monetary gain.<sup>68</sup>

### **Industrial Hunting in the Southwest**

After 1874, the focus of hide hunting shifted to the south into western Texas. In this region, hunting was slower to develop because of the threat from Indians, such as the Comanche, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe, and a lack of adequate transportation. John R. Cook, who started as a skinner in 1874 and became a hunter in later years, made Fort Griffin, Texas, his base of operations in the southwestern plains along with hunters like Mooar, Mayer, and Dubbs.<sup>69</sup> Cook’s account as a skinner offers one of the only existing

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<sup>67</sup> Adobe Walls was the site of the Adobe Walls Battle of June 27, 1874. At this battle, a united force of 1,100-1,200 Comanche, Arapahoe, and Cheyenne Indians assaulted twenty eight hunters and one woman. Amazingly, only four whites died while 115 Indians did. The number of dead Indians comes from Chief Whirlwind, a Cheyenne chief who reminisced about the battle years later with J. Wright Mooar. The chief reason for the discrepancies in death tolls was the longer range of the buffalo rifles. Mooar and his crew were at the fort the night before the battle, but upon hearing the rumor of an impending Indian attack scheduled for the next day, left without telling anyone. In fact, there exists some debate about who knew what and when. The traders at the post, Charles Rath and Charles Myer, along with the saloon keeper Joe Hanrahan, allegedly knew of the attack in advance due to the report of an army scout, but did not want the hunters to leave the post with no defense, for fear of losing their investments in their stores and supplies they had placed there. Rath and Myers left before the battle, although they never admitted to knowing about the planned Indian attack. Hanrahan stayed behind and may have been responsible for making sure some hunters stayed at the post and were up early on the day of the attack. Mooar admitted what he knew many years later, when he felt that it would not matter if the truth came out about the battle. For more information about the attack, see John R. Cook, *The Border and the Buffalo: An Untold Story of the Southwest Plains* (New York: Citadel Press, 1967), 109, 130; Mooar, *Buffalo Days*, 49-51, 64-5 .

<sup>68</sup> Charles Goodnight, Emmanuel Dubbs, and John A Hart, *Pioneer Days in the Southwest from 1850 to 1879: Thrilling Descriptions of Buffalo Hunting, Indian Fighting and Massacres, Cowboy Life and Home Building*. (Guthrie, OK: State Capital, 1909), 38, 45-6, 49-50, 60, 62, 66, 73.

records of someone with this expertise. According to Cook, he and a fellow skinner could skin anywhere from 30 to 40 to up to 200 animals killed by their hunter in a single day. In one 41 day period, his outfit skinned over 2,000 hides. For Cook's work, he was paid twenty-five cents per hide. Cook, when comparing his camp to others, points out that a neighboring camp harvested 3,700 hides from the same vicinity. In 1876, his outfit sold over 3,000 hides to an English buyer, Loganstein, for \$2,000.<sup>70</sup> By this point, the hide market had become glutted with hides, and hides sold for \$1.50 to \$2.00 each and would drop even more the following year to \$1.00 or less in some cases.<sup>71</sup> In the meantime, Mooar had expanded his operation since his days around Dodge City. His brother John now acted as a business manager for a group of four separate outfits run by the Mooars.<sup>72</sup> In November 1873, his crews harvested four thousand buffalo along the Brazos River. They maintained this rate through 1876, when in the four months of that winter they slaughtered 4,500 buffalo and sold 62,000 pounds of meat for 7.5 cents a pound at Fort Griffin. The following year 3,700 hides were sold at Fort Worth along with 25,000 pounds of meat. In 1878, 2,800 hides and 20,000 pounds of meat were sold, and finally, in 1879, the Mooars quit the buffalo hide and meat business, but only after harvesting 7,000 pounds of meat. By that year there were no more buffalo left in significant numbers to hunt on the southern plains.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Cook, *The Border and the Buffalo*, 185.

<sup>70</sup> Cook, *The Border and the Buffalo*, 168, 171, 179, 194, 198. Cook may be referring to the W.C. Lobenstein firm, an active buyer of hides.

<sup>71</sup> Robinson, *The Buffalo Hunters*, 95-6, 98, 106.

<sup>72</sup> Mooar, *Buffalo Days*, 61, 68-70. Mooar's outfit consisted of four nine yoke teams of oxen, thirteen wagons, two four mule teams with two wagons, and nine men employed as teamsters, skinners, and general help.



### **Tabulating the Number of Dead Buffalo on the Southern Plains**

At this point, it is prudent to examine just how many hides were being shipped and how many buffalo were being killed in the southern plains region. Unfortunately, no exact number of hides for the entire region exists; however, personal observations and tabulations by observers have allowed some estimates to be formed, based chiefly around the hunting that happened in the Dodge City region. In this case, the most accurate figures come from J. A. Allen and Richard Dodge, who requested figures of the railroads of the region, the Union Pacific, the Kansas Pacific, and the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe for several years during the hunts of 1871-1874. Both men were interested in just how many buffalo products, including meat, tongues, robes, and hides each railroad shipped, so that they could begin to understand just how many buffalo were being killed. For 1871, Allen was able to retrieve the following figures from the Kansas Pacific's General Superintendent, E. T. Bowen. According to Bowen, the line shipped an estimated 341,151 pounds of dry buffalo hides. Bowen figured that each hide weighed twenty-five pounds, so that the total number of buffalo killed was 13,646. In addition, the line carried 1,161,419 pounds of meat, figuring that each animal had two hundred pounds taken from them, for another 5,807 animals. Allen, upon receiving these figures, instantly realized that the railroad was most likely underestimating the buffalo products their line hauled. Allen interviewed several hunters who hunted in 1871 who claimed that they killed upwards of 3,000 animals each. Armed with this information, Allen estimates that the number of killed animals was no less than 20,000 for the year 1871.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Mooar, *Buffalo Days*, 73-4, 77-8.

<sup>74</sup> Allen, *The American Bisons*, 189.

While Allen retrieved these figures easily for 1871, after this point only the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe provided any numbers of buffalo products shipped. Amazingly, the Kansas Pacific and Union Pacific claimed that they were unable to find the records that showed how many buffalo hides they shipped, and to do so would require too much time and effort to discover and compute. Both Allen and Dodge, who requested these figures simultaneously, would be rebuffed in their efforts.<sup>75</sup> While Allen took this rebuff in stride, Dodge believed that the railroads knew full well how many hides they were shipping and had this information become public, some measure would have been taken by Congress to outlaw buffalo hunting. Since these products made up a great deal of the railroads' freight, they attempted to hide the information to prevent legislation from being proposed and passed.<sup>76</sup> Historian Larry Barsness notes an instance where the Union Pacific's deceit is noticeable, stating in 1872 the line had a shed that was sixty feet wide by thirty feet high by one hundred seventy five feet long in Cheyenne, Wyoming, bulging with hides ready to be moved.<sup>77</sup>

Despite having only one railroad's cooperation, Dodge and Allen moved forward with their studies. The Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe's General Superintendent, C. F. Morse, provided the following figures to both Dodge and Allen. In 1872, the line hauled 165,721 hides, followed by 251,443 in 1873, and 42,289 in 1874. For this same period, the railroad hauled 1,617,600 pounds of meat in 1873 and 632,800 pounds in 1874. In

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<sup>75</sup> Allen, *The American Bisons*, 190; Richard I. Dodge, *The Hunting Grounds of the Great West: A Description of the Plains, Game, and Indians of the Great North American Desert* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1878), 139.

<sup>76</sup> Dodge, *The Hunting Grounds*, 139. The first efforts to save bison developed simultaneously with the industrialized hunting of buffalo in 1871. The topic of Congressional action to protect the buffalo is covered in Chapter 2.

<sup>77</sup> Barsness, *Heads, Hides, and Horns*, 128.

1872, the line recorded no meat as being hauled. The line admitted to hauling 18,489 robes in 1874 too. The railroad also provided the numbers of bones hauled per year for the three years in question as well. In 1872, 1,135,300 pounds of bones were hauled, followed by 2,743,100 pounds in 1873, and 6,914,950 pounds in 1874.<sup>78</sup> Dodge, upon receiving these numbers, figured that the robe trade was carried on in a clandestine manner during all these years, since robes could only be procured during the winter when the buffalo had most of their hair. Furthermore, the best robes were handled by the Indians, such as the Cheyenne, who were in a state of quasi war against the United States, meaning that trading with a warring faction of Indians was aiding an enemy force against the army.<sup>79</sup>

Upon further analysis, these numbers were expanded upon by both Dodge and other people involved in the buffalo trade. Richard Wright, who served as one of the chief hide buyers of hides in Dodge City, stated that he and his partner, Charles Rath, had 200,000 hides in their yard in 1872 to go out on the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe, along with 200 cars of hindquarters of meat and two rail cars of tongues.<sup>80</sup> Keeping in mind that other hide dealers were present in Dodge City, these figures show that even the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe, which admitted its numbers, was most likely underestimating how many hides and buffalo products they were shipping. As hides were worth around \$3.00 early on according to J. Wright Mooar, Wright's 200,000 hides were worth \$600,000 dollars alone. The price for hides would drop precipitously as the

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<sup>78</sup> Allen, *The American Bisons*, 190; Dodge, *The Hunting Grounds*, 140. More information about the buffalo bone trade is contained at the end of this chapter.

<sup>79</sup> Dodge, *The Hunting Grounds*, 141.

<sup>80</sup> Wright, *Dodge City*, 75.

market was flooded with hides, so that the price of hides in some cases would only bring sixty-five to ninety-cents per hide.<sup>81</sup> Frank Mayer noted that he set a quota of shooting twenty-five buffalo per day and could go up to fifty to sixty per day, but anything more than that and his skinners would be unable to keep up and he would lose money by wasting bullets on buffalo from which he could not harvest the hides.<sup>82</sup>

Dodge, not content to examine only one of the three main rail lines, began to postulate how many bones, hides, and meat the other railroads carried from 1872 to 1874. Figuring that the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe carried approximately one third of the trade, he applied their numbers to the other two railroads. Dodge believed that the feeder lines of the Kansas Pacific and Union Pacific helped to augment their numbers up to a similar level with those of the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe. Using this logic, Dodge assigned the value of 331,442 hides in 1872 to all other railroads except the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe. In 1873, the number jumped to 502,886 and in 1874 the total fell sharply to 84,578. For meat, he assigned no value to any line in 1872, but in 1873, he claimed all other lines carried 3,235,200 pounds, while in 1874, the railroads carried 1,265,600 pounds. For bones, in 1872, the lines hauled 2,270,600 pounds, 5,486,200 pounds in 1873, and 13,829,900 pounds in 1874. Therefore, when Dodge added up all of these figures, including those given by the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe, he came to the

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<sup>81</sup> Hornaday, *Extirpation*, 446.

<sup>82</sup> Mayer, *The Buffalo Harvest*, 35. Mayer easily could have gone higher than this amount, but efficiency was his goal throughout his career. David Dary points out that a good hunter could kill seventy-five to a hundred buffalo per day, an average one fifty, and a common one twenty-five per day. A good skinner could get through sixty to seventy hides per day, an average one thirty to forty, and a common one fifteen to twenty. For more information, see Dary, *The Buffalo Book*, 112.

grand total of 1,378,359 hides, 6,751,200 pounds of meat, and 32,380,050 pounds of bones.<sup>83</sup>

After computing the numbers of hides that he thought more accurately described what the railroads shipped, Dodge tackled the difficult problem of how many buffalo were actually killed during this period. According to Dodge, when the hunts commenced in 1872 on a large scale, each hide represented up to five dead buffalo. This figure dropped to three for every one hide in 1873, and by 1874, when buffalo were becoming less prevalent, the hide ratio was 100 hides for every 125 buffalo killed. The cause of this waste was due to a variety of reasons, including the lack of skill of many of the hunters and skinners, who did not treat the hides properly when skinning. In many cases, Dodge pointed out that skinners simply hooked a horse up to the hide and yanked it off, tearing and ruining the hide in the process.<sup>84</sup> Hunter Frank Mayer supported Dodge in his claims, stating that in 1872 three to four buffalo died for every one hide successfully harvested.<sup>85</sup> John Cook, a skinner, learned along with other skinners that the best way to skin the buffalo was by rolling them slowly over by pulling the carcass with a horse as the skinner worked. Even with this more careful approach, Cook commented that for every hide, one and a half buffalo were killed, due to insects getting in the hides and ruining them or injured buffalo running off wounded and then dying later.<sup>86</sup>

Based on the statistics that he gathered, Dodge estimated the total kill numbers from 1872 to 1874. In 1872, using the figure of one hide for every three killed, he came

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<sup>83</sup> Dodge, *The Hunting Grounds*, 140.

<sup>84</sup> Dodge, *The Hunting Grounds*, 141.

<sup>85</sup> Mayer, *The Buffalo Harvest*, 89.

<sup>86</sup> Cook, *The Border and the Buffalo*, 168-9, 197.

up with a total aggregate, including the railroad figures, of 1,491,489 dead. In 1873, using one hide for two dead buffalo, he came up with 1,508,658 dead buffalo. Finally, in 1874, he determined a kill total of 158,583. The severe drop-off in this case shows just how quickly the animals were being harvested. Altogether for the three years, Dodge determined that a minimum of 3,158,730 buffalo died by the hand of white hunters alone.<sup>87</sup> After figuring the number that Americans may have killed, Dodge confronted the problem of how many the Indians killed. The estimate he came up with was one robe made it to market for every five to six buffalo killed. The Indians, in this case, would use many of the other dead buffalo for their personal needs. Using these assumptions, Dodge figured that the southern plains Indians, including the Kiowa, Comanche, Cheyenne, Arapahoe, and all others killed upwards of 114,000 buffalo, the Sioux Indians on the reservations near the Union Pacific killed 16,000, while all the other Upper Missouri Indian tribes killed 275,000, based on the robe market. The total of 405,000 was then multiplied by three to account for the three years in question, to come up with an aggregate of 1,215,000, which, when added to the kill of the whites, totaled 4,373,730 dead buffalo. These figures, as Dodge points out, did not include the totals of the hide hunters in Texas, modern day Oklahoma, Colorado, or the northern plains.<sup>88</sup>

While Dodge was able to give some estimation of the slaughter of buffalo around Dodge City, figuring out how many animals died elsewhere is more difficult. It is not impossible, however, to estimate the scale of these hunts. Robert Wright thought there

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<sup>87</sup> Dodge, *The Hunting Grounds*, 142.

<sup>88</sup> Dodge, *The Hunting Grounds*, 143. For more information about Indian hunting techniques and practices, see Richard Irving Dodge, *Our Wild Indians: Thirty Three Years' Personal Experience among the Red Men of the Great West; A Popular Account of Their Social Life, Religion Habits, Traits, Customs, Exploits, Etc; With Thrilling Adventures and Experiences on the Great Plains and in the Mountains of Our Wide Frontier* (1882; repr., Williamstown, MA: Corner House, 1978), 282-296 and 574-583.

were 1,500 hunters around Fort Griffin, Texas, with hides selling for \$1-1.60 in 1877.<sup>89</sup> Mari Sandoz noted a few incidents in her book for the winter of 1875 to 1876 in Texas, in which one hunter, Brick Bond, killed 5,855 buffalo for the entire winter period, while Tom Nixon, another hunter, killed 2,173 for the period from September 15 to October 20.<sup>90</sup> Charles Robinson, whose work focuses on the southwestern United States, noted another hunter, Joe McCombs, who killed 9,700 buffalo during the 1877-78 winter and received \$1.00 for each hide. Robinson went on to mention that a hide exchange was created in Galveston, Texas, to handle the hide market, acting as a sort of stock market for the industry.<sup>91</sup> Around Fort Griffin, where the hide hunting was centered, Charles Rath had four to five acres of land on which he stacked hides to await shipment. At this site, Rath would often times have forty to fifty wagons waiting to transport the hides overland to Forth Worth, Texas.<sup>92</sup> Rath would establish another hunter's camp, called Rath City, which existed for three years from 1876 to 1879, from which an estimated 1.1 million hides were shipped.<sup>93</sup> These figures, while incomplete, help to show that the hide business in the south was just as prevalent as it was more to the north in the region surrounding Dodge City, Kansas.

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<sup>89</sup> Wright, *Dodge City*, 192.

<sup>90</sup> Sandoz, *The Buffalo Hunters*, 254.

<sup>91</sup> Robinson, *The Buffalo Hunters*, 102-06.

<sup>92</sup> Ida Ellen Rath, *The Rath Trail* (Wichita, KS: McCormick-Armstrong, 1961), 137.

<sup>93</sup> Robinson, *The Buffalo Hunters*, 115-16.



The person on the hide pile may be Charles Rath, one of the foremost hide buyers and suppliers for the buffalo hunters. In the background, a hide baler is used to pack the hides together for ease of shipment. According to some estimates, there are 40,000 hides in this pile. (Photo by J. R. Douglass, 1874, courtesy of the National Park Service)



### **Finishing off the Buffalo: The Northern Plains Industrial Hunts**

When the southern hunts finally ended, many of the hunters shifted their focus to the last large herd of buffalo left, located in the northern plains and centered in the western Dakotas and Montana. The hunt in this region had been the focus of the American Fur Company and the Red River hunters for several decades, and it soon became the last place for the free ranging wild buffalo to be seen in vast numbers. Unlike the southern herds, this region of the country was slower to have rail access. The Northern Pacific reached Bismarck in 1876, and Miles City, Montana, in 1881.<sup>94</sup> One major source of information on buffalo hunting in this region was William T. Hornaday. Sensing the unsustainable nature of industrial hide hunting, he made it his mission to record and contact hunters and hide dealers before they dispersed and disappeared after the eventual disappearance of the buffalo. Another key historical source is the writings of Victor “Vic” Smith, one of the preeminent hunters in the northern plains. Together, Hornaday and Smith provide insight into the evolving nature of the hunt and the change in focus as the buffalo entered their twilight phase as the dominant animal of the Great Plains.

In the northern plains, hunting buffalo was predominantly a winter activity. Unlike the southern plains, more emphasis was placed on the value of the robe as a product of the buffalo, although the hide was still marketed. The chief reason for this change in focus was because in the north, the buffalo’s robe was thicker and stayed in prime condition for a longer period of time, meaning that more value could be assigned to the commodity than to the southern hides, which had a shorter window of peak value. In the north, the period from mid-October to mid-February was the time when buffalo could

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<sup>94</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 507-08, 513.

be harvested and have a higher return in value.<sup>95</sup> Compared to the southern plains, where \$3.00 was considered to be a high price for hides, in the north in 1881 hides sold from \$2.50 up to \$4.00, and this figure would continue to rise as the hunters found fewer buffalo to hunt. The higher prices paid for robes led to a large influx of hunters from across the nation. Hornaday interviewed several people that were in the region, and they believed that there were upwards of 5,000 hunters and skinners on the range hunting buffalo in 1882. Lieutenant J. M. T. Partello informed Hornaday that there was a solid line of hunter camps all along the Missouri River into Idaho.<sup>96</sup> These hunters, like those in the south, were drawn by the potential for economic gain that had driven the relationship between Americans and buffalo since the time of the Red River hunts.

Victor Smith and Jim McCaney provide some idea of the numbers of buffalo that were being harvested on the northern plains. Smith, who described himself as “the champion shot of Montana” was too young to take part in the southern hunts, but in the late 1870s he went west to Montana and the Dakotas to hunt buffalo.<sup>97</sup> In 1879, from October 31 to the middle of March, Smith killed 4,470 buffalo and sold their hides for \$3.00 a piece. Smith continued to pull in large numbers of buffalo in his career, setting a record for a one hour stand in which he killed 107 buffalo in one hour in 1881. That winter, he killed 4,500 buffalo near Glendive, Montana, on the Yellowstone River. Smith revealed that he killed even more buffalo the following year, although he does not

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<sup>95</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 442.

<sup>96</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 509-10

<sup>97</sup> Victor Grant Smith, *The Champion Buffalo Hunter: The Frontier Memoirs of Yellowstone Vic Smith*, ed. Jeanette Producers (Helena, MT: Twodot, 1997), 129. Theodore Roosevelt supported Smith in this claim. Roosevelt and Smith would grow to be close friends after meeting each other. For more information about Roosevelt and Smith, see Theodore Roosevelt, *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman: Sketches of Sport on the Northern Cattle Plains* (1886; repr., Upper Saddle River, NJ: Literature House, 1970), 42-43.

divulge just how many. Based on other information in his book, this may have been the year in which he killed 5,000 buffalo. Smith would continue to hunt into the mid 1880s, even though most hunters had quit by this time.<sup>98</sup> While Smith was a highly successful hunter, more typical of his time was Jim McCaney, whose experiences are recorded by Hornaday. McCaney was only fifteen when he started hunting in the northern plains. In the winter of 1881-82, McCaney brought in 1,200 buffalo of which twelve were the highly sought after blue robes, which sold for \$16.00 a piece and one was the even more valuable beaver robe, which sold for \$75.00.<sup>99</sup> Hornaday explained that both the beaver and blue robes were rare, but could be identified by their pelt characteristics. In the case of the rare beaver robes, the hair was silkier and softer than a regular robe, taking on the characteristics of a beaver pelt. The blue robes were mottled robes that gave off a blue hue. Both of these rare types of robes dwarfed the regular price of \$3.50 paid for robes and hides of normal quality, lending to them a mystical quality that made hunters even more desirous of harvesting them.<sup>100</sup>

While the cases of Smith and McCaney are illustrative of hunting successes in the northern plains, Hornaday wished to take a “big picture” approach to this region much like Dodge had done for the southern plains. To do this, Hornaday contacted known robe and hide buyers and the Northern Pacific Railroad to create a picture of the scale of the slaughter on the northern ranges. The first firm that Hornaday received information from

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<sup>98</sup> Smith, *The Champion Buffalo Hunter*, 97-8, 126, 173. Smith stated that he did not wish to reveal how many buffalo he killed in 1882 because when he composed his autobiography in the 1900s, people frowned upon the buffalo hunters. Later in his book though, he reveals that in one season he killed over 5,000 buffalo. Since buffalo became more difficult to find from 1883 on, it stands to reason that the 1882 hunt may have been the one in which Smith killed over 5,000 buffalo.

<sup>99</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 444, 467; Robinson, *The Buffalo Hunters*, 134, 137.

<sup>100</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 444.

was J & A Boskowitz out of New York. This firm admitted that they spent \$923,070 for hides for the period from 1876 to 1884. Another robe and hide firm, Joseph Ullman, with offices in New York and St. Paul, Minnesota, spent \$216,250 on hides in 1882 alone.<sup>101</sup> A further breakdown of the Ullman firm shows that the company handled 14,000 hides for \$3.50 a piece and 12,000 robes at \$7.50 each in 1881 and 35-40,000 hides in 1882 at an average price of \$3.50 per hide. In 1882, the company also handled 10,000 robes at a cost of \$8.50 per hide. In 1883, the hide shipments dropped to 6-7,000 hides and 1,500-2,000 robes at slight price increases, while in 1884, only 2,500 hides arrived, and in 1885, little to nothing came in.<sup>102</sup> Another hide dealer out of Glendive, Montana, H. F. Douglas, shipped 250,000 hides in the winter of 1881-82, while another 180,000 shipped out of southeastern Montana, during this same period.<sup>103</sup> Hornaday learned that another company, the I. G. Baker Company out of Fort Benton, Montana, sent 76,000 robes east in 1876, 20,000 in 1880, 5,000 in 1883, and none in 1884.<sup>104</sup>

The final figures that Hornaday assembled were from the Northern Pacific Railroad. From 1876 to 1879 the railroad shipped 3-4,000 bales of robes per year from Bismarck. In each bale, there were ten robes, for a total of 30-40,000 robes shipped annually. In 1881, Hornaday learned that the railroad shipped 75,000 untanned hides from Bismarck, according to J. M. Hannaford, the traffic manager for the line. The company revealed that it did not have records for anything beyond this date and no totals

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<sup>101</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 435.

<sup>102</sup> Robinson, *The Buffalo Hunters*, 141.

<sup>103</sup> Robinson, *The Buffalo Hunters*, 140.

<sup>104</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 506



The figure skinning the buffalo most likely is L. A. Huffman, a hunter/photographer who hunted in the northern plains in the late 1870s. His photos are some of the few existing photographs, not artist renditions, from this era that show dead buffalo. (Photo courtesy of the National Park Service)



This is another view of Huffman's kill. The first book that featured this photo and the one preceding it was William T. Hornaday's *Extermination of the American Bison*. In 1894, different angles of these same buffalo pictures appeared again in *Forest and Stream* magazine in the wake of the capture of a poacher illegally killing buffalo in Yellowstone National Park. The editor of *Forest and Stream*, George Bird Grinnell, did not reveal that the animals had actually died in the 1870s, not 1894. Instead, he used the pictures to convince the public that Yellowstone and the buffalo within the park needed to be protected from poachers. The poaching incident and subsequent reactions to it are covered in more detail in Chapter 2. (Photo courtesy of the National Park Service)

for robes hauled either.<sup>105</sup> Despite these difficulties, Hornaday was able to gather data from a robe buyer, J. N. Davis, who worked closely with the Northern Pacific to ship hides and robes. Davis estimated that in 1881, the Northern Pacific hauled 50,000 robes and hides out of the stations between Miles City and Mandan, Montana. In 1882, 200,000 were hauled, followed by 40,000 in 1883, and in 1884, only one carload was hauled by the railroad out of Dickinson, Dakota Territory.<sup>106</sup> This carload marked the end of the industrial hunting of the buffalo and the species as a dominant feature of the Great Plains.

### **The Outfitters of the Hunters**

While the hunters who came to the plains came in search of getting rich quick, other groups capitalized on the hunters' need for supplies and shipping. These groups of people were the outfitters and freighters. In particular, a few people cornered the market to supply the hunters and at the same time act as hide dealers. The main outfitters of the hunters were Charles Rath, Robert Wright, Charles Myer, and Frank Conrad. Rath came to dominate this trade more than any other person, establishing at least four stores for the hunters and helping to create the short-lived Texas towns of Reynolds City, Rath City, and Adobe Walls. In addition, he helped to cement Fort Griffin and Dodge City as centers of the commerce.<sup>107</sup> Robert Wright, who later bowed out of his partnership with Rath, admitted that he thought Rath handled over a million hides by himself as he forged

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<sup>105</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 507-08.

<sup>106</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 513.

<sup>107</sup> Rath, *The Rath Trail*, 137, 161. The only accurate record for the amount of goods that Rath handled comes from court records that deal with claims suffered after the fall of Adobe Walls. According to these records, Rath lost \$12,250 worth of goods after Indian hostility forced the closure of the post.

new outlets for his business to move into.<sup>108</sup> Frank Conrad, who moved to Fort Griffin from Rockford, Illinois, partnered with Rath to run the store there. Conrad stated that their firm kept thirty tons of lead and five tons of powder on hand in addition to other supplies. This firm, like others with Rath's involvement, hauled hides to double up the profits for the company. In some cases, up to ten wagons and forty yoke of oxen could be kept busy hauling hides to railheads for transport.<sup>109</sup> In Fort Worth, Texas, a competitor, Gurley & Co., handled 1,000 hides per day.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, the network of saloons and other businesses that followed the hunters were able to capitalize on the booming buffalo industry. Joe Hanrahan, who became famous for his role in the Battle of Adobe Walls, was just one of the saloon keepers who followed the hunters wherever they went. Victor Smith tells of another person, Don McArthur, who built his saloon outside Glendive just for hunters in 1881 and in that winter alone, cleared \$10,000.<sup>111</sup>

With high demand for their wares, the outfitters were able to charge exorbitant prices for all their products. Frank Mayer outlined the costs of his outfit, which while better equipped than some, was still representative of the times. Mayer revealed that he had two wagons, a large one for hauling hides and a smaller one for supplies. These wagons cost \$650 and \$400 each. The large wagon required twelve mules to pull it, while the smaller one required six. Mayer also had a couple of saddle horses. Mayer pointed out that on the range, a good buffalo horse could cost \$250-500. The guns cost \$100-150, with the Sharp's "Old Reliable" costing over \$237. Factory made ammunition

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<sup>108</sup> Wright, *Dodge City*, 196.

<sup>109</sup> Robinson, *The Buffalo Hunters*, 119-20, 123.

<sup>110</sup> Robinson, *The Buffalo Hunters*, 120.

<sup>111</sup> Moorar, *Buffalo Days*, 49-51; Smith, *The Champion Hunter*, 99.



cost twenty-five cents, while that made by the hunters on the range cost half that. On top of this, the camp equipment such as bedrolls, tents, and cooking utensils all had to be bought too. In all, Mayer spent over \$2,000 just to get started hunting and this money did not include the additional fees paid to his skinners and camp help.<sup>112</sup> On the northern ranges, these prices held steady, with Hornaday stating that an outfit cost \$1,000 to \$2,000 to start out. Jim McCaney revealed to Hornaday that he had the following in his outfit in 1882: “two wagons, two-four horse teams, two saddle horses, two wall tents, one cook stove with pipe, one .40-90 Sharp’s rifle, one .45-90 Sharp’s rifle, one .45-120 Sharp’s rifle, fifty pounds gunpowder, 550 pounds lead, 4,500 primers, 600 brass shells, four sheets patch paper, sixty Wilson skinning knives, three butcher’s steels, one portable grindstone, food (flour, bacon, coffee, sugar, baking powder, molasses, dried apples, canned vegetables, beans, etc.).” All together this outfit would cost McCaney \$1,400 plus another \$50 per month for each of his two hired men.<sup>113</sup> At these prices, the outfitters were the only ones who ever really achieved their goals of making a fortune off of the buffalo.<sup>114</sup>

### **Destroying the Indians’ Livelihood**

Besides money-making, subjugation of the Great Plains Indians provided another reason to kill the buffalo. On the plains, buffalo were the life blood of the tribes, who

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<sup>112</sup> Mayer, *The Buffalo Harvest*, 49-56.

<sup>113</sup> Hornaday, *Extirpation*, 467.

<sup>114</sup> Robert Wright retired and lived comfortably for the rest of his days in Dodge City. Wright was also able to purchase an incredibly rare white buffalo robe from one hunter, “Prairie Dog” Dave Morrow, for \$1,000. Charles Rath, on the other hand, would not live as comfortably as his former partner. Rath made poor decisions later in his life, leading him into debt in his later years. For more information on the lives of Wright and Rath, see Wright, *Dodge City*, and Rath, *The Rath Trail*. For more information on Wright’s purchase of the white buffalo robe, see Wright, *Dodge City*, 197.

were largely sustained by the animals. Red Cloud, a Sioux chief, confided to a white visitor that his tribe had twenty-two uses for buffalo, ranging from food and medicine, to tools made from the bones, to clothing and housing from the animals' hides, to using buffalo chips as fuel.<sup>115</sup> While the Great Plains Indians, which included the Sioux, Comanche, Cheyenne, Arapahoe, Comanche, and Kiowa, among others, had always used buffalo as a food source, their complete reliance on the animal was cemented with the arrival of the horse.<sup>116</sup> Originally brought by the Spaniards, the horse would radically alter the dynamics of the Great Plains tribes. With the horse, the tribes could follow the buffalo year round. Adding impetus to this movement towards increasing mobility was the advent of diseases on the plains, such as smallpox. These diseases proved especially deadly to tribes living in more sedentary villages that relied on agriculture for food. By shifting to hunting buffalo year round, the tribes decreased their population density, while helping them to avoid the conditions that allowed the diseases to thrive, though making them more dependent on the buffalo in the process.<sup>117</sup> While seemingly creating a safer lifestyle that emphasized mobility, the Indians instead became completely reliant on buffalo, a vulnerability that would be exploited by Americans in the 1870s and 1880s to subjugate and force the plains Indians onto reservations, opening the Great Plains to American settlement.

While the federal government was well aware of the reliance of the tribes on buffalo, it did not have the means or the manpower to industrially kill off the animal, nor

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<sup>115</sup> Dary, *The Buffalo Book*, 55.

<sup>116</sup> For more information about the impact of the horse on Indians, see Frank Gilbert Roe, *The Indian and the Horse* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955); and Elliott West, *The Contested Plains*.

<sup>117</sup> Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, 31-62. Isenberg presents an excellent analysis of the increasing reliance of the Indians on the buffalo in his book.

the ability to force the Indians onto reservations. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1868 claimed that for each Indian killed the cost to the government was one million dollars.<sup>118</sup> With the increasing economic significance of buffalo to Americans, the means to transport the goods, and the creation of a veritable army of people who killed buffalo for a living, the federal government finally had the means to keep its hands “clean” while solving the issue of how to properly control a mobile population that relied predominantly on one food source for its livelihood. As early as the 1860s, the southern plains tribes saw the hunting of buffalo by whites as a threat to their way of life, leading raids against white settlements during and after the Civil War to try to force the hunts to cease. In 1867, their goals were partially achieved when the federal government signed the Medicine Lodge Treaty of 1867 with the Kiowa, Southern Cheyenne, and Comanche in which the tribes gave up all hunting rights north of the Indian Territory and the Arkansas River in return for the pledge to keep all hunters out of the area south of the Arkansas River. In addition, the treaty promised the tribes horses, cows, and plows to help them begin farming.<sup>119</sup>

While the Medicine Lodge Treaty held up nominally for several years, by 1874 it had collapsed. By this point, the buffalo had been exterminated between the Arkansas River and the Union Pacific Railroad, except for a smattering of scattered herds. Even before this, the government and the army revealed their opinions to the buffalo hunters. According to Mayer, military forts around the plains began giving out free ammunition to the hunters if they asked for it. In fact, the hunters were given more ammunition than

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<sup>118</sup> Barsness, *Heads, Hides and Horns*, 127. The commissioner exaggerated this figure in order to show just how difficult controlling the Indians could be.

<sup>119</sup> Sandoz, *The Buffalo Hunters*, 54-5.

they needed in order to kill the buffalo that much more quickly. Mayer quotes one high ranking army officer as saying the following after he came in for some free ammunition:

Mayer, there's no two ways about it: either the buffalo or the Indian must go. Only when the Indian becomes absolutely dependent on us for his every need, will we be able to handle him. He's too independent with the buffalo. But if we kill the buffalo we conquer the Indian. It seems a more humane thing to kill the buffalo than the Indian, so the buffalo must go.<sup>120</sup>

J. Wright Mooar, who saw the scarcity of buffalo becoming a problem to his career, asked the commander of Fort Dodge, then Major Richard Dodge, what would happen if he and other hunters were to cross into the lands promised to the Indians by the Medicine Lodge Treaty. Dodge, in words that would become famous throughout the plains, told Mooar, "Boys, if I were a buffalo hunter, I would hunt buffalo where the buffalo are."<sup>121</sup> Dodge never refuted this stance in his later works, noting that hunting in Indian Territory was illegal, "but it was the duty of no special person to put a stop it."<sup>122</sup> As a result of the army's unwillingness to prevent hunters from crossing into lands reserved for Indian hunting only, the dependence of the Indians on the buffalo was exploited to its fullest.<sup>123</sup>

In Texas, John R. Cook came to rationalize his entire hunting experience based on something that General Philip Sheridan may or may not have said.<sup>124</sup> In 1875, territorial and state legislatures started putting laws in place that outlawed hunting buffalo. Kansas,

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<sup>120</sup> Mayer, *The Buffalo Harvest*, 29-30.

<sup>121</sup> Mooar, *Buffalo Days*, 37.

<sup>122</sup> Dodge, *Our Wild Indians*, 296.

<sup>123</sup> The Battle of Adobe Walls in 1874 was a direct result of the illegal hunting on Indian lands south of the Arkansas River.

<sup>124</sup> Lott, *American Bison*, 178. Lott, a preeminent buffalo scholar, noted that there is no evidence that Sheridan ever said any of this. Despite this, Cook is frequently cited in books about buffalo. Cook heard about Sheridan's proclamation while on the range, which means that Sheridan's "Buffalo Statement" was widely disseminated among the hunters and skinners of his time. Whether the statement was real or not is not as important as the fact that hunters believed it to be true as it granted them some measure of federal support for what they were doing.

Colorado, and the Indian Territory all had laws, although they were mostly ignored. According to Cook, Texas began to consider similar legislation until General Philip Sheridan intervened. Cook states that Sheridan was against protecting the buffalo, and believed that the Texas legislature should instead give every hunter a bronze medal instead. On this medal should be a dead buffalo on one side and a “discouraged Indian” on the other side. Allegedly, Sheridan went on to say the following:

These men [the buffalo hunters] have done in the last two years and will do more in the next year, to settle the vexed Indian question, than the entire army has done in the last thirty years. They are destroying the Indians’ commissary; and it is a well known fact that an army losing its base of supplies is placed at a great disadvantage. Send them powder and lead, if you will; but, for the sake of a lasting peace, let them kill, skin, and sell until the buffalos are exterminated. Then your prairies can be covered with speckled cattle, and the festive cowboy, who follows the hunter as a second forerunner of an advanced civilization.<sup>125</sup>

Whenever Cook doubted his role in slaughtering the buffalo, he reminded himself of what Sheridan said and used this as motivation to continue in his work.

While Sheridan’s “official” proclamation has some questions surrounding its accuracy, Secretary of the Interior Columbus Delano and General William T. Sherman thought much the same way as their subordinate. Delano, in his annual report for the year 1872, stated:

I cannot regard the rapid disappearance of the game from its former haunts as a matter prejudicial to our management of the Indians. On the contrary, as they become convinced that they can no longer rely upon the supply of game for their support, they will turn to the more reliable source of subsistence furnished at the agencies, and endeavor to so live that the supply will be regularly dispensed. A few years’ cessation from the chase will tend to unfit them for their former mode

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<sup>125</sup> Cook, *The Border and the Buffalo*, 163-64. State efforts to protect buffalo are not covered in much detail in this thesis, due to the lack of effort to enforce these laws and because many of these laws went into effect after buffalo had already been eliminated in those states. Hence, even though Cook worried about the effect of the laws on his livelihood, in reality he had no reason to fear the state buffalo laws.

of life, and they will be the more readily led into new directions, toward industrial pursuits and peaceful habits.<sup>126</sup>

Sherman, in a letter to William Cody, revealed that he felt that it was necessary for the Indians and buffalo to both be displaced from the plains, so that cattle and settlers could move in and replace them, to the benefit of civilization.<sup>127</sup> Mayer, Cook, and Mooar all echoed these sentiments when regarding their roles as buffalo hunters, believing that they were the ones who made settlement of the plains possible. Without them, the Indians and buffalo would have both remained.<sup>128</sup>

### **After Death: The Bone Trade**

The final chapter in the economic exploitation of the buffalo took place after the animals died. In this phase, buffalo bones became a prominent source of plains dwellers' incomes. Despite the importance of the trade to these people, the historical record for this industry is scattered. Moreover, a historiography is virtually nonexistent. The two sources that are of the most help are Le Roy Barnett's doctoral dissertation, which focuses on the northern Great Plains, and Martin S. Garretson's work, which takes a broader view of the plains region.<sup>129</sup> According to Barnett, the trade followed the path of

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<sup>126</sup> Columbus Delano, *Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, 42<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> Sess., 1873, H. Exec. Doc. 1 pt. 5, vol. 1, 7. For complete website address, see bibliography.

<sup>127</sup> Cody, *An Autobiography of Buffalo Bill*, 324-25.

<sup>128</sup> All three men wrote their autobiographies after the general public developed a negative view of buffalo hunters as a type of villain who killed off the buffalo for malicious motives. In all three cases, the men defended what they did. Only Victor Smith offered any sort of apology for the role that he played in slaughtering the buffalo. However, Mayer dedicated his book to Charles "Buffalo" Jones, a former hunter who later helped to save the buffalo in the coming years. For more information about the sentiments of the retired hunters and their beliefs, see Cook, *The Border and the Buffalo*, 166-67, 191, 240, 284; Mayer, *The Buffalo Harvest*, 27; Mooar, *Buffalo Days*, 63; Smith, *The Champion Buffalo Hunter*, 97-8.

<sup>129</sup> Le Roy Barnett, "An Historical Geography of the Nineteenth Century Buffalo Bone Commerce on the Northern Great Plains" (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 1979), Garretson, *The American*

the hunters, with the southern plains being gleaned prior to the northern plains.

Midwestern fertilizer plants centered in Detroit, Chicago, and St. Louis purchased the bones to make a diverse array of products. Many of the companies used the bone char left over from grinding for fertilizer to sell to sugar companies, who used the byproduct to refine sugar. Of those involved in the business, the Michigan Carbon Works in Detroit, the Northwestern Fertilizing Company of Chicago, A. B. Mayer Manufacturing of St. Louis, and Empire Carbon Works of St. Louis came to dominate the business.<sup>130</sup>

Because of the high demand for fertilizer, the companies sent agents throughout the Great Plains to advertise for bones. In most cases, these prices ranged from eight to ten dollars per ton, depending on the location, with places further from railheads and the eastern markets receiving slightly less per ton than the markets closer to bone buyers in the Midwest.<sup>131</sup>

On the southern plains, the records of the buffalo bone trade are limited. Despite these limitations, what does exist mimicked what occurred on the northern plains, helping to prove that the industry followed the same general patterns wherever it went. On the southern plains, Robert Wright wrote that the bone trade was a “godsend” to the early settlers, allowing poor farmers time to establish themselves and making a few rich.<sup>132</sup>

Wright went on to point out that the phrase “Buffalo bones are legal tender in Dodge

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*Bison*, 161-64. As detailed earlier in the chapter, Richard Irving Dodge’s *The Hunting Grounds of the Great West: A Description of the Plains, Game, and Indians of the Great North American Desert* provides specific figures for the amount of bones being transported on southern plains railroads; however, he does not go beyond these figures in his analysis.

<sup>130</sup> Barnett, “An Historical Geography,” 225-43.

<sup>131</sup> Barnett, “An Historical Geography,” 18, 243.

<sup>132</sup> Wright, *Dodge City*, 153-54.

City” was known throughout Kansas.<sup>133</sup> Frank Mayer commented on one person he knew who began collecting bones early on in Kansas when the hunts were still occurring. Mayer remarked that many people made fun of this person, but he continued in his work and eventually collected enough bones to fill 3,000 train carloads, retiring as a millionaire. Even Mayer, who scorned the bone collectors, hired men at fifty percent commission to pick up bones for one year, making a few thousand dollars in the process.<sup>134</sup> Garretson points out that twenty miles from Grenada, Colorado, one pile of bones was twelve feet high, twelve feet wide, and a half mile long along the railroad tracks. Garretson remarks that buyers could make fortunes too, with one individual, John Young, buying bones for six to eight dollars per ton and then reselling them to the Midwestern plants for \$13 to \$15 per ton.<sup>135</sup> Garretson ends his piece on buffalo bones in the south by discussing the roles of freighters. These individuals picked up the piles of bones along trade routes, bringing them to the railroads. One person Garretson chronicled had three ox teams, with which he hauled twelve to fifteen tons of bones on return trips, making \$1,500 per trip. Another freighter, named Kilfoile, received \$25,000 from the aforementioned John Young for hauling bones. In the end, from 1868 to 1881, the Kansas bone trade paid out \$2.5 million dollars for bones.<sup>136</sup>

To the north, the bone trade began in earnest in 1883 as hunting wound down. Much like the southern plains, local settlers used the trade to augment their incomes. In fact, in the town of Carrington, North Dakota, the lack of money after a bad harvest in

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<sup>133</sup> Wright, *Dodge City*, 154.

<sup>134</sup> Mayer, *The Buffalo Harvest*, 92, 95.

<sup>135</sup> Garretson, *The American Bison*, 161, 163.

<sup>136</sup> Garretson, *The American Bison*, 161, 163.





The industrial hide hunting of the 1870s and 1880s created this common sight, a pile of bones waiting for shipment and processing at plants primarily in the Midwest. (Photo by Hugh Lumsden, 1890, courtesy of the National Park Service)



Bones being loaded onto a railcar in 1885. (Photo courtesy of National Park Service)

1883 led the farmers there to suggest to the local store owner, Archibald Miller, to take bones instead of money. After investigating to see if this was a viable option or not, Miller contracted out to a St. Louis firm to provide bones to them for eight dollars a ton. Elsewhere, the *North Dakota Inter-Ocean* remarked that any enterprising person could make eighty dollars per day with little effort, while the *New Rockford Transcript* stated that local farmers scouring the plains could bring in one ton of bones per day to the town of New Rockford, North Dakota, with the town averaging fifteen tons of bones per day at eight to ten dollars per ton paid out.<sup>137</sup> As time went on, the northern plains began to experience price wars between rival buyers. In Cooperstown, North Dakota, bone buyers engaged in trying to corner the market for their buyers, raising the price of bones from eight dollars per ton, to twenty dollars per ton in May 1885. Already at twelve dollars per ton, one buyer, John Syverson, filled a train carload with bones per day. This same practice repeated at Devil's Lake, North Dakota, too, with prices rising from twelve dollars per ton to twenty dollars per ton in order to siphon off the neighboring town of Bartlett's bone business when their own trade began to falter in July 1885.<sup>138</sup> Like all non-renewable resources though, the buffalo bone trade diminished by the mid 1880s. By the early 1890s, the industry had completely exhausted itself.<sup>139</sup>

Beyond the Great Plains the fertilizer works in the Midwest benefitted greatly from the bone business. The United States treasury department reported that the Michigan Carbon Works was producing 5,000 tons of bone black for sugar refining, 4,000 tons of fertilizer, and 150 tons of glue per year in 1885. By 1892, this company

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<sup>137</sup> Barnett, "An Historical Geography," 18-19, 23.

<sup>138</sup> Barnett, "An Historical Geography," 31, 92.

<sup>139</sup> Barnett, "An Historical Geography," 145, 198.

was the largest industry in Detroit, with 750 employees.<sup>140</sup> In St. Louis, the Empire Carbon Works came to dominate the industry, going through thirty carloads of bones per day within a month of opening in 1875. In 1882, the company produced two million pounds of carbon for local sugar refiners in St. Louis, according to the treasury department. The president of the works bragged years later to an interviewer that his company controlled seventy percent of the market in the St. Louis area, buying 1.25 million tons of buffalo bones worth \$28 million.<sup>141</sup> Using these figures, bison historian Larry Barsness calculated that one complete buffalo skeleton weighed twenty pounds, so that one hundred animals equaled one ton. If the Empire Carbon Works controlled seventy percent of the market with 1.25 million tons of bones and each skeleton weighed twenty pounds, the company processed the equivalent of 125 million animals. Furthermore, the rest of the market would have equated out to 53.5 million animals for a grand total of 178.5 million animals. While this figure is more than the estimated total of 30 to 75 million buffalo that ever existed in North America even before European contact, it stands to show just how large the trade was in America.<sup>142</sup> One way that this trade may have been augmented was mentioned by Victor Smith, who revealed that Indian bones were taken along with the buffalo bones.<sup>143</sup> This fact might account for some of the discrepancies in the bone totals versus the live animal totals, yet the indisputable fact remains that buffalo bone collecting was a major business. Barsness

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<sup>140</sup> Barnett, "An Historical Geography," 230-31.

<sup>141</sup> Barnett, "An Historical Geography," 242.

<sup>142</sup> Barsness, *Heads, Hides, and Horns*, 135-37.

<sup>143</sup> Smith, *The Champion Buffalo Hunter*, 132. Other sources of bones were probably used too, however, the sheer volume of buffalo bones made other sources of bones less noticeable.

sums up the entire trade when he writes that people may have made more in buffalo bone collecting than in hide hunting.<sup>144</sup>

As can be seen in this chapter, the period from 1820 to 1890 illustrates the exploitation phase for Americans with the buffalo, which caused the animals' near extermination. The emphasis during this period was on hunting for economic gain or for cultural reasons, whether for the joy of hunting a "dangerous" game animal, using that game as a weapon to subjugate the plains Indians, or to simply turn a profit. The end result was catastrophic for the buffalo, which went from being the most numerous native land mammals on the North American continent to an animal on the verge of extinction. The next chapter analyzes the evolving relationship Americans had with buffalo, as the emphasis shifted from destructive hunting to preserving the animals as part of America's cultural heritage.

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<sup>144</sup> Barsness, *Heads, Hides, and Horns*, 137.

## **CHAPTER 2: BACK FROM THE BRINK**

The years 1871 to 1914, particularly 1880-1908, witnessed efforts to save the buffalo from the verge of extinction. During this period, activists drove home the symbolism of buffalo as a part of America's heritage. Rescuing the buffalo became important to wealthy Americans in the Northeast who believed having one of the most storied and prolific land animals on the continent go extinct would be an unforgivable tragedy. Yet, it was western ranchers who literally saved the animal. They, however, did so less for cultural reasons than for economic gain. For the ranchers, buffalo offered the potential for vast profits if they could promulgate the view of the animals as a "unique" part of American history. By doing so, they hoped to create a market for their animals. The potential to reap a windfall in profits drove these ranchers to continue to expand their herds, even as the remaining wild herds diminished in size. In the process they possessed the only means available to restore the species, making for a close working relationship with the Northeastern preservationists. In the quest to save the buffalo from extinction, easterners and westerners came together to create an enduring legacy of the buffalo. In the midst of the struggle to save the animals, the founding of conservation groups and publications that operated on a national scale brought added attention to the efforts of those involved in the fight to preserve the buffalo. Furthermore, the fight to protect the buffalo brought added awareness to the plight of national parks in America, helping to cement the two preservationist concerns together for Americans.

## Early Legislative Efforts to Protect the Buffalo

Even before buffalo had been hunted to the brink of extinction in 1883, legal efforts at the federal, state, and territorial levels to save the animals appeared, based on a belated sense of guilt about wiping out the vast herds of animals.<sup>1</sup> These endeavors appear half-hearted when compared to the later attempts organized after 1880. In 1864, Idaho Territory became the first territory to outlaw buffalo hunting. In 1871, Wyoming Territory did the same thing, followed by Nebraska in 1875. In 1872, Colorado made it illegal for any meat to be left to rot on the plains. This law, while not directly mentioning buffalo, was aimed at the buffalo hunters, since in most cases they left the meat to rot, due to transportation and spoiling issues associated with harvesting it.<sup>2</sup> Skinner John R. Cook pointed out that by 1875, even Kansas had a law on the books to protect buffalo and that Texas considered putting one in place too. Cook found the move to protect buffalo disturbing, since without the animals, his career as a skinner would be over. When General Philip Sheridan supposedly gave his “buffalo speech” before the Texas legislature, Cook felt relieved that finally a stand had been taken on behalf of the hunters and skinners, whose livelihoods depended on the buffalo.<sup>3</sup> Yet, the state and territorial

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<sup>1</sup> The terms “verge of extinction” and “brink of extinction” are meant to imply a stage where a species is limited in numbers and due to a lack of genetic diversity, could possibly go extinct. Since only approximately one thousand buffalo remained nationwide by the end of the nineteenth century, these two terms are directly applicable to the fate of the animals, which during the time period of this chapter, was highly uncertain.

<sup>2</sup> J. Albert Rorabacher, *The American Buffalo in Transition: A Historical and Economic Survey of the Bison in America* (St. Cloud, MN: North Star Press, 1970), 50. Little information exists as to why the states and territories created game legislation at this time. The best reasoning is that many of the states and territories simply wanted to be able to say that they had in fact “protected” the animals, even though their protection measures oftentimes followed the virtual extermination of the buffalo from their particular region.

<sup>3</sup> John R. Cook, *The Border and the Buffalo: An Untold Story of the Southwest Plains* (New York: Citadel Press, 1967), 163-64. See Chapter 1 for Sheridan’s speech. Cook’s reasoning is interesting, since

legal efforts did not end after 1875. In 1880, the New Mexico territorial legislature made it illegal to kill any animals, including buffalo and deer, in its region while the Dakota Territories did the same thing in 1883.<sup>4</sup>

Despite state and territorial legislation, the buffalo still disappeared. An analysis of the dates in which legislatures enacted these laws is instructive. In each state or territory except Colorado, buffalo were no longer found in the state, or existed in such small numbers as to be a negligible part of the environment. So, why were the laws implemented only after it was too late to save the buffalo? Part of the reason for the lackluster attempts at preservation can be directly attributed to economic and cultural interests. When the states began to ponder legislation to protect buffalo, the great hunts were occurring on the Great Plains. Considering the number of hunters, skinners, and others involved, and the degree of business that the buffalo hunting industry provided to western states and territories, any attempts at curtailing the slaughter of buffalo would have detrimental economic affects. As Cook and hunters like Frank Mayer and J. Wright Mooar alluded to in their autobiographies, the army did not want the hunting of buffalo to stop until the army had completely conquered the plains Indian tribes, most importantly the Sioux, Kiowa, Cheyenne, and Comanche. Only by destroying the food economy and mainstay of the plains Indians could the army finally force these people onto reservations.<sup>5</sup> When legislatures finally created protective laws, it was done out of a

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the hunters had been given virtual free reign to break Indian treaties by many army officials before, and to assume that state laws would prevent hunters from continuing their deadly work in areas where the army was the chief legal authority is ironic.

<sup>4</sup> Rorabacher, *The American Buffalo*, 50.

<sup>5</sup> Cook, *The Border*, 163-64; Frank H. Mayer and Charles B. Roth, *The Buffalo Harvest* (Denver, CO: Sage, 1958), 29-30; J. Wright Mooar, *Buffalo Days: Stories from J. Wright Mooar As Told to James Winford Hunt*, ed. Robert F. Pace (Abilene, TX: State House Press, 2005), 37.



belated sense of regret and sympathy for the remaining herds that once dominated the plains, illustrating that even at this early stage, enough people felt uncomfortable with the slaughter of the buffalo to feel that they needed to be safeguarded. Left unsaid in the historical record is that protective legislation at the state level generally went into effect after the Indian tribes of those regions had been effectively forced onto reservations because of the disappearance of the buffalo. Yet, creating legislation was far different from enforcing it. In each of the states and territories that created legislation, little to no effort was made to protect the animals, meaning that even the pitiful small herds of buffalo left were hotly pursued by hunters, until even these animals disappeared. In this way, even states like Colorado, which had laws on the books about wasting meat before the animals disappeared, allowed their buffalo to disappear just like its neighboring states.

At the federal level, legislation to protect buffalo first appeared in 1871. Ironically, this was the same time that the industrial hunts commenced. The chief driving factors behind these first federal efforts usually came back to the theory that buffalo and Indians were interconnected and therefore, dealing with buffalo would have an effect on federal Indian policy, and the idea that killing buffalo was inherently “unsportsmanlike.” The proponents of buffalo preservation disagreed with the notion that killing the buffalo would solve America’s “Indian Problem.” Instead, they argued that preserving the buffalo would act as a type of “good faith” gesture that could perhaps allow the Indians, buffalo, and Americans to co-exist peacefully. These individuals also felt some debt of gratitude for what the buffalo had done in helping Americans settle the frontier. Economic motives were absent from these reformers’ outlook. In their quest to conserve

the animals, they even suggested taxation. As will be seen shortly, all of these early efforts failed to save the buffalo. Naturalist William T. Hornaday wrote later that the inability of the government to protect the buffalo when the opportunity existed to keep large numbers of the animals on the plains was due to “our republican form of Government.” In this one instance, Hornaday believed that a monarchy would have been better, since only one person’s opinion would have needed to be won over instead of many.<sup>6</sup> The common element among these early congressional reformers was their sympathetic stance towards the Indians. Instead of forcing the Indians to starve and then surrender, these people wished to explore all of the options in dealing with the Great Plains tribes, instead of the easiest solution, which was to kill the buffalo.<sup>7</sup>

The first substantial effort to pass federal legislation was made by Representative Robert C. McCormick of Arizona on March 13, 1871. The bill McCormick proposed outlawed any killing of buffalo, anywhere in the United States, for any purpose except for meat or to preserve the skin of the animal. If a person was caught killing a buffalo, he would be fined \$100 for each dead animal, with the informer who turned in the hunter receiving half of the fine. In a recurring trend, the bill died in committee.<sup>8</sup> Yet while McCormick’s bill failed, it marked the beginning of the movement to put wildlife protection bills into action at the federal level. McCormick’s bill was followed in quick

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<sup>6</sup> William T. Hornaday, *The Extinction of the American Bison* (1889; repr., Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 513.

<sup>7</sup> One of the most common refrains for Indian reformers was that the tribes needed to be assimilated into white society as rapidly as possible. In effect, this meant giving up hunting for a livelihood and instead pursuing more “virtuous” pursuits like farming. The Dawes Act of 1887 is the most glaring example of the reformers’ misguided efforts to assimilate the tribes into mainstream American society. For more information about reforming Indian policies, see Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 143-156.

<sup>8</sup> Hornaday, *Extinction*, 514.

succession by a series of bills by congressmen from across the country. Later on in the year, Representative S. S. Cox of New York proposed a bill with the same parameters as McCormick's bill, except it applied only to public lands. Cox added in his report, "I would just as soon shoot my mother's cow in the barn-yard as kill buffaloes for sport."<sup>9</sup> Cox's reasoning about a sort of "sportsman's code" would prove critical to creating a lobbyist group for wildlife and buffalo preservation at the end of the 1880s, but when he first used this reasoning in 1871, he was far ahead of his time.

In 1872, McCormick tried again to save the buffalo. Since his first attempt, McCormick had become more tenacious in his pursuit of buffalo protection at the federal level. Unlike before, he had allies in the Senate who began to look into creating protective buffalo legislation. In February, Senator Cornelius Cole of California introduced a resolution to inquire whether or not buffalo legislation should be enacted to preserve the animals, while Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts went one step further and proposed a bill making it "unlawful for any person to kill the buffalo or buffalo found anywhere upon the public lands of the United States."<sup>10</sup> Back in the House of Representatives, McCormick proposed a bill along the lines of the one in the Senate, with the same penalties as his earlier bill. In a speech before Congress, he tried using practicality to get his legislation to pass. McCormick began his plea by revealing the inherent use in having an emergency supply of meat available to Americans on the Great Plains. In his own experience, he had once been caught on the Kansas Pacific Railroad in

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<sup>9</sup> "History of Buffalo Legislation," *Forest and Stream*, April 6, 1882, 189.

<sup>10</sup> Hornaday, *Extirpation*, 514; *Cong. Globe*, "A Bill Restricting the Killing of the Buffalo upon the Public Lands," 42nd Cong., 2d sess., February 16, 1872, S. doc. 655, 179. (For website address, see bibliography). Public lands also refers to territories too.

the middle of a snowstorm in December 1870. Since the engine was unable to make its way through the snow, he and others on the train survived on buffalo meat.<sup>11</sup>

McCormick knew that his personal experience would not persuade many. Therefore, he went on to read letters sent to Henry Bergh, the president of the recently founded American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), which expressed concern about the hunting of buffalo. In these letters, McCormick revealed that not everyone on the plains agreed with the notion that killing buffalo was for the best. Brevet Major General William Hazen with the 6th Infantry stated in his letter: "The theory that the buffalo should be killed to deprive the Indians of food is a fallacy, as these people are becoming harmless under a rule of law." Hazen went on to point out that the hides, which were all the hunters were after, only netted one dollar total, while in most cases the meat was left to rot. Another army officer, A. G. Brackett of the 2nd U. S. Cavalry, considered the "sport" aspect of hunting buffalo to be false, regarding it to be as easy as killing cattle. McCormick ended the defense of his bill with a letter from E. W. Wynkoop, a former Indian agent. Wynkoop argued that killing buffalo was having the exact opposite effect of what ranking officials like Generals William T. Sherman, Sheridan, and Secretary of the Interior Columbus Delano prophesized. Instead of quieting the Indians, it was inciting them to greater violence.<sup>12</sup> Yet, like his earlier proposals, all of these attempts died in their respective committees as most Congressmen

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<sup>11</sup> *Cong. Globe*, "A Bill Restricting the Killing of the Buffalo upon the Public Lands," 179.

<sup>12</sup> *Cong. Globe*, "Restricting the Killing of the Buffalo," by Robert C. McCormick, 42nd Cong., 2d sess., April 6, 1872, 179-80. (For website address, see bibliography). While seemingly contradictory, Hazen's and Wynkoop's conclusions are similar. What both individuals are in effect saying is that if the buffalo were to be left alone, the Indians would leave Americans alone and become more receptive to living on the reservations. In other words, the continued existence of the buffalo could act as a sort of "good faith" agreement on the part of the federal government.

still followed the line touted by Delano, Sheridan, Sherman, and other army officials less sympathetic than Hazen and Brackett.<sup>13</sup>

The fact that Bergh and the ASPCA provided testimony on behalf of McCormick is noteworthy in and of itself in understanding the cultural relationship between Americans and the buffalo. Bergh had begun the APSCA in 1866 in New York as an effort to stop senseless cruelty towards animals, such as beating or shooting them when they did not do as the owner wished.<sup>14</sup> While the movement was initially restricted to domesticated animals such as dogs, cats, and horses, soon Bergh had expanded the concept of preventing animal cruelty, so that it applied to wild animals. Based on testimony he had received and the accounts of those who had shot buffalo, Bergh soon protested the slaughtering of the buffalo as a crime. By publishing and advertising the letters by Brackett and Hazen, Bergh tried to create the image of cattle as buffalo and vice versa. Since buffalo were being killed in a wasteful manner that resulted in many of the animals' meat being left to rot, something that would never happen with a domesticated animal, Bergh was taking the next step of comparing wild and domesticated animals, noting that all animals should be treated with respect and not wasted.<sup>15</sup>

Even though McCormick failed in 1872, he tried again in 1874 to get protective legislation for buffalo passed. Nevertheless, he was soon overshadowed in his attempts

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<sup>13</sup> For more information on Delano, Sheridan, and Sherman and their thoughts on buffalo preservation in the 1870s, see Chapter 1.

<sup>14</sup> Douglas Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 49. Theodore Roosevelt's grand uncle, John Roosevelt, served as a charter member of the APSCA.

<sup>15</sup> Brinkley, *Wilderness Warrior*, 51-53. Bergh had difficulty getting his agenda across initially to Americans, who decried his work as that of a fanatic. It was only when he took on a case that questioned the cruelty of killing sea turtles, in which the animals hung by their fins until they died, that the public took him more seriously. Bergh's work on behalf of animals carried over to people too. In 1873, he helped to co-found the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

by Representative Greenburg L. Fort of Illinois, who was known as a maverick in Congress. In quick succession, both Fort and McCormick introduced bills with the same general spirit into two separate committees, with Fort's bill going to the Committee on the Territories on January 5, and McCormick's to the Public Lands Committee on February 2. While McCormick's bill died, Fort's bill moved out of committee. The bill made it "unlawful for any person who is not an Indian, to kill, wound, or in any way destroy any female buffalo of any age, found at large within the boundaries of any of the Territories of the United States." In addition, it was to be made illegal for any male buffalo to be killed, "than are needed for food by such person, or than can be used, cured, or preserved for the food of other persons or for market."<sup>16</sup> This bill had a fine of \$100 attached to it and included the same penalty for someone who assisted in the killing of buffalo, such as a skinner. If a person was caught more than once, he could face a prison sentence of up to thirty days on top of the fine of \$100 for each buffalo killed.<sup>17</sup>

The debate over Fort's bill is instructive, since it showed the challenges that the early proponents of saving buffalo faced. One argument that some congressmen made was that sexing the buffalo prior to killing them was impossible when the animals were moving around and running.<sup>18</sup> In most cases though, the debate invariably came back to Indians' reliance on buffalo for survival. The supporters of the bill were unperturbed, with both Fort and McCormick reading testimony that revealed the rate of slaughter. For example, General Hazen wrote to McCormick that he knew a man who killed ninety-nine

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<sup>16</sup> Hornaday, *Extinction*, 515.

<sup>17</sup> "History of Buffalo Legislation," 189.

<sup>18</sup> Hornaday, *Extinction*, 515. Hornaday considered the idea that a buffalo hunter could not tell the sex of a buffalo when it was running to be ridiculous and an affront to the hunter's intelligence.

animals in one day. The general attitude of many of the congressmen who had qualms about the bill always went back to the Indians. With the wording of the bill in its current format, Congress allowed Indians to continue to hunt buffalo. This sticking point, which allowed Indians an “advantage” over white settlers, appeared unfair to several congressmen who did not wish to see favoritism granted to one group of people over another. Even Congressman Cox, who had supported McCormick in earlier attempts, was unsupportive of allowing only Indians to hunt the buffalo, while prohibiting Americans. Only a bill which outlawed hunting for everyone, regardless of their ethnicity, would work for him.<sup>19</sup> Despite these men’s qualms, the bill passed the House.<sup>20</sup> Once in the Senate, the bill again faced debate over the wording that limited hunting to Indians only, but the bill passed. Despite passing both houses of Congress, the bill was pocket vetoed by President Ulysses S. Grant, who favored the opinions of his fellow generals, Sherman and Sheridan, in their assessments and that of his Secretary of Interior, who all believed the buffalo must die in order for the federal government to successfully force Native Americans onto their designated reservations.<sup>21</sup>

Fort and McCormick, despite being defeated several times before, forged on in their attempts to pass legislation to protect buffalo. On February 2, 1874, Fort had proposed a bill to tax buffalo hides. Using the logic that if the hunters had to pay a fee

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<sup>19</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 516.

<sup>20</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 515-517. Congressmen Cox, Issac Parker of Missouri, and Omar Conger of Missouri were the most ardent opponents of the bill, while congressmen McCormick, Fort, and Joseph Hawley of Connecticut were the most supportive. One hundred thirty two people voted for the bill. No figures are given for those who voted against the bill. Assigning regional support to the voting patterns is difficult in this case, since individuals from the same region were apt to be on the opposite side of this issue, such as Parker opposing the bill, while Fort supported it.

<sup>21</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 517; “History of Buffalo Legislation,” 189. *Forest and Stream* reported that the bill passed the Senate with only five minutes worth of debate on the last day of the first session of Congress.

for each buffalo killed, Fort wagered that the slaughter would abate somewhat, while the government would receive revenue. This bill, like so many others before it, failed to become law.<sup>22</sup> The last move to save the buffalo while they still existed in large numbers commenced on January 5, 1876, and was initiated by Fort. Identical to his 1874 bill, Fort believed this bill would meet Grant's approval since he would have more time to review it and sign it into law. Fort tried using the reasoning that to save buffalo for the Indians in this case was worthwhile, since the tribes could eat buffalo, which was free, instead of having the federal government pay for cattle to feed them. Unlike in his earlier debates, Fort faced more general opposition to this bill than his first, with representatives from New York, in addition to representatives from Texas and other western states.<sup>23</sup> One reason for this is that the army was fighting a series of Indian wars against a variety of tribes, including the Sioux, Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Comanche across the Great Plains. While the army had conquered most of the southern plains tribes by 1876, trouble brewed with the Sioux in the northern plains, as they gathered under the leadership of Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull. The bill moved on to the Senate, but it failed to pass when referred back to the House. On March 20, 1876, the last move was made by Fort, who again proposed a tax on hides, but like all other prior legislation, failed to get out of committee.<sup>24</sup> Part of the reason for this failure and the lack of legislation after this date can be directly attributed to the military disaster at the Battle of Little Bighorn, in which a coalition of plains Indians defeated George Custer, wiping out the Seventh Cavalry.

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<sup>22</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 517.

<sup>23</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 518.

<sup>24</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 519.



After this military debacle, Congress and the public lost sympathy for Indians and buffalo in the quest to crush Native American resistance on the plains.

After 1876, the efforts to preserve buffalo shifted away from a comprehensive plan designed to save the species from extinction while large numbers of the animals still existed. The 1870s attempts reveal the lack of compromise that Americans would accept, at this point, to regulate expansion on the Great Plains and to stop the economic exploitation of buffalo as a commodity.<sup>25</sup> As Fort's bills demonstrate, any consideration of Native American needs in protective buffalo legislation was frowned upon at the highest levels of the executive branch, which believed the only way to control the American Indian population on the Great Plains was to destroy the mainstay of their food economy, the buffalo. As legislative efforts failed, the buffalo gradually disappeared from the North American continent, until by 1884 only a few scattered herds remained. Of these bands, a few hundred buffalo made their way into Yellowstone National Park. These buffalo would become the center of American cultural efforts to save the buffalo through the twentieth century. In the end, the battle to protect the buffalo in Yellowstone became synonymous with the battle to save the park from development and exploitation.

### **Yellowstone and the Rise of George Bird Grinnell and William T. Hornaday**

In 1872, an act of Congress created Yellowstone National Park to preserve the wonders found inside of the park, which included geysers, rock formations, and forests.

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<sup>25</sup> Columbus Delano, *Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, 42<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> Sess., 1873, H. Exec. Doc. 1 pt. 5, vol. 1, 10. (For website address, see bibliography). Delano broke down the amount of land sold in 1872 to various parties, including colleges, military land grants, homesteads, railroads, and wagon roads. Altogether the federal government allocated over 11.8 million acres in the year 1872. Of this total, Native Americans received only 5,760 acres, although Delano does not break down land distribution by tribes.

The act also protected the fish and game found within the park.<sup>26</sup> The idea of a national park went back to George Catlin in the 1840s. Catlin, who traveled and lived with numerous plains Indian tribes, including the Sioux, was an outspoken advocate for the buffalo and for Indian protection. Catlin thought that a “nation’s park” would be a perfect place to preserve buffalo and to protect the Indian way of life.<sup>27</sup> While Catlin’s vision originally called for a large expanse of land to be set aside for the buffalo and for the Indians, the creation of Yellowstone owed more to the natural settings found within the park than the buffalo. For years, stories about the geysers and hot springs found in the Yellowstone region had trickled back east. However, the public paid little attention to the stories until 1871, when F. V. Hayden of the United States Geological Survey led a team to explore the reports of strange natural wonders found in the region. Hayden’s report was successful in confirming that there were “natural wonders” in the area, and he urged Congress to set aside this region, due to the unique environs and wide range of animal life found in the park. While moderate resistance existed, Hayden and his biggest supporters, National Bank Examiner Nathaniel Langford and Representatives Henry Dawes of Massachusetts and William Clagett of Montana Territory were successful in fostering the view that the area that the proposed park was in was economically worthless and setting it aside as a park would hurt no one. On March 1, 1872, the act creating

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<sup>26</sup> Committee on Public Lands, *The Yellowstone Park*, 42nd Cong., 2nd sess., February 27, 1872, H. Rpt. 26, 1-2. (For website address, see bibliography).

<sup>27</sup> George Catlin, *North American Indians: Being Letters and Notes on Their Manners, Customs, and Conditions, Written during Eight Years’ Travel amongst the Wildest Tribes of Indians in North America, 1832-1839*, vol. 1 (1841; repr., Edinburgh, MA: John Grant, 1903), 294-95. Catlin was one of the most knowledgeable Americans on Great Plains Indian culture, having spent several years living and visiting with thirty-eight tribes, the foremost of which were the Sioux. Catlin envisioned a much larger park than what Yellowstone actually was, since he would have had a large bison and Indian population living within the park.

Yellowstone National Park was signed into law, forming the nation's first national park in the process.<sup>28</sup>

While Yellowstone officially existed, the money to protect game and improve the park by building infrastructure, such as roads and bridges, was not included. Nathaniel Langford, who became the first park superintendent, would be hamstrung by these issues during his tenure in office. Congress, instead of appropriating money or making protective measures for the park, instead left it up to Langford to find potential lessees who would rent ground in the park, thereby creating revenue for the park. However, because Langford could not improve the park, he could not attract potential leaseholders. In addition, because he could not pay anyone a salary, including himself, he could not attract people to help him to police the park. Within two years of its founding, the game in Yellowstone, including elk and buffalo, fell to poachers' bullets. General W. E. Strong noted that in the winter of 1874, poachers killed 4,000 elk in the park. Captain William Ludlow, who visited the park around the same time, made the suggestion that the army should patrol the park, since civilian administration was incapable of protecting Yellowstone.<sup>29</sup> In 1878, Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz and the new superintendent of Yellowstone, P. N. Norris, requested \$15,000 to protect the park. In June, Congress finally did appropriate \$10,000 for Yellowstone but made no provision for protection of the game in the park, which continued to be poached illegally.<sup>30</sup> This situation continued on into 1890s, although awareness of the plight of the animals in Yellowstone increased

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<sup>28</sup> H. Duane Hampton, *How the U.S. Cavalry Saved Our National Parks* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1971), 27-30.

<sup>29</sup> Hampton, *How the U.S. Cavalry*, 33, 39-40.

<sup>30</sup> Carl Schurz, *Letter from the Secretary of Interior, in Regard to the Better Protection of the National Park from Injury*, 45th Cong., 2nd sess., April 11, 1878, H. Exec. Doc. 75, 2 (For website address, see bibliography); Hampton, *How the U.S. Cavalry*, 45.

under the influence of George Bird Grinnell, who helped to propagate the view of the buffalo as a culturally significant animal in American history.

Born into a wealthy family, George Bird Grinnell came to love the American West, its landscapes, and animals. Grinnell, who studied under Lucy Audubon, the widow of naturalist John James Audubon, soon embarked on a career in natural history at Yale, abandoning his family's textile industry as a career.<sup>31</sup> While at Yale, Grinnell had the opportunity to take part in paleontologist Otheniel Marsh's dinosaur hunting expeditions in 1870 and 1873, which led him to Wyoming and the Black Hills of the Dakotas. During his travels, Grinnell witnessed first hand the large scale slaughter of buffalo on the Great Plains. Due to his training as a paleontologist, Grinnell was not swayed by the argument that animals as plentiful as the buffalo were immune to extinction.<sup>32</sup>

Upon arriving back home, Grinnell took his experiences in the American West and channeled them into his writings in the weekly magazine, *Forest and Stream*. Initially founded in 1873 by Charles Hallock to cater to sportsmen across the nation, the publication soon became the preeminent source for environmental news.<sup>33</sup> Hallock, realizing Grinnell's potential, soon had him writing for the periodical in 1876 as a natural history correspondent. In 1880, Grinnell bought out Hallock and became the editor of

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Punke, *Last Stand: George Bird Grinnell, the Battle to Save the Buffalo, and the Birth of the New West* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 27; George Bird Grinnell, *The Passing of the Great West: Selected Papers of George Bird Grinnell*, ed. John F. Reiger (New York: Winchester, 1972), 24, 32, 56.

<sup>32</sup> Grinnell, *Passing of the Great West*, 32, 56.

<sup>33</sup> Gary G. Gray, *Wildlife and People: The Human Dimensions of Wildlife Ecology* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 37. *Forest and Stream* was not the only periodical to develop around this time which catered to sportsmen groups. *American Sportsman* was founded in 1871 while *Field and Stream* was founded in 1874.

*Forest and Stream*.<sup>34</sup> Grinnell soon used the power of the press to push for the preservation of buffalo and other wildlife in Yellowstone. To Grinnell, if buffalo disappeared, a crime of unspeakable proportions would have occurred in America. Yet Grinnell suffered from some of the same misconceptions as his contemporaries when he guessed that the buffalo would last another four years at the rate of slaughter that was occurring in 1882.<sup>35</sup> While Grinnell was wrong about how quickly the buffalo disappeared, he nonetheless tried to raise public awareness of the animals' plight, which after 1883, existed for the most part only in Yellowstone National Park.<sup>36</sup>

While Grinnell agitated for legislation in *Forest and Stream*, others involved in the government decided to take another approach to preserving buffalo for the nation. At the Smithsonian Institution, William T. Hornaday, the chief taxidermist of the museum, examined the existing buffalo specimens that his predecessors had preserved. What he found dismayed him. The specimens that existed were falling apart, incomplete, and not representative of the species, since they were taken when the animals were shedding their winter hair.<sup>37</sup> Hornaday, who knew that buffalo were diminishing daily, believed the animals would soon be totally extinct and that no adequate representatives of the species would be left to exhibit to the nation in the future. Horrified by this prospect, Hornaday quickly gained the support of the museum director to organize an expedition. It headed

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<sup>34</sup> Grinnell, *Passing of the Great West*, 126, 127; John F. Reiger, *American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation* (New York: Winchester, 1975), 31-32. Reiger notes that Hallock originally was trying to cater his publication to gentlemen sportsmen, who would then take the ideals of sport and the fair chase and transfer these ideas to the rest of society. Grinnell still held to these principles, only he believed that the publication needed a broader base.

<sup>35</sup> "The Extermination of Game," *Forest and Stream*, March 30, 1882, 177.

<sup>36</sup> "History of Buffalo Legislation," 189; "Game Bag and Gun: The Yellowstone Park Bill," *Forest and Stream*, March 13, 1884, 124-25.

<sup>37</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 529.

to Montana to hunt buffalo as specimens to put on display in the museum. Arriving on May 9, 1886, in Miles City, Montana, Hornaday killed two bulls, secured three skeletons, seven skulls, and captured one live calf, all of which he shipped back to Washington on June 6. In addition to the buffalo specimens, Hornaday's team also collected eighty other samples of wildlife, including prairie dogs and antelope, to display in the museum. However, Hornaday was not pleased with his success, since the bulls he had killed were shedding their hair and were not representative of the full grandeur of the species in the winter.<sup>38</sup>

Since his first expedition was unsuccessful, Hornaday organized another trip to Montana that began on September 24, 1886. Hunting north of Miles City, Hornaday killed nine buffalo by October 22. By November 20, he had killed twenty more and on his return trip to Miles City, he procured another two animals. Unlike his earlier expedition, these animals were of all ages and sizes, which was exactly what Hornaday wanted. In addition, they had begun growing their winter hair, which made them appear more representative of the species.<sup>39</sup> Hornaday, who wished to dispel the notion that finding and killing these animals was easy, wrote later:

They sought the remotest bad lands, they hid in low grounds, they watched sharply during every daylight hour, and whenever a man on horseback was sighted they were off like a bunch of racers, for a long and frantic run straight away from the troublemaker...No deer, mountain sheep, tiger, bears, nor elephants,-all of which I have pursued (and sometimes overtaken!)-were ever more wary or keen in self preservation than those bison who *at last* [emphasis original] had broken out from under the fatal spell of herd security.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 529-30, 533-34.

<sup>39</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 534, 537, 541-45.

<sup>40</sup> William T. Hornaday, *The Minds and Manners of Wild Animals: A Book of Personal Observations* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1922), 144.

When Hornaday returned to Washington, he mounted the six animals that he considered to best represent all the ages and sexes of buffalo, including calves, heifers, cows, and bulls. Then, he placed the animals in a customized setting in realistic poses, creating the image that the museum viewer was actually looking at a family group of buffalo on the plains. In addition, the live calf that Hornaday had captured on his first trip was kept at the museum as well, until it died a few months later. In the end, Hornaday's mission was a complete success. The animals he preserved for the nation remained on display in the Smithsonian until 1955, when museum curators finally took them down.<sup>41</sup> In addition, Hornaday used the expedition as an opportunity to write *The Extermination of the American Bison*, which first appeared in the *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution* for 1887. This volume was reformatted into an actual book and published in 1889, becoming the first book to catalogue the history of buffalo in the nation *and* push for their preservation.<sup>42</sup>

### **The Wild West Shows and the Emergence of Theodore Roosevelt**

In the midst of the cultural efforts to preserve the buffalo for future generations, a new type of cultural romanticism of the American West formed. This romanticism took the form of "Wild West Shows." These shows, which used many elements of the Great Plains experience, including cowboys, Indians, soldiers, and animals, became immensely popular worldwide and tried to portray the West as an adventurous place full of excitement, danger, and individual freedom. While at least eighty of these shows existed

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<sup>41</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 545, xx-xxi. The live calf was a success among museum employees and began Hornaday's drive to create a "national zoo" in Washington. This dream was realized in 1889, when Congress appropriated funds to build the zoo.

<sup>42</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, ix, xix-xxi."

across the country, William F. Cody, better known as Buffalo Bill, formed one of the most successful and largest.<sup>43</sup> On May 17, 1883, he inaugurated his show in Omaha, Nebraska, to instant acclaim.<sup>44</sup> Cody's show incorporated buffalo, where he used the animals in "stampedes" and hunting scenes, which included Indians, to popularize and complete his transformation into a consummate showman. By its second year, Cody's show was drawing tens of thousands of people as it traveled the country. In one 1887 Chicago show, he drew 41,448 people. In fact, Cody's show could be considered most Americans' first taste of the American West and as such, they believed Cody's staged shows actually portrayed life as it was on the western plains, creating an entire mindset of the American West in the process.<sup>45</sup>

Cody's show soon grew to be an international phenomenon after he took his show overseas to Europe. In March 1887, he and his show traveled to London, where they performed before Queen Victoria, the Prince of Wales, the Crown Prince of Austria, and the Kings of Denmark, Greece, and Saxony.<sup>46</sup> Cody's show even had enough power to convince Queen Victoria to salute the American flag, something that no British monarch had ever done before. Cody's shows were enjoyed by the masses too, with 20,000 to 40,000 people attending each show at the London Amphitheatre.<sup>47</sup> Cody, who realized the mystique surrounding the animals was perhaps greater in Europe than America,

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<sup>43</sup> Mary Ann Franke, *To Save the Wild Bison: Life on the Edge in Yellowstone* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 60.

<sup>44</sup> Don Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 295-98.

<sup>45</sup> Russell, *Lives*, 308.

<sup>46</sup> Colonel W.F. Cody, *An Autobiography of Buffalo Bill Cody* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1920), 317-24.

<sup>47</sup> Russell, *Lives*, 329-32.



always made sure to have some buffalo in his shows. In fact, even before he left the United States, he made sure to have twenty buffalo, buying two animals from the Philadelphia Zoo for \$300 each. Cody even offered \$1,000 a head to Kansas buffalo rancher Charles “Buffalo” Jones prior to departure. On November 4, 1887, the *Birmingham Gazette* of Birmingham, England, stated, “Additional interest is attached to the buffaloes by the fact that they are almost the only survivors of what is nearly an extinct species. According to Colonel Cody there are not so many buffaloes on the whole American continent as there are in the exhibition.”<sup>48</sup> Cody exaggerated the small number of buffalo then left in existence, but not by much. In 1889, Hornaday could only come up with a figure of eighty-five buffalo left in the wild outside of Yellowstone National Park, and these animals were spread throughout their former range.<sup>49</sup> The enduring legacy of Cody’s Wild West Show and others like it was the romanticizing of the American West and of its inhabitants, which may have played a role in the growing American awareness of just how close the buffalo was to extinction.

Simultaneously with the rise of Cody’s Wild West Show, upper echelons of American society became interested in the fate of the buffalo. For the most part, the individuals who were the most interested in saving the buffalo were members of what could be considered the “old rich” of American society and were confined to the Northeast. These people were distinguishable from the “new rich,” like John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie, who made their fortunes on their own. Instead, these people were independently wealthy due to the financial success of their families. George Bird Grinnell was one member of this class of “old rich,” who early on agitated for

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<sup>48</sup> As quoted in Russell, *Lives*, 342.

<sup>49</sup> Hornaday, *Extirpation*, 525.

buffalo preservation. Soon enough, he was joined by Theodore Roosevelt, who saw in the western United States an outlet to show America's natural heritage. The tumult and chaos of the Gilded Age, in which political corruption and labor upheaval seemed to be the norm, appeared to be a threat to the ways of life of reformers like Roosevelt and Grinnell. In addition, the nation had been torn by the Civil War and was in need of a unifying force. To Grinnell and Roosevelt, the western United States was the perfect outlet to heal America and to create an enduring legacy of what it once was.<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, a "cult of masculinity" developed around these men, who felt that only in the wilds of North America could they live out their fantasy of conquering nature.

Historian G. Edward White sums up this attitude when he states, "The image of the wilderness and a wild life as an alternative to the social order retained its power...and as eastern society became more complex, rigid, and urbanized in the last years of the nineteenth century, this image was to reassert itself in a cult of westernizing which profoundly influenced the American imagination."<sup>51</sup> The buffalo came to symbolize this wilderness and the passing of an age in America, and to allow the animals to disappear without a fight on their behalf would be a gross injustice to all Americans.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1977), 441.

<sup>51</sup> G. Edward White, *The Eastern Establishment and the Western Experience: The West of Frederic Remington, Theodore Roosevelt, and Owen Wister* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 41, 50.

<sup>52</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman: Sketches of Sport on the Northern Cattle Plains* (1886 repr., Upper Saddle River, NJ: Literature House, 1970), 267; George Bird Grinnell, "The Last of the Buffalo." *Scribner's Magazine*, September 1892, 267-286. Grinnell's work acts as a memorial of the role of the buffalo in American history.



A photograph of George Bird Grinnell in midlife. (Photo courtesy of the National Park Service)

Like Grinnell before him, Roosevelt was not a newcomer to the American West or to animal life. In fact, Roosevelt had originally planned on becoming a naturalist, and for his first years at Harvard, studied natural history, only giving up this career path after he grew tired of Harvard's emphasis on microscopic study.<sup>53</sup> By 1882, Roosevelt had become infatuated with one day killing a buffalo, and in September 1883, made his first trip west to Little Missouri, Dakota Territory, to kill the animal that he considered to be the "largest and most important to man."<sup>54</sup> Roosevelt, under the supervision of his guide, Joe Ferris, took two weeks to find and kill his buffalo, enduring rainy weather and poor conditions throughout his trip, but when the animal was killed, the entire trip was made worthwhile.<sup>55</sup> As Roosevelt biographer Douglas Brinkley points out, it was only after Roosevelt shot his first buffalo and roamed the countryside that he felt like a true man of the West.<sup>56</sup> After this experience, Roosevelt returned again and again to the Dakotas and the western United States, using the area to seek solace after his wife and mother died within hours of each other in 1884. Later, he participated in a business venture in which he raised cattle until the devastating winter of 1886, in which more than half of his cattle died.<sup>57</sup> Yet, as much as Roosevelt wanted to be viewed as a westerner, his East Coast training at Harvard taught him that life was fragile, and that the slaughter of the buffalo

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<sup>53</sup> Paul Russell Cutright, *Theodore Roosevelt: The Making of a Conservationist* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 6, 127-28.

<sup>54</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *The Wilderness Hunter: An Account of the Big Game of the United States and Its Chase with Horse, Hound, and Rifle* (1900; repr., Upper Saddle River, NJ: Literature House, 1970), 26.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Russell Cutright, *Theodore Roosevelt: The Naturalist* (New York: Harper, 1956), 40-42.

<sup>56</sup> Brinkley, *Wilderness Warrior*, 163.

<sup>57</sup> Brinkley, *Wilderness Warrior*, 168, 196-97. Roosevelt lost \$23,556.68 after the winter of 1886-87. Altogether, sixty to seventy percent of all the cattle on the northern plains died as a result of the extreme cold and snows of this one winter.

had driven the animals to the brink of extinction.<sup>58</sup> In the coming years, he used the plight of the buffalo to agitate for national park protection, conservation and preservation of natural resources, and more protective wildlife laws, so that the same thing would not happen to other animals as had happened to the buffalo, whose slaughter he classified as a “veritable tragedy of the animal world.”<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, even though the buffalo were nearly gone, those that were left should be preserved at all costs for the nation as a symbol of what the West once was.

While Roosevelt and Grinnell worked separately up to the mid-1880s to save the buffalo, they soon merged their efforts together. While each person knew about the other and read each other’s works, the spark that drew them together was actually over a book review that Grinnell had published in *Forest and Stream*. Grinnell reviewed Roosevelt’s *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*, which was the first part of Roosevelt’s “nature trilogy” that catalogued his time spent in the Dakotas.<sup>60</sup> Roosevelt noted that while other reviewers uncritically praised his book, Grinnell criticized Roosevelt for generalizing too much about the animals he treated in his text. Roosevelt, who had deep respect for Grinnell, was angered by this criticism and stormed in to meet with Grinnell about the review. At the end of the meeting, in which the two went through the book page by page, Roosevelt realized that Grinnell knew more about animals than he did and as a result of the meeting, the two quickly became friends for the rest of their lives. In fact, because of this meeting the two formed a close working relationship that was crucial to the

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<sup>58</sup> Brinkley, *Wilderness Warrior*, 164.

<sup>59</sup> Roosevelt, *Hunting Trips*, 260.

<sup>60</sup> The rest of Roosevelt’s nature trilogy includes *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail* (1888) and *The Wilderness Hunter* (1900).

preservation of the buffalo and the creation of the first national wildlife conservation group, the Boone and Crockett Club.<sup>61</sup>

### **The Boone and Crockett Club, the Railroad Gang, and the Fate of Yellowstone**

The Boone and Crockett Club, officially founded in 1887, was a seminal event in the history of buffalo preservation, forest reserve creation, and conservation in general.<sup>62</sup> This club, which Roosevelt and Grinnell jointly founded, was formed in response to the dwindling buffalo population in Yellowstone and the defacement of the park by visitors. Unlike future wildlife organizations, this group had stringent rules for membership and was designed to effect real change for the benefit of wildlife and nature by raising awareness through exploration and by pushing for the creation of legislation to protect large game animals, as well as to help enforce wildlife laws.<sup>63</sup> Both Roosevelt and Grinnell realized that the only way to get anything done in Congress to protect nature was to form their own political lobbying group to combat more powerful political interests, which threatened the buffalo and Yellowstone National Park. These interests, which will be discussed shortly, had derailed all prior efforts to preserve the park and protect the animals within it. In response, both men knew that they needed to create a disciplined organization to prevent the continuing depredations in the park.

The Boone and Crockett Club was based on a cultural phenomenon known as the “sportsman’s code.” This code held that game had to be killed in a manner that did not

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<sup>61</sup> Brinkley, *Wilderness Warrior*, 184-86; Reiger, *American Sportsmen*, 117. Reiger believed that Grinnell, along with Gifford Pinchot, were the most influential people when Roosevelt shaped his conservation policies.

<sup>62</sup> George Bird Grinnell, ed. *American Big Game and Its Haunts: The Book of the Boone and Crockett Club* (New York: Forest and Stream Publishing Company, 1904), 485.

<sup>63</sup> Grinnell, *American Big Game*, 485.

hinder the chase of the animal, lead to torture of the animal, and that made use of the animal after it was killed. In fact, the first purpose of the club was “to promote manly sport with the rifle.”<sup>64</sup> For the Boone and Crockett Club, this applied to the big game animals, which were the animals that the club argued most needed to be saved.<sup>65</sup> In order to be a member of the club, a person had to have killed one member of three of the big game species of mammals in North America, which included buffalo, grizzly bears, mountain sheep, cougars, elk, moose, and other big game species in a fair chase or still hunt.<sup>66</sup> To keep the membership tight, focused, and devoted, Grinnell and Roosevelt capped the number of full members at one hundred, while associate memberships were possible. While the full membership group was small, the founders used associate and honorary memberships to add people in power positions in Congress and the military to increase the political power of the group. All of the park superintendents at Yellowstone, Henry Cabot Lodge, Henry Stimson, Elihu Root, Owen Wister, Gifford Pinchot, Philip Sheridan, and William T. Sherman became associate or honorary members of the club, while sportsmen groups across the nation allowed the Boone and Crockett Club to speak on their behalf. Moreover, Grinnell used *Forest and Stream* to act as the official organ of the club.<sup>67</sup> In the end, the influence of the Boone and Crockett Club goes back to the idea that American society was in need of restoration according to the “old rich,” who comprised most of the full membership of the club. Historian G. Edward White

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<sup>64</sup> Grinnell, *American Big Game*, 485.

<sup>65</sup> Reiger, *American Sportsmen*, 31; Grinnell, *American Big Game*, 485-89.

<sup>66</sup> Grinnell, *American Big Game*, 486. Other big game animals included black and brown bears, polar bears, musk oxen, woodland and barren-ground caribou, white goats, pronghorn antelope, and Virginia, mule, and Columbian black-tail deer.

<sup>67</sup> Grinnell, *American Big Game*, 485; Reiger, *American Sportsmen*, 120; James B. Trefethen, *An American Crusade for Wildlife* (New York: Winchester, 1975), 120, 125-25.

effectively captured the ideals of the Boone and Crockett Club and the followers of Roosevelt when he wrote, “the paternalistic notions of the Roosevelt conservationists included a belief that somehow the federal government could enact a balance between traditional and modern America. In this sense, conservation legislation was intended to preserve the status of representatives of older America by insuring they could adapt to the new times.”<sup>68</sup>

Even before the Boone and Crockett Club had formed, cultural efforts to save the buffalo and wildlife in Yellowstone had recommenced beginning in 1883. The work in this case was initiated at the urging of Grinnell and was championed by Senator George C. Vest of Missouri. Between 1883 and 1890, Vest made six attempts to create legislation for Yellowstone National Park, which would have provided a legal apparatus by which poachers could be prosecuted for killing game in the park. Buffalo, as the animal most in danger from poaching because of their value as a cultural icon to wealthy easterners, were the animals which stood to benefit the most from protective legislation. Representative Erastus Turner of Kansas supported Vest in the House, stating:

It is nearly, though almost, too late to repair the tremendous mistake committed in the destruction of this king of cattle. Should this herd [of Yellowstone buffalo] be permitted to separate and be destroyed the extermination of the race would be final and complete... This generation has destroyed the buffalo. If it is possible to do so it is the duty of the same generation to in some degree make amends to posterity for the mistake which may almost be denounced as a national crime.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> White, *The Eastern Establishment*, 181.

<sup>69</sup> Committee on Public Lands, *Protection of American Bison and Other Animals*, by Erastus Turner, 51<sup>st</sup> Cong., 1st sess., May 3, 1890, H. Rep. 1876, 1. (For website address, see bibliography).



On two occasions, Vest's bills actually passed the Senate unanimously, only to be defeated in the House.<sup>70</sup> The main opponents of the Vest bills were representatives beholden to the mining and railroad interests, market hunters, and land speculators. In addition, the falsely named Yellowstone National Park Improvement Company, which was formed in 1882, wanted concessions granted to it, so that it could control all future development that occurred in the park. Collectively, this group became known as the "Railroad Gang" and comprised the Boone and Crockett Club's chief competition for several years.<sup>71</sup>

The motive for the Railroad Gang stopping the protection bills always came back to the issue of financial gain. The lobby decided that it would prevent any protective legislation from passing Congress, until a right of way was granted to create a spur line through the park to the silver mines in Cooke City, Montana. The hope of these individuals was that the Northern Pacific Railroad would then buy up the land surrounding the railroad, making them rich in the process. Since the park protectionists were strong enough to prevent outright passage of the railroad lobby's bills, the Railroad Gang attached their proposals to the protection bills in the hope that the protectionists would concede to their wishes in return for the passage of their legislation. Representative Louis Payson of Illinois, a member of the Railroad Gang, voiced the reasoning of his interest group when he declared that he could not understand the logic behind protecting the park and the buffalo when mining could create jobs and revenue.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Trefethen, *An American Crusade*, 83-84.

<sup>71</sup> Trefethen, *An American Crusade*, 83-84; Hampton, *How the U. S. Cavalry*, 54.

<sup>72</sup> Franke, *To Save the Wild Bison*, 29.

To Vest and Grinnell, any compromise could open up the possibility of other railroads to coming in and splitting the park up, destroying Yellowstone in the process.<sup>73</sup>

Despite the efforts of the Boone and Crockett Club and the support of presidents Benjamin Harrison and Grover Cleveland and a host of large city newspapers, the protectionists gradually lost ground to the Railroad Gang. By 1892, the lobby successfully proposed a bill, which threatened to cut 622 square miles from Yellowstone. This bill passed the Senate on February 23, 1893, and would have passed the House too, had the lobby not blundered.<sup>74</sup> The railroad lobby, not wanting to let anything rest to chance, bribed the Speaker of the House, Charles Crisp, who had always towed the railroad line. In this case, the lobbyists wanted their bill resolved quickly and were willing to pay Crisp to do just that. However, Grinnell was able to intercept the letter to Crisp and revealed it to the nation in *Forest and Stream*. This act, which provided irrefutable proof that the railroad lobby had attempted to pay off a representative finally broke the power of that group. Adding to the joy of the preservationists, the president of the Northern Pacific, T. F. Oakes, stated that his line would not build through Yellowstone, nor complete a line to the mines at Cooke City.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Hampton, *How the U. S. Cavalry*, 115. For more information on Grinnell's positions on Vest's bills and the Railroad Gang's amendments on a bill by bill basis, see "Game Bag and Gun: The Yellowstone Park Bill," *Forest and Stream*, March 13, 1884, 124-25; "An Emasculated Bill," *Forest and Stream*, August 2, 1888, 21-22; "The Park Bill in the House," *Forest and Stream*, August 9, 1888, 41; and "The New Park Bill," *Forest and Stream*, January 9, 1890, 21.

<sup>74</sup> "A Natural Reservoir," *Forest and Stream*, May 1, 1890, 285; Trefethen, *An American Crusade*, 84-85. The *Chicago Times*, *Boston Herald*, and all of the major New York newspapers, including the *Times* and *Herald*, supported wildlife protection.

<sup>75</sup> Trefethen, *An American Crusade*, 84-85; Reiger, *American Sportsmen*, 128-29; Hampton, *How the U. S. Cavalry*, 118. Grinnell never revealed how he came into possession of this letter.

## Closing the Loopholes on Poachers

During all of the political wrangling to keep the railroad out, Congress cut the funding to pay for a park superintendent in 1886. At this point, the Secretary of the Interior was forced to request military assistance to govern the park. On August 20, 1886, Captain Moses Harris and twenty-two other men of the 1st U. S. Cavalry took over park administration. Unlike his civilian predecessors, Harris made greater attempts to patrol the park for poachers, although he could do nothing to punish them.<sup>76</sup> Harris expressed this problem in his report to the Secretary of the Interior in 1888, which appeared in *Forest and Stream*, stating, “The buffalo or bison have so narrowly escaped extinction, and the number which now find a refuge in this park is so limited, that they should be protected by every possible method. Hunters, stimulated by the high price offered by taxidermists for specimens, are now lying in wait beyond the borders of the Park, ready to pounce upon any unfortunate animal which may stray beyond its limits.”<sup>77</sup> One of Harris’s successors, Captain George S. Anderson, who took over on February 15, 1891, soon was confiscating so much contraband from poachers that he was forced to burn it just to make room for more. Anderson was the most active superintendent yet, patrolling the park and literally kicking poachers out after he or his troopers had marched them across the full expanse of Yellowstone on foot.<sup>78</sup> Despite his best efforts, poaching continued. Especially alarming to Anderson was the declining buffalo population, which was sought after by poachers more than any other game. According to Anderson, buffalo

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<sup>76</sup> Hampton, *How the U. S. Cavalry*, 80, 94. Captain F. A. Boutelle served as park superintendent between Harris and Anderson, from June 1889 to 1891.

<sup>77</sup> “Yellowstone Park Report,” *Forest and Stream*, September 13, 1888, 146. Harris thought there were no more than 200 animals in the park in 1888.

<sup>78</sup> Franke, *To Save the Wild Bison*, 35; Hampton, *How the U. S. Cavalry*, 111.

heads were going for \$300 to \$500 a piece, in nearby Livingston, Billings, and Helena, Montana, with some heads selling to East Coast millionaires for up to \$1,500. With no penalties to discourage the poachers beyond confiscating their equipment and kicking them out of the park, Anderson was forced to continue to watch the buffalo be killed as the poachers re-supplied themselves and re-entered the park.<sup>79</sup> Anderson believed that the only way to galvanize Congress into creating legislation to protect the game of the park was to shock the nation by providing proof of the slaughter of the buffalo. In March 1894, he finally got what he wanted.

In early winter 1894, Anderson got word that a known poacher, Edgar Howell, had re-supplied himself in Cooke City, Montana, and was coming back into the park. Anderson sent his scout, Felix Burgess, and a trooper to patrol the area where he guessed Howell might be. In Burgess's own words, the following circumstances were pure luck. Burgess miraculously found Howell's sled trail and followed it until he heard six rifle shots over a ridge. Once over the ridge, Burgess discovered Howell and five dead buffalo in the snow. Burgess and the trooper, who only had a revolver between them, were outgunned by Howell, who had a rifle. In addition, Howell had a dog with him and was separated from Burgess by several hundred yards. Burgess, despite the odds against him, skied down the hill and surprised Howell, who was starting to skin the animals, arresting him on the spot for killing buffalo. After his arrest, Burgess found six more heads of buffalo that Howell had killed.<sup>80</sup> Unlike in other cases, Anderson had finally caught a poacher red-handed killing game in the park. Furthermore, a correspondent

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<sup>79</sup> Franke, *To Save the Wild Bison* 35, Hampton, *How the U. S. Cavalry*, 108.

<sup>80</sup> Emerson Hough, "Yellowstone Park Game Exploration: The Account of Howell's Capture," *Forest and Stream*, May 5, 1894, 377-78.

from *Forest and Stream*, Emerson Hough, and photographer F. J. Haynes were in the park visiting for a series of stories to appear in the publication about Yellowstone.<sup>81</sup> The story of Howell's capture soon catapulted the nation to action and had far reaching consequences for all the game in Yellowstone.

Within twelve hours of Howell's capture, Hough wired news of his arrest to Grinnell back in New York who published the preliminary information in the March 24, 1894, edition of *Forest and Stream*. In his stinging and wide ranging editorial, Grinnell called the capture of Howell "unquestionably the most important that has ever been made in the National Park." Grinnell then lampooned the "criminal negligence" of Congress in refusing to pass laws to protect the park and its animals. Furthermore, Grinnell emphasized that the destruction of the park and its animals was hurting the nation and each person in it, who all had a stake in the park, and that the poachers who killed the animals "laughed at the troops" who were charged with protecting the animals. He went on to compare the irony of the slaughter of buffalo by Howell, which had a value of \$2,500 to \$5,000, were considered government property, and were irreplaceable, with the slaughter of a government owned mule or horse, whose killing could result in jail time or a fine. Grinnell ended his outburst by stating that there were only five hundred buffalo left in the park, "the remnant of a continent...the rarest of the living wonders of our American Wonderland." It was now up to the nation to decide whether the loss of the buffalo from the nation would be tolerated by the American people.<sup>82</sup> Soon after

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<sup>81</sup> Hampton, *How the U. S. Cavalry*, 123.

<sup>82</sup> "A Premium on Crime," *Forest and Stream*, March 24, 1894, 243. William T. Hornaday actually placed the number of animals in Yellowstone much lower this. In his 1889 study, he estimated that there were only 200 free ranging buffalo left in the entire United States. For more information, see Hornaday, *Extirpation*, 464.

Grinnell's report appeared, the rest of the nation's newspapers picked up the story, and the Howell capture and the fate of the buffalo became an overnight sensation.

Grinnell, by promoting the idea that the buffalo were going to go extinct, finally had driven home the cultural significance of the animals as part of American frontier life and as the predominant symbol of American wildlife overall. Helping his story was the description of the ragged Howell, who, nevertheless, was unrepentant in his interviews with Hough. Howell even went so far as to say that he might return to the park again to hunt, since the loss of \$26.50 in supplies was nothing to the \$2,000 he stood to gain from the sale of the heads. To go with Howell's story were the grizzly images of the dead buffalo, which had floundered in the deep snow as Howell walked up on snowshoes and shot them as they tried to escape. Unlike earlier images of dead buffalo, these images were actual photographs of the animals, not an artist's rendition or a lithograph. In a manner of speaking, Grinnell's constant refrain about buffalo protection for over a decade finally had "indisputable" evidence of what was happening to the animals within Yellowstone.<sup>83</sup> While Hough's article did not appear in full until the May 5, 1894, edition of *Forest and Stream*, his earlier reports, which Grinnell had disseminated, were successful in arousing public indignation. Hundreds of letters flowed in to Congress demanding legislation. In Washington, Roosevelt, who was testifying before the Senate on behalf of the Boone and Crockett Club for game protection in Yellowstone, wasted no

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<sup>83</sup> Hough, "Yellowstone Park Game," 378; Allan C. Braddock, "Poaching Pictures: Yellowstone, Buffalo, and the Art of Wildlife Conservation," *American Art* 23, no. 3 (Fall 2009), 39-41, <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/649775> (accessed December 9, 2009). Braddock points out that the bison in the pictures that Grinnell published in *Forest and Stream* were not the ones that Howell actually shot. Instead, he used pictures taken by L. A. Huffman, a photographer who hunted bison in the northern plains in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Hence, even though Grinnell tricked the nation, he did achieve his goals by creating a firestorm of public awareness of the Yellowstone herd of bison. As Braddock points out in his article, the pictures of dead buffalo within Yellowstone juxtaposed sharply with scenes of grandeur and beauty that artists, such as Thomas Moran, attempted to show of the park through their work.

time in applying pressure too.<sup>84</sup> In a letter to Anderson, W. Hallett Philips, a member of the Boone and Crockett Club, told Anderson that “the killing of the buffalo has excited the people very much and may stir Congress up to do something.”<sup>85</sup>

In Congress, Representative John F. Lacey of Iowa led the fight to create protectionist measures. Lacey had joined Congress in 1892, and became an ardent wildlife supporter and creator of legislation to benefit nature throughout his career. On April 4, Lacey proposed a new bill, which gave “full authority to protect all the birds, fish, and animals in the park,” noting, “one of the purposes of setting aside this park has been to preserve this little herd [of buffalo].”<sup>86</sup> Lacey’s bill stated that outside of the authority of the Secretary of the Interior, no one was “to kill, ensnare, trap, catch, or in any manner injure any wild beast, bird, or wild animal of any nature or description within the boundaries of the Yellowstone National Park.” The law provided a fine of up to \$1,000 and/or a prison sentence of two years, and the seizure of equipment for anyone caught doing anything harmful to the animals of Yellowstone.<sup>87</sup> On April 6, 1894, the bill passed the House with no debate and moved on to the Senate.<sup>88</sup> Within thirty days of being introduced, the bill was signed into law by President Grover Cleveland on May 7, marking the first instance where the federal government actively protected wild animals

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<sup>84</sup> Brinkley, *Wilderness Warrior*, 269. Roosevelt went so far as to say that if he had captured Howell, Howell would not have made it out of the park alive.

<sup>85</sup> As quoted in Hampton, *How the U. S. Cavalry*, 124.

<sup>86</sup> John F. Lacey, *Protection of Game in Yellowstone National Park*, 53rd Cong., 2nd sess., April 4, 1894, H. Rpt. 658, 1 (For website address, see bibliography).

<sup>87</sup> “A Bill for Park Protection.” *Forest and Stream*, April 21, 1894, 337.

<sup>88</sup> Hampton, *How the U.S. Cavalry*, 121.



These are the heads of the buffalo that Howell killed in Yellowstone in 1894. This image did not appear in *Forest and Stream*. (Photo courtesy of the National Park Service)



in America.<sup>89</sup> As will be seen later, however, the passage of this act had unforeseen consequences, which led to the necessity of creating partnerships between the private and public sectors in order to preserve the buffalo from extinction.

### **Enter the Western Buffalo Ranchers**

In the western United States, ranchers also moved to save buffalo, although their motive was economic gain. A market for anything related to buffalo developed soon after the destruction of the northern herd, particularly east of the Mississippi River. To the ranchers, the buffalo was worth more alive than dead, since they could see with the cultural sentiment developing in the Northeast that buffalo were worth preserving to sell to zoos and other private owners.<sup>90</sup> In this regard, these individuals were right, as the market that they foresaw coming one day did in fact arrive. As time went on, these individuals would provide the national parks and reserves of America with buffalo. Hence, even though the East Coast elites were the ones who pushed for buffalo preservation for cultural reasons, it was the western ranchers including Charles “Buffalo” Jones, Charles Goodnight, Frederick Dupree, James “Scotty” Philip, and Charles Allard and Michael Pablo who had the animals that allowed their dreams to reach fruition.

One of the first people to start up his herd was Charles Goodnight of Goodnight, Texas. Goodnight, who helped to forge the Goodnight-Loving Trail, spent most of his time and money in cattle ranching. However, in 1866, he took a notion to capture some

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<sup>89</sup> Punke, *Last Stand*, 216-17. In this case, the word “actively” is used to denote the punishment aspect of this legislation. While the bill creating Yellowstone in theory “protected” the animals within the park, there was no legal recourse to keep these animals safe.

<sup>90</sup> For more information about the development of zoos in America, see Elizabeth Hanson, *Animal Attractions: Nature on Display in American Zoos* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

buffalo calves. Pursuing the cows until the calves fell behind, he was able to capture six calves to start his own herd. Goodnight milked the calves off of Texas cows, until he had to attend to his cattle business. After leaving the animals in the care of a friend, Goodnight returned to find the animals had been sold in his absence.<sup>91</sup> The next time that Goodnight attempted to save some buffalo was in 1878. By this point, he and his wife Mary had moved to the Texas panhandle, when the buffalo slaughter was at its height. Goodnight's wife was able to convince her husband that at least a few buffalo should be saved for the nation and Texas. Using the same methods as before, Goodnight captured two calves, which would become the nucleus of his permanent buffalo herd.<sup>92</sup>

Goodnight soon saw all kinds of potential in buffalo after he witnessed the birth of a cross bred cattle-buffalo calf that was sired by his buffalo bull, Old Sikes, one of the two calves he had originally captured. Goodnight, unlike many of his contemporaries, thought that buffalo were naturally smarter than cattle, and due to their hardiness and economy, could possibly offer a better return than cattle if he could exploit the market for the animals.<sup>93</sup> As such, in 1885 Goodnight began to experiment with a cattle-buffalo cross, which he called a cattalo. To do this, Goodnight chose Angus heifers, which he considered the hardiest cattle to breed to his buffalo. What he discovered was that the cross actually worked better if a domestic bull bred a buffalo cow, since domestic cows

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<sup>91</sup> J. Evetts Haley, *Charles Goodnight: Cowman and Plainsman* (1936; repr., Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), 438. Goodnight was an intensely private individual. Haley provides the best biography of Goodnight, who he admits was a difficult person to interview. Goodnight revealed to Haley that he was forced to kill one of the mothers of the six calves he had captured in 1866. This act haunted him for the rest of his life.

<sup>92</sup> Charles Goodnight, Emmanuel Dubbs, and John A. Hart, *Pioneer Days in the Southwest from 1850 to 1879: Thrilling Descriptions of Buffalo Hunting, Indian Fighting and Massacres, Cowboy Life and Home Building* (Guthrie, OK: State Capital, 1909), 28. Goodnight credited the settlement of Northern Texas to the buffalo hunters.

<sup>93</sup> Haley, *Charles Goodnight*, 442-43.

tended to die when having calves. Goodnight entertained dreams of becoming rich after creating his “super-cattle,” which he claimed were more immune to disease, gained weight faster while eating less, had better meat, turned head-long into storms instead of drifting before them like cattle, and were longer lived.<sup>94</sup> In addition to genetic superiority, Goodnight envisioned a wide range of uses and products for his cattalo and buffalo, including buffalo tallow balm, buffalo wool blankets, and buffalo elixir. While many of these products were busts, the robes of his cattalo sold for \$100 a piece, partially helping to vindicate his belief in the future of the animals.<sup>95</sup> Goodnight also created a market for his live buffalo, selling animals to owners who wanted their own small herds. In fact, Goodnight’s sale of seven buffalo to Buffalo Bill for \$225 per head helped him to start his Wild West Show.<sup>96</sup> However, Goodnight was never able to overcome high abortion rates for his cattalo, limiting their economic effectiveness. Despite this, his buffalo thrived, and by the 1902, he reported to the Secretary of the Interior that he thought he had sixty to seventy pure bred buffalo.<sup>97</sup> Throughout the rest of his life, Goodnight continued to maintain “that the buffalo is the most profitable farm animal in America today.”<sup>98</sup> By the end of his life, Goodnight had 200 to 250 pure bred buffalo in his herd.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Haley, *Charles Goodnight*, 443-45.

<sup>95</sup> Haley, *Charles Goodnight*, 424, Goodnight, *Pioneer Days*, 8-9.

<sup>96</sup> Martin S. Garretson, *The American Bison: The Story of Its Extermination as a Wild Species and Its Restoration under Federal Protection* (New York: New York Zoological Society, 1938), 144.

<sup>97</sup> *The American Bison in the United States and Canada: Letter from the Secretary of the Interior, Transmitting to the Senate Facts in Relation to the Preservation of the American Bison in the United States and Canada*, by Ethan A Hitchcock, Secretary of the Interior, 57th Cong., 1st sess., 1902. S. Doc. 445, 32 (For website address, see bibliography).

While Goodnight had one of the first herds of buffalo in the nation, his contributions to the continuation of the species were overshadowed by Charles “Buffalo” Jones of Garden City, Kansas. Unlike Goodnight, Jones was boisterous and self-promoting. As such, he pushed the economic benefits of buffalo even more than Goodnight did. Jones, who started out his life as a buffalo hunter, stated that he first decided to raise buffalo in 1872 when out hunting one day. Later that year he captured twelve calves, which he later sold for \$7.50 a piece. Yet, Jones’s desire to raise buffalo did not stop him from killing the animals, since he figured that if he did not kill the animals, someone else would. Despite this, the desire to save the species and atone for his past sins in killing the animals while still turning a profit continued to motivate him.<sup>100</sup> In 1877, Jones first got into the buffalo breeding business, after he purchased one bull and four heifers. Jones rapidly expanded, buying animals when he could, while capturing others, much like Goodnight had done in Texas.<sup>101</sup> From 1885 to 1888, Jones led expeditions into remote areas of the Staked Plains of Texas to find these buffalo, eventually capturing eighty-seven animals, of which fifty-seven survived. In addition, Jones made a large purchase of animals from Manitoba, Canada, in 1888, from S. L.

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<sup>98</sup> American Bison Society, *Second Annual Report of the American Bison Society, 1908-09* (New York: American Bison Society, 1909), 57.

<sup>99</sup> Haley, *Charles Goodnight*, 442.

<sup>100</sup> Charles J. Jones, *Buffalo Jones’ Forty Years of Adventure: A Volume of Facts Gathered from Experience*, by Hon. C.J. Jones, *Whose Eventful Life has been Devoted to the Preservation of the American Bison and Other Wild Animals* (Topeka, KS: Crane & Co., 1899), 37, 235.

<sup>101</sup> Hornaday, *Extinction*, 455; Jones, *Buffalo Jones’ Forty Years*, 56-66, 189, 242. Hornaday kept up an active correspondence with Jones as he compiled his report.

Bedson, who owned eighty-three cross breeds and pure blooded buffalo, paying \$50,000 and taking them back home to his ranch in Kansas.<sup>102</sup>

Jones, like Goodnight, was a strong believer in the hardiness of buffalo over cattle. This belief was cemented in his mind after the killer blizzards of 1886, in which millions of cattle died. Jones hoped to breed cattle and buffalo together, creating a new form of cattle in the process.<sup>103</sup> The benefits, as he saw it, were worth the risk of starting his herd. According to Jones, he wanted to create an animal that was hardy, faced the storms, had strong endurance, and ate less while yielding more in terms of meat.<sup>104</sup> Jones revealed to William T. Hornaday that his cattalo meat sold for eighteen cents per pound, the dressed hides \$50 to \$75, while a robe sold for \$40 to \$50.<sup>105</sup> Throughout the rest of his life, Jones continued to sell his animals to prospective buyers, helping to spread the animals in his herd across the nation and the world, even selling full grown buffalo to an English nobleman, C. J. Leland, in October 1891 for what he described as a “fabulous” price.<sup>106</sup> Already in 1888, Jones had sold twelve calves to Austin Corbin, a wealthy developer from New York, followed by another ten in 1892, which he purchased for \$1,000 each.<sup>107</sup> By 1895, Jones had overextended himself and was forced to liquidate his

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<sup>102</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 458. Bedson began his herd in 1877 and raised all of his own animals, refusing to buy from other owners.

<sup>103</sup> Jones, *Buffalo Jones' Forty Years*, 49-55. Jones and Goodnight fought for many years over who developed the concept of the cattalo. Eventually, Jones received credit for the animals, although Goodnight probably did in fact coin the term. In addition, Goodnight's rate of successful conception and delivery of new calves was always much higher than Jones'. Perhaps contributing to this was that Goodnight used hardier Angus and Hereford cattle, while Jones used Galloways and Texas cows.

<sup>104</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 456; Jones, *Buffalo Jones' Forty Years*, 49-55.

<sup>105</sup> Hornaday, *Extermination*, 456.

<sup>106</sup> Jones, *Buffalo Jones' Forty Years*, 225.

herd to pay off his debts.<sup>108</sup> As will be seen later, Jones' scheming did not end after this, and even came to involve the federal government.

While Jones and Goodnight created their herds on the southern plains, to the north in the Dakotas and Montana, Frederick Dupree, Scotty Philip, and Charles Allard and Michael Pablo formed their own herds. Frederick Dupree, who lived near Fort Bennett, Dakota Territory, on the Cheyenne Indian Agency, followed the pattern established by Goodnight in the south. Originally starting out as an Indian trader, Dupree changed to ranching and began his search for buffalo in late 1881 and early 1882, perhaps at the behest of his Sioux wife, Mary. Finally capturing five calves in 1882, Dupree's herd grew to nine animals by 1888. Dupree, like Goodnight and Jones, entertained the idea of breeding cattalo, and by the same date, had seven of these animals.<sup>109</sup> Unlike his contemporaries, Dupree left his animals to breed amongst themselves and did not push to create cattalo, letting it happen naturally. By 1898, Dupree had approximately eighty cattalo and buffalo when he died unexpectedly. After his death, his children sold the animals to Scotty Philip, who used this opportunity to get into the buffalo business.<sup>110</sup>

While Goodnight, Jones, and Dupree all experimented with cross-breeding and captured buffalo calves on the plains, Philip was a strong believer in pure-blooded buffalo and was a relative late comer to buffalo ranching. Philip, who had immigrated to

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<sup>107</sup> Garretson, *The American Bison*, 220. The Corbin herd would play a key role in the creation of the American Bison Society in 1904-05.

<sup>108</sup> Harold P. Danz, *Of Bison and Men: From the Annals of a Bison Yesterday to a Refreshing Outcome from Human Involvement with America's Most Valiant of Beasts* (Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1997), 119.

<sup>109</sup> Hornaday, *Extirpation*, 462; Ken Zontek, *Buffalo Nation: American Indian Efforts to Restore the Bison* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 51.

<sup>110</sup> David A. Dary, *The Buffalo Book: The Full Saga of the American Animal* (Chicago: Sage, 1974), 231-32.

America from Scotland, traveled the Great Plains before finally settling down near Pierre, South Dakota, to start cattle ranching. Philip, who witnessed the slaughters of the 1870s and 1880s, felt pity for the buffalo that remained, and after conversations with his wife Sally, who was part Sioux, and William T. Hornaday, he decided that he would get into the buffalo business, making it a subsidiary to his main cattle enterprise.<sup>111</sup> In order to acquire the late Dupree's buffalo herd, Philip agreed to take on the cattalo too, even though he did not want the animals. Eventually, Philip acquired eighty-three animals, fifty-seven of which were pure-bred buffalo. Philip, like other buffalo ranchers, emphasized how the animals were culturally significant and unique in order to market and earn money off of them. One way Philip accomplished this was by organizing a hunt to kill the renegade animals he had purchased from the Dupree estate, but could not capture. Philip realized \$500 to \$1,000 for the heads of these animals, which he shipped east to wealthy buyers. Moreover, Philip's animals became a tourist destination for visitors to Pierre, with ferries running daily excursions by his herd on the Missouri River. When Philip died in July 1911, his herd contained up to 1,000 animals, making it the largest privately held herd in the nation.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Nancy Veglahn, *The Buffalo King: The Story of Scotty Philip* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 162-64; Wayne C. Lee, *Scotty Philip: The Man Who Saved the Buffalo*, (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1975), 9-12, 249. Lee notes that Philip had 40,000 cattle on the range, sixty hired men, and had interests in banking too. The fact that both Dupree and Philip had wives of Indian descent speaks to the fact that their wives' cultural heritage may have played a role in helping their husbands to get into raising buffalo.

<sup>112</sup> Lee, *Scotty Philip* 246, 301, 311. Philip engaged in an interesting episode concerning an international competition with Mexican officials who challenged the fighting ability of a buffalo bull versus a Mexican fighting bull. In a well publicized fight, Philip shipped two bulls to Juarez, Mexico, for the fight. Along the way, crowds lined the tracks to see the buffalo destined for Mexico. Once in the ring, one buffalo soundly defeated four fighting bulls individually, and then collectively. A matador fight with the bull was called off at the last minute. As a result of the fight, Philip pocketed a large, undisclosed purse. However, the bitter Mexicans did not allow the victorious buffalo back into America and the animals were forced to be killed. For more information about this episode, see Lee, 272-285.

The final herd started around this time was a joint project begun by Charles Allard and Michael Pablo. Both men were of Native American ancestry and lived near the Flathead Reservation in Montana. Pablo and Allard began their herd in 1883 after they purchased thirteen buffalo from a Pend d' Oreille Indian, Walking Coyote, for \$2,000 cash. By 1888, Allard and Pablo had thirty-five animals and continued an aggressive purchasing and breeding campaign that resulted in the two men owning approximately three hundred animals by 1895.<sup>113</sup> The reasoning behind their purchases appears to have been a result of wanting to connect with their Indian heritage and the possibility to reap a profit, since the two men also purchased cattalo to go with their pure-blooded buffalo and sold some of their pure-breeds. In 1895, tragedy struck this partnership, when Allard died unexpectedly. After Allard's death, the herd was split in half, with half going to Pablo, while the other was sold off to Charles and Alicia Conrad of Kalispell, Montana, who wished to raise the animals as a business. Both halves of the Pablo-Allard herd had critical roles in the future of America's publicly owned buffalo herds, albeit for different reasons.<sup>114</sup>

While all of these ranchers worked mostly independently of the federal government, in some cases they were able to convince the government to support their own economic agendas. On the Flathead Reservation, Allard and Pablo grazed their animals for free.<sup>115</sup> Meanwhile, Philip applied to the federal government for the rights to

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<sup>113</sup> Hornaday, *Extirpation*, 460; Dary, *The Buffalo Book*, 224-25. While Allard was Anglo and Native American, his partner Pablo was mestizo. Both men grazed their animals on the Flathead Reservation, but may or may not have had any Flathead Indian ancestry. Pablo probably was part Flathead, but this cannot be said definitively.

<sup>114</sup> Dary, *The Buffalo Book*, 225-26. Soon after the purchase, Charles Conrad died, leaving his wife to manage the herd.



3,500 acres adjoining his buffalo pasture in 1905. While it took over a year to hear back about his request, Philip did succeed in getting the leasing rights for this land for \$50 per year.<sup>116</sup> Buffalo Jones put in the most effort, however, in campaigning for expansion and government support for his cattalo and buffalo projects. In Jones's eyes, the only way to save the buffalo was to domesticate and actively manage the animals. According to Jones, his first attempt to do this was in 1887, when he proposed to Congress that something be done to save the few animals roaming the Texas plains. While interest existed in Congress about his ideas, no substantive action was taken to support them.<sup>117</sup> Jones's first attempt would not be his last though.

Through frequent letter campaigns to *Forest and Stream* and to Congress, Jones kept his issue alive, until members of Congress began to support domestication of the buffalo too. By 1888, Jones had convinced *Forest and Stream's* editorial board of the effectiveness of his ideas, with the magazine's editorial board encouraging domestication and the production of cattalo, citing the potential profits from the byproducts, such as robes and meat.<sup>118</sup> By 1890, Jones had proposed a scheme whereby the government would lease him land in the Southwest and on islands in the Great Salt Lake to breed cattalo. In return, the government would pay \$30,000 to fence and improve the land. One representative from Kansas even proposed that the government pay Jones an

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<sup>115</sup> George Bird Grinnell, "American Bison in 1924," in George Bird Grinnell, and Charles Sheldon, eds., *Hunting and Conservation: The Book of the Boone and Crockett Club* (1925; repr., New York: Arno, 1970), 383-84.

<sup>116</sup> Lee, *Scotty Philip*, 255, 268.

<sup>117</sup> Jones, *Buffalo Jones' Forty Years*, 264-65.

<sup>118</sup> "Buffalo Domestication," *Forest and Stream*, December 20, 1888, 435; G. O. Shields, "Buffalo Cross Breeds" *Forest and Stream*, September 18, 1890, 167. The figures cited were \$75 for a cattalo robe that was three-quarters buffalo and the eighteen cents per pound for the meat of a cattalo.

additional \$30,000 to help him start out his enterprise. While this plan failed on concerns of funding a private citizen, Jones had planted a seed in Congress.<sup>119</sup> Later in the year, Representative Erastus Turner of Kansas stated, “As with the American Indian, the only way to prevent his [the Indian’s] extermination is to civilize him, so the only way to preserve the remaining buffalo is to domesticate them.”<sup>120</sup> In 1900, even the stalwart John F. Lacey had grown concerned over the still diminishing buffalo population. Lacey came to believe that the only way to save the buffalo was to domesticate them, and as such, recommended setting aside 20,000 acres in New Mexico to lease to buffalo ranchers for this purpose, who would then donate back two buffalo per year to be used in public parks across the nation. The term of this lease was for twenty years and cost one cent per acre to lease. Since the land was publicly held, he saw no problem with his proposal. Lacey ended his request by stating, “The whole people of the United States are concerned in saving our nation from the reproach of allowing the entire extinction of the American bison. Our children’s children would curse us, and they ought to, if we do not prevent this reproach on the American people from being consummated.”<sup>121</sup> What these bills and actions show was a gradual amalgamation of the ranchers, the federal government, and the preservationists, so that when the twentieth century dawned, all of the different groups had a basic familiarity with one another that proved crucial in the coming years.

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<sup>119</sup> “The Buffalo Bill,” *Forest and Stream*, February 13, 1890, 61.

<sup>120</sup> Committee on Public Lands, *Protection of American Bison and Other Animals*, 1.

<sup>121</sup> Committee on Public Lands, *Bison Preserve*, by John F. Lacey, 56th Cong., 1st sess., April 10, 1900, H. Rep. 985, 3-4 (For website address, see bibliography).

## National Game Legislation and Moves to Create National Public Herds

Unbeknownst to Jones, his idea to breed buffalo with the cooperation of the government opened up a new stage in the development of the cultural and economic relationship between the animals and Americans. His ideas awakened the notion of creating refuges for buffalo and other large game animals beyond Yellowstone National Park. Adding to the appeal of this idea was the frequent turnover associated with the privately held herds. When under private control, the buffalo were subject to the whims of their owners, who frequently sold the animals, leading to a gradual proliferation of the herds. While this allowed more Americans to come into contact with the animals, in order to perpetuate the species more than one or two animals in a single place were needed. Furthermore, by 1898 Dupree and Allard had died, while Jones had lost his herd due to financial problems, illustrating that even the largest herds were not safe. The first step to correct this imbalance began in the wake of the 1894 act to protect Yellowstone. In 1895, Roosevelt, along with zoologists Madison Grant and the curator of the American Museum of Natural History, Professor Henry Fairfield Osborn, came up with the idea of creating a zoo in New York that would act as a breeding and education center for buffalo and other animals. The objective of the New York Zoological Society was “the preservation of our native animals.”<sup>122</sup> To operate this institution, Roosevelt, Osborn, and Grant recruited William T. Hornaday, who they knew was one of the preeminent buffalo experts of the day, with only Jones as a possible rival. Hornaday set about the

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<sup>122</sup> Brinkley, *Wilderness Warrior*, 276-79; William T. Hornaday, *Our Vanishing Wild Life: Its Extermination and Preservation* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1913), 254. George Bird Grinnell was against putting the breeding center in New York, since he felt that placing the animals in their natural surroundings in Kansas under the direction of Buffalo Jones would have benefited the animals more, since the target of the Society was to one day move them west anyway. The New York Zoological Society is now the Bronx Zoo.

task of creating a buffalo breeding program with vigor, even tearing up the grass in the buffalo enclosure of twenty acres, replacing it with native Great Plains grasses.<sup>123</sup> In addition, Hornaday worked with the Page Woven Wire Fence Company of Adrian, Michigan, to develop a suitable fence that would hold a buffalo. In the process, Hornaday and the company created a fence of “springy woven wire” that was used on all of the subsequent ranges created to hold buffalo.<sup>124</sup>

Adding urgency to the work of the New York Zoological Society was the news that the buffalo population continued to decrease in Yellowstone National Park. In 1896, George S. Anderson reported to Secretary of the Interior Hoke Smith that the buffalo were in danger of disappearing from the park, due to poaching. While the rest of the animals in the park, such as elk, deer, and mountain sheep had increased after the 1894 protection act, the buffalo were still hunted mercilessly. Anderson commented that his police force was insufficient to patrol the millions of acres encompassing Yellowstone with only one scout to lead his troops. Furthermore, the local people around the park remained suspicious of him and his troops, while poachers caught with buffalo heads simply stated that the head was from somewhere else, and not from Yellowstone, knowing that he was then powerless to prosecute.<sup>125</sup> Even though the risk was greater after the act of 1894, poachers knew that eastern buyers were willing to spend even more

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<sup>123</sup> Brinkley, 284. Brinkley calls Hornaday’s work *Our Vanishing Wildlife*, “perhaps the single most important (if deeply flawed) book ever published on protecting wildlife.”

<sup>124</sup> Hornaday, *Thirty Years War*, 167. The development of this fence is an interesting tale. The company originally bought two buffalo from the city of Keokuk, Iowa, to test their fence. The company promoted the idea that a fence that could hold a buffalo could hold any domesticated farm animal. Hornaday, who was originally from Iowa and had family in Keokuk, learned of the development of this fence and became actively involved in its creation. For more information about the Keokuk herd of buffalo and their sale to the Page Woven Wire Fence Company, see Dary, *The Buffalo Book*, 233-34.

<sup>125</sup> *Letter from the Secretary of the Interior, in Response to Senate Resolution of February 26, 1896, as to whether Poaching is Carried on to any Great Extent in the Yellowstone National Park*, by Hoke Smith, 54th Cong., 1st sess., March 16, 1896. S. Doc. 170, 2-5 (For website address, see bibliography).

to acquire a buffalo head. By this point, some eastern buyers were paying over \$1,500 for a single head, while the taxidermists in Montana were paying \$500. *Recreation* magazine published an article in 1901, which appears reminiscent of accounts from the great hunts of the 1870s and 1880s, calling buffalo, “a small fortune walking around without an owner.”<sup>126</sup>

The problem of interstate commerce in buffalo heads was not a limited phenomenon though. Across the nation, black market trafficking of animals both dead and alive was becoming an issue of national importance, particularly for birds. In response to this, John F. Lacey proposed a bill that outlawed animal trafficking nationally. This act, which became known as the Lacey Act, closed the loophole that allowed the poachers and taxidermists to sell the heads of buffalo in the open with no repercussions. This clause, which Lacey considered to be the most important of the act, destroyed the excuse that black market dealers had used previously to get around the 1894 act, since buffalo were only found in a few limited places, and the ranchers who owned the animals would not kill their valuable stock without a guaranteed buyer. Furthermore, the traffickers, not just the hunters and sellers, could be prosecuted under this act, which made all wild animal shipments, whether dead or alive, illegal.<sup>127</sup> While the bill was primarily designed for the protection of birds and was responsible for millions of them being saved, Lacey had designed a bill which was applicable to all

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<sup>126</sup> As quoted in Franke, *To Save the Wild Bison*, 37.

<sup>127</sup> Iowa Park and Forestry Association, *Major John F. Lacey Memorial Volume and Report of Iowa Park and Forestry Association for 1913* (Cedar Rapids, IA: Iowa Park and Forestry Association, 1915), 136-38.

wildlife and one he hoped would become a model for the entire world by showing that the United States was at the forefront of wildlife preservation.<sup>128</sup>

Despite the good intentions of everyone involved, the buffalo population at Yellowstone continued to decrease. In this case, allowing the animals to naturally increase was no longer a viable option and government intervention was necessary. The driving force behind this shift in opinion were the results of two federal studies undertaken at the urging of the Senate by the Secretary of Agriculture, James Wilson, and Secretary of the Interior, Ethan A. Hitchcock. Working independently, the two men surveyed the buffalo population of the United States. According to Wilson's results, there were fewer than twenty-five buffalo left in Yellowstone, while another remnant herd of eight to ten animals were believed to be in the Lost Park, Colorado, region too. These animals were the only wild, free-ranging buffalo left in existence. Of the private herds, Secretary Wilson stated that the only significant herds were those of Goodnight, Allard [and Pablo], and Austin Corbin. Wilson ended his report by saying, "Should the Government acquire possession of a considerable number of full-blooded animals, it is possible that the absolute extermination of the species might be delayed." In addition, Wilson recommended that several herds be established across the nation to prevent diseases from wiping out the species.<sup>129</sup> Hitchcock's report, which was more thorough than Wilson's, found that there were then in existence 1,143 buffalo total in the United

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<sup>128</sup> Iowa Park and Forestry Association, *Major John F. Lacey*, 147.

<sup>129</sup> Committee on Forest Reservations and the Protection of Game, *Letter from the Secretary of Agriculture, Transmitting to the Senate Facts with Reference to the Preservation of the American Bison in the United States and Canada*, by James Wilson, Secretary of Agriculture, 57th Cong., 1st sess., February 20, 1902, S. Doc. 208, 1-2 (For website address, see bibliography).

States, of which only seventy-two were wild.<sup>130</sup> In a state by state analysis, Hitchcock discovered that while a few bigger private herds existed, the vast majority of animals were in herds of eight to eleven animals, signifying that many people wanted the animals as a curiosity, not as a marketable commodity. Hitchcock, like Wilson, recommended government intervention, stating, “In my judgment, steps should be taken by the United States for the preservation from extinction of the buffalo or American bison.” Hitchcock went on to recommend the expenditure of \$30,000 to purchase buffalo for Yellowstone.<sup>131</sup>

In response to the secretaries’ pleas, and at the urging of Roosevelt, who had now become president, Congress acted to prevent the total extinction of the buffalo in Yellowstone. On July 1, 1902, Congress appropriated \$15,000 for the purchase of buffalo for Yellowstone. In addition, Buffalo Jones, who had been trying to become a superintendent at Yellowstone since 1896 in order to manage the buffalo there, was appointed game warden and given the responsibility of increasing and caring for this herd.<sup>132</sup> Jones soon acquired 18 cows from Howard Eaton, who had purchased part of the Allard herd after Allard’s death. These animals cost \$500 each. In addition, Jones acquired three herd bulls from Charles Goodnight. By spreading out his purchases, Jones was able to create a viable herd that was composed of animals from around the nation, eliminating inbreeding in the process. However, being a consummate showman, Jones

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<sup>130</sup> Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, *The American Bison in the United States and Canada*, 1. In the case of the wild animals, Wilson’s figure is more accepted, although both agreed that less than twenty-five animals were in Yellowstone. Moreover, Hitchcock found that there were approximately 669 buffalo in Canada too.

<sup>131</sup> Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, *The American Bison in the United States and Canada*, 2. For a complete state by state list, see pages 3-43 of Hitchcock’s report.

<sup>132</sup> Franke, *To Save the Wild Bison*, 54; Jones, *Buffalo Jones’ Forty Years*, 264. Franke notes that from 1900 to 1903, only \$5,000 was appropriated by Congress for game protection in Yellowstone.

felt compelled to put his new herd of buffalo at the busiest entrance of the park, at Mammoth Springs. By doing so, Jones popularized the buffalo as a crucial part of the park while helping to familiarize people with the animals.<sup>133</sup> In a striking display of irony, the Northern Pacific Railroad, which had the closest rail transportation to Yellowstone, soon advertised the park and the buffalo in it with advertisements that read, “BISON once roamed the country now traversed by the Northern Pacific. The remnant of these Noble Beasts is now found in Yellowstone Park reached directly only by this line.”<sup>134</sup> Soon enough, this herd was thriving, justifying all those who had believed that federal intervention was necessary to preserve the buffalo. Nevertheless, their demands soon grew beyond expanding the Yellowstone herd, as the protectionists pushed for more national refuges and parks for Americans and for the buffalo.<sup>135</sup>

### **The American Bison Society and the Establishment of Public Herds**

Starting in 1904, more attention was paid nationally to the buffalo population in the United States. At this time, three people became more vocal in their requests to set aside land for buffalo preserves under the management of the federal government. Behind their requests was a deeply held sense of the importance of the buffalo in American history. In addition, while the Yellowstone herd had finally begun to increase after Buffalo Jones took over its management, the fact remained that the only publicly

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<sup>133</sup> Franke, *To Save the Wild Bison*, 55.

<sup>134</sup> As quoted in Brinkley, *Wilderness Warrior*, 588.

<sup>135</sup> In 1905, Jones resigned as game warden of Yellowstone. His resignation was partly due to disagreements with the park superintendent, Major John Pitcher, who did not enjoy the self-promoting Jones. Also, Jones soon engaged in various schemes, including a balloon contest at the World's Fair. Despite his faults, Jones was successful in establishing the herd at Yellowstone. For more information about Jones's disagreements and resignation, see Franke, *To Save the Wild Bison*, 58.



held herd was at Yellowstone, while the rest of the nation's buffalo were owned by private interests. The uncertainty of the private herds, which could be bought and sold on the whims of the owner, made the creation of public herds more important, since if any sort of disease or catastrophe should happen to the Yellowstone buffalo, the nation would be left with no animals in its protective care. Two of the individuals behind the movement were already well known buffalo preservationists, President Theodore Roosevelt and William T. Hornaday, who was breeding buffalo at the New York Zoological Society. The third individual was a relative newcomer to the scene of buffalo preservation. Ernest Harold Baynes, a nature journalist, became infatuated with the aura surrounding buffalo after visiting Austin Corbin's herd at the Blue Mountain Forest and Game Preserve in New Hampshire in 1904. In September of that year, Baynes began publishing articles in the *Boston Transcript* emphasizing the cultural significance of buffalo and calling for the creation of preserves across the country. Soon enough, Baynes's articles, which were syndicated in newspapers across the country, caught the attention of Roosevelt, who promised to bring up the issue of the lack of buffalo preserves to Congress in his annual message for 1904.<sup>136</sup>

True to his word, Roosevelt did bring up the matter in Congress on December 6, 1904. In his address, Roosevelt requested the right of the president to set aside game refuges, stating:

I desire again to urge upon Congress the importance of authorizing the President to set aside certain portions of the reserves or other public lands as game refuges for the preservation of the bison, the wapiti [elk], and other large beasts once so abundant in our woods and mountains and on our great plains, and now tending

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<sup>136</sup> American Bison Society, *Annual Report of the American Bison Society, 1905-1907* (New York: American Bison Society, 1908), 2. Altogether, Baynes had forty articles about buffalo syndicated nationally.

toward extinction... We owe it to future generations to keep alive the noble and beautiful creatures by which their presence add such distinctive character to the American wilderness.<sup>137</sup>

Roosevelt, who had this speech reprinted as part of an article by Baynes in *Forest and Stream*, used the bully pulpit of the presidency to make sure the nation knew just where he stood on this issue, in case they did not know already. In the case of Roosevelt, his use of the word “noble” suggests an imagery in which buffalo were in complete control of the environment and in a manner of speaking, instantly drew attention to themselves as the supreme “ruler” of their domain, something that no human could ever achieve. Later in the same article, Baynes appealed directly to the people of the nation, taking the step of making buffalo preservation a national goal, not just the goal of the Boone and Crockett Club and the New York Zoological Society. Baynes used emotional language that appealed directly to people’s sense of American history while confirming the dangers of only having private ownership of buffalo. He wrote:

If you are an American, no doubt you take some pride in the fact that one of the grandest animals of all time is a native of this country... As you look upon his mighty frame, you read intelligently long chapters from the early history of our country... But they should no longer be left in the hands of private individuals, who are liable at any time to sell the last survivors for their hides and heads.<sup>138</sup>

Furthermore, Baynes argued that merely being in support of buffalo preservation was not enough. Rather, everyone was capable of action. Naturalists should recruit other naturalists, writers should write something, teachers should mention the subject in their classes, and lecturers should tack on five minutes at the end of lectures to promote

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<sup>137</sup> Ernest Harold Baynes, “Save the American Bison,” *Forest and Stream*, December 31, 1904, 549. The power to create forest reserves had been granted to the president in the Forest Reserve Act of 1891. This act, which was created at the urging of the Boone and Crockett Club, was seen as a first step in the creation of habitat for wildlife. Roosevelt applied this act liberally, creating millions of acres of forest reserves during his presidency. For more information about the creation of this act, see Brinkley, *Wilderness Warrior*, 237-39.

<sup>138</sup> Baynes, “Save the American Bison,” 549.

buffalo preserves. By doing so, Baynes helped to make buffalo preservation not just a cause of the wealthy but of all society.<sup>139</sup>

In the coming months, Baynes did not abate from his relentless call for the creation of preserves for buffalo. On January 18, 1905, he began a speaking tour of sportsman's groups, including the Boone and Crockett Club, natural history societies, science societies, and anyone else that would have him. In his lecture, entitled "The American Buffalo-A Plea for Its Preservation," Baynes emphasized how much Americans owed the buffalo in the history of the country and how this was the moment to repay that debt by creating preserves for the animals.<sup>140</sup> In an article in *Forest and Stream* in February, Baynes again called on the nation, urging men and women to join the movement to save the buffalo, stating that the case of the animals was no longer one of "should" preserve, but one that was a "must." To accomplish this goal, Baynes began his call for the creation of a national organization that would dedicate itself to the task of the creation of buffalo preserves. Baynes ended this particular article by quoting an old plainsman, who listed all of the ways that buffalo helped Americans, and stated, "Well there is no other native animal toward which Americans should have so kindly a feeling as for buffalo; it has done more toward the civilization of the country than all the rest out together...Save the buffalo? Well, I should say they ought to, rather."<sup>141</sup>

On June 2, 1905, Baynes's and Roosevelt's goals came together when Roosevelt declared that the Wichita Mountain Forest Reserve in Oklahoma would now become the

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<sup>139</sup> Baynes, "Save the American Bison," 549.

<sup>140</sup> American Bison Society *Annual Report, 1905-1907*, 2.

<sup>141</sup> Ernest Harold Baynes, "The Fight to Save the Buffalo," *Forest and Stream*, February 18, 1905, 133.

Wichita Mountain Forest and Game Preserve, the first national game refuge.<sup>142</sup> The purpose behind this act was to create a buffalo preserve outside of Yellowstone National Park. Congress, which finally decided to support this declaration, appropriated \$14,000 to fence in fourteen square miles to hold the buffalo. However, they would not be responsible for providing the animals.<sup>143</sup> This responsibility fell to Hornaday, whose buffalo breeding program at the New York Zoological Society had been successful. In October 1907, when the fence was finally completed, Hornaday shipped fifteen of his best buffalo to the preserve in Oklahoma. Signifying the importance of this event, the buffalo were shipped in Arms Palace rail cars, which were then only used to transport the most valuable of race horses. Furthermore, once the animals arrived in Oklahoma, thousands of people were present to see the reintroduction of the buffalo, including Native American groups, who were allowed to witness the return of the buffalo to the Great Plains.<sup>144</sup>

Later in the year, another significant milestone in the history of the buffalo took place when the American Bison Society formed. As noted earlier, Baynes had pleaded his case before the American people early in 1905 for reasons already explained. In the meantime, more support had been gathering for just such an organization. The

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<sup>142</sup> American Bison Society, *Annual Report, 1905-1907*, 55. The Wichita Mountain Forest Reserve was created in 1901 by Roosevelt.

<sup>143</sup> Hornaday, *Thirty Years War*, 168. The hoped for outcome in this first game refuge was that it would be able to be populated by all kinds of game animals, including elk and antelope. Buffalo were the test subjects to see if this project was feasible.

<sup>144</sup> Brinkley, *Wilderness Warrior*, 626-27, 630. The Comanche chief, Quanah Parker, who was one of the Indian leaders at the Battle of Adobe Walls and during the Red River War of 1874-75, was present for the reintroduction of the buffalo. Parker felt a deep sense of appreciation to Roosevelt for returning the buffalo to the plains. At the same time that the buffalo were being reintroduced in Oklahoma, Roosevelt had the White House renovated. For the mantle in the state dining room, Roosevelt and his wife, Edith, had decided to use lions as figureheads. After the buffalo release, Roosevelt, in a fit of patriotism, changed his mind about the lions and decided to adorn the mantle with the more "American" buffalo instead.

introduction of the buffalo at Wichita Mountain certainly did nothing to discourage the formation of a national buffalo association.<sup>145</sup> In December, Hornaday and Baynes decided to formally begin the Society after sending out 200 invitations to people they thought would be interested in joining the organization. On December 8, 1905, the American Bison Society was formally begun with fourteen individuals in attendance on the New York Zoological Society grounds. Tellingly, in the first meeting of the organization that was to stress equality in its membership, one woman was also present.<sup>146</sup> The express purpose of this organization was “the permanent preservation and increase of the American bison.”<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, the dues for this organization were kept low to encourage membership from all levels of society and welcomed men and women. Full memberships were available for \$5, while an associate membership cost only \$1.<sup>148</sup> In an article in *Forest and Stream* that appeared later in the month, Baynes explained this rationale, stating, “let every man, woman, and child who has a love or sympathy for American animals, join hands in saving for the country the grandest of them all.”<sup>149</sup> Reflecting their roles in the preservation of the species to that point, Hornaday was elected president, Baynes secretary, and Roosevelt honorary president.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> “Buffalo for the Wichita Reserve,” *Forest and Stream*, July 14, 1906, 52.

<sup>146</sup> American Bison Society, *Annual Report, 1905-1907*, 3. At the first meeting, only people from New York and Massachusetts attended. In the coming years, people from across the nation would join the organization, although the membership was always proportionally greater in these two states. The woman was Mrs. Francis Parker, the wife of Francis Parker of Arlington Heights, Massachusetts.

<sup>147</sup> American Bison Society, *Annual Report, 1905-1907*, 11.

<sup>148</sup> American Bison Society, *Annual Report, 1905-1907*, 79. In addition, life memberships were available for \$100 and people were designated patrons after donating \$1,000.

<sup>149</sup> Ernest Harold Baynes, “The American Bison Society,” *Forest and Stream*, December 23, 1905, 512.

While the Society recognized that the Wichita herd was a start, in a special meeting held in February 1906 with a select few members of the club, including Hornaday, Baynes, and Buffalo Jones, agreed that there needed to be widely spread out herds of buffalo across the nation, to avoid having a disease wipe the animals out. To advertise their work and to raise money for the potential purchase of buffalo, Society spokespersons began to appear at various meetings and conventions of sportsmen and naturalist groups, selling buffalo paraphernalia and recruiting new members in the process.<sup>151</sup> In an editorial in *Forest and Stream* in June, George Bird Grinnell commended the Society and its purpose. In the editorial, Grinnell stated that the emphasis on sentiment, rather than economic reasons to preserve the buffalo, was what made the Society all the more important. The editorial went on to state, “It is because it [the buffalo] is our largest mammal, because it is typical of America, and because its history is interwoven with the development of the great West and with the history of the Indians and the pioneers.”<sup>152</sup> The Society, by appealing to this sentiment, was able to garner widespread public support. Because of a favorable public relations campaign, by the first annual meeting of the Society held in January 1907, the group had gained 9 life members, 125 full members, and 102 associate members from across the nation. Furthermore, the Society laid out its plans to attempt to create buffalo preserves on the Flathead and Crow reservations in Montana, on public lands in Illinois, in the Adirondacks of New York, in the Southern Appalachians, and in forest reserves in New

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<sup>150</sup> American Bison Society, *Annual Report, 1905-1907*, 3. Roosevelt was not at the meeting, although he was proud of the honor bestowed upon him.

<sup>151</sup> American Bison Society, *Annual Report, 1905-1907*, 10. At the Sportsmen’s Show in Boston in April 1907, the club attracted one hundred new members.

<sup>152</sup> “The Bison Society,” *Forest and Stream*, July 14, 1906, 53.

Hampshire, so that buffalo would become more accessible to the public. Of these preserves, the Flathead Reservation one was deemed the most feasible, since the Michael Pablo herd of buffalo currently grazed there and was known to be available for the right price. Therefore, the Society would place most of its efforts into creating a preserve in this location.<sup>153</sup>

In late 1906, Pablo made clear to the United States government that he wished to sell his entire herd of buffalo. The reason for this was because the federal government had opened up the Flathead Reservation to settlers after allotting portions to all of the Indians living there, putting into action the Dawes Act of 1887, which allowed the government to sell off excess reservation lands after allotting certain amounts to every Indian on a given reservation. Pablo, who had over 300 animals, knew that his position was untenable, since he had nowhere to graze the animals if the Flathead lands were divided. As such, he offered his animals to the largest buyer that he could liquidate his herd to: the United States federal government. The American Bison Society, Roosevelt, and Secretary of the Interior Ethan Hitchcock all saw this as a golden opportunity to achieve their goals in one stroke. Unfortunately, their ideas were crushed by Congress, which did not wish to appropriate the money or time to creating an additional buffalo preserve.<sup>154</sup> Pablo, who saw no positive response coming soon from the American government, opened a dialogue with the Canadian government. The Canadians, unlike the Americans, were highly receptive to the idea of a buffalo purchase, agreeing to take

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<sup>153</sup> American Bison Society, *Annual Report, 1905-1907*, 6-7. The preserves in New York and Illinois never were created.

<sup>154</sup> Dary, *The Buffalo Book*, 237; Brinkley, *Wilderness Warrior*, 668. In the 1906 election, the Republicans lost twenty-eight seats in Congress, eroding Roosevelt's position of power in regards to conservation. One of the individuals not re-elected was John F. Lacey, which was a major blow to Roosevelt.

the entire herd of animals for \$200 per head in early 1907. While Pablo thought that he had just over 300 animals, in reality he had over 700, which he transferred to the Canadian government over the next six years.<sup>155</sup> By selling so many animals Pablo had finally achieved what so many before him had tried to do with the buffalo; he had struck it rich.

The effect of the sale of the largest buffalo herd in the world out of the United States to Canada was a grievous blow to the psyche of the American Bison Society and all of the other organizations and individuals involved with buffalo preservation. *Forest and Stream* published several editorials about this topic over the coming months. In May, the periodical commended the Canadian government for its foresight in buffalo preservation. For Congress, *Forest and Stream* had nothing but harsh words, stating, “Congress is responsible for the dilatory tactics by reason of which the lost opportunity to secure this great herd of bison has passed by,” adding that no blame could be bestowed on Roosevelt or Hitchcock, who had both tried to get Congress to act.<sup>156</sup> *Forest and Stream* held out the hope though that the success of Pablo in raising his herd could be duplicated if Congress could be convinced to act. In February 1908, *Forest and Stream* still had not cooled off about the loss of the Pablo herd, especially since Congress had yet to act or move towards creating a buffalo preserve. An even harsher condemnation appeared in the publication, using terminology which was meant to shame Congress into acting. The editorial stated:

It is not very flattering to the patriotic pride of Americans interested in the protection of the greatest animal of this continent, and one which had its chief centers of abundance in the United States, to feel that the Government of our

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<sup>155</sup> Dary, *The Buffalo Book*, 225.

<sup>156</sup> “The Pablo Bison Herd,” *Forest and Stream*, May 11, 1907, np.



northern neighbor is so much further sighted than our own, that it has been allowed to equip itself with something like half the existing living buffalo, and has been able to come into our country and purchase from one of our people a herd of buffalo which the United States might have retained for the benefit of its own citizens.<sup>157</sup>

At the end of the article, *Forest and Stream* tried to hold out a ray of hope, stating that if a partnership could be struck between the government and the American Bison Society, there was still a chance to do some good for the buffalo in America.<sup>158</sup>

The American Bison Society, which was shocked by the sale of the Pablo herd, had not given up the hope that the government would come around to their way of thinking. Even before the sale of the herd, the Society had commissioned Professor Morton J. Elrod of the University of Montana to survey the Flathead Reservation for a spot to put a buffalo herd. Elrod was to consider several factors in his assessment, including ease of rail access, so that the animals could be shipped in along with fencing supplies, and so the public could see the animals. In addition, rangeland, shelter, and water access all were to be considered too.<sup>159</sup> By the early 1908, Elrod had completed his survey and recommended the purchase of land near Ravalli, Montana, for the buffalo range. Knowing that the land on the Flathead Reservation was to be put up for sale, the Society acted quickly to achieve their goal, lobbying Congress to purchase the land and provide the fencing, while the Society would furnish the buffalo. This pattern, which the Society knew was successful in getting the Wichita herd established in Oklahoma, was

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<sup>157</sup> "The Pablo Buffalo," *Forest and Stream*, February 15, 1908, 247.

<sup>158</sup> "The Pablo Buffalo," *Forest and Stream*, February 15, 1908, 247.

<sup>159</sup> American Bison Society, *Annual Report, 1905-1907*, 15, 17.

the best shot that the Society had to get the range and urged immediate action to be taken.<sup>160</sup>

Soon enough, Congress did act on the Society's request. While exact figures were not prepared by the Society, Senator Joseph M. Dixon of Montana took up the cause, proposing a bill to set aside land for a buffalo range in the area that the Society had recommended. On April 6, the bill was reported to the Senate at large, with the caveat that it be acted on quickly, since the land in question was being sold off rapidly. Dixon recommended that \$30,000 be allocated to purchase twenty square miles of land and another \$10,000 be set aside to pay for fencing. Dixon, who called the loss of the Pablo herd "unfortunate," remained optimistic, like Hornaday, that something still could be done by Congress to ensure the creation of more public herds.<sup>161</sup> On April 15, the bill to create a "national bison range" was passed by the Senate and moved on to the House. Again, due to the necessity of quick action, the bill to create the range was attached to the annual Agriculture Appropriation Bill with the consent of Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson and a three member panel, whom Roosevelt pressured to allow the bill to continue on as a rider. With this obstacle overcome, the bill passed the House and Roosevelt signed it into law on May 23, 1908.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> American Bison Society, *Second Annual Report, 1908-09*, 2. The American Bison Society wanted the preserve to be publicly funded so that the buffalo preserve would not become a privately owned game preserve with no access to the public at large. Public fundraising was only considered for the herd of buffalo, since quick action was needed immediately to secure the sought after land before it went up for private sale.

<sup>161</sup> American Bison Society, *Second Annual Report, 1908-09*, 4-5; Committee on Indian Affairs, *To Establish a Permanent National Bison Range*, 60th Cong., 1st sess., April 6, 1908, S. Rep. 467, 3 (For website address, see bibliography).

<sup>162</sup> American Bison Society, *Second Annual Report, 1908-09*, 5-8. The three member panel consisted of representatives Charles F. Scott of Kansas, Gilbert N. Haugen of Iowa, and John Lamb of Virginia.

With the passage of the bison range bill, the American Bison Society felt pressure to make good on its promises to populate the range. The Society decided that \$10,000 should be set aside for this purpose. Putting out a national call to achieve their goal, the Society was hopeful of receiving numerous small donations of \$1 and \$5, so that the purchase of the buffalo could be considered a national endeavor. This did not mean, however, that businesses or large entities could not donate funds for the purchase of the buffalo. In fact, Hornaday sent letters to large businesses, including the New Orleans Board of Trade, which was designed to weigh on the consciences of the individuals who ran those corporations, who Hornaday blamed for the extermination of the species.<sup>163</sup> While Hornaday was hopeful of the pledge drive's success, there is some indication that he had some qualms part way through the campaign, as when he sent a request into *Forest and Stream* which chastised the readers of that publication for not sending any money for the purchase of the buffalo by October, even though requests had been published in the periodical since July.<sup>164</sup> In the end, the fund raising campaign was successful, with \$10,560.50 raised to purchase the buffalo. One fact that disappointed the Society about this total was that western states contributed less proportionally than those in the eastern United States, with Texas and Kansas donating nothing to the campaign. The Society, though, was able to purchase thirty-seven buffalo from the Conrad herd out

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<sup>163</sup> American Bison Society, *Second Annual Report, 1908-09*, 9; Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, 166. Unfortunately, the American Bison Society Report does not divulge which corporations Hornaday wrote letters to. By writing to the New Orleans Board of Trade Hornaday would have been able to reach a wide audience of affluent individuals and businesses.

<sup>164</sup> William T. Hornaday, "A Letter to Our Readers," *Forest and Stream*, October 24, 1908, 652; "Montana's Buffalo Range," *Forest and Stream*, July 18, 1908, np.

of Kalispell, Montana, while fourteen more buffalo were to be given as gifts to the Society from various ranchers, including Philip and Goodnight.<sup>165</sup>

In the coming years, the Society continued to facilitate the creation of federally owned herds and find private herd owners markets for their buffalo. In 1912, Wind Cave National Park, which Roosevelt created in 1902, decided that it needed a secondary attraction besides the caves from which it got its name. Like the bills before it, Congress paid for the fencing, while the Society found the buffalo. In this case, the Society relied on the New York Zoological Society, which furnished ten buffalo to Wind Cave.<sup>166</sup> This act was followed shortly afterwards by the creation of the Niobrara Bird Reservation by executive order, which consisted of approximately 12,000 acres near Valentine, Nebraska. Soon enough the American Bison Society had secured six buffalo to live on this range too, which then became the Niobrara Game Refuge.<sup>167</sup> While these two herds were the last successful federal herds to be created by the Society, the group continued to support the creation of numerous state and county herds. In addition, due to the network that had been formed in the previous years between the Society and the ranchers, the Society was able to refer prospective buyers to specific herds or individuals that they knew were looking to sell buffalo.

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<sup>165</sup> American Bison Society, *Second Annual Report, 1908-09*, 11-12, 15, 19-42; Hornaday, *Our Vanishing Wildlife*, 342. The *Second Annual Report* breaks down the state by state and individual donations. New Yorkers donated the most money, giving \$5,213, followed by Massachusetts with \$2,320, Minnesota with \$1,054, and Illinois with \$177.50. In the process of purchasing the land, the Society found that the land was not selling for as much as they thought it would be. Because of this, the Society was able to convince Congress to purchase another eight square miles and provide another \$3,000 to fence the added land.

<sup>166</sup> American Bison Society, *Fifth Annual Report of the American Bison Society, 1912* (New York: American Bison Society, 1912), 31-32.

<sup>167</sup> American Bison Society, *Fifth Annual Report*, 19.

After the creation of the Niobrara Game Refuge, the hardest work in saving the buffalo from the verge of extinction had been completed. What had begun in 1871 with Robert McCormick had come to fruition under the leadership of the American Bison Society. During this time period, views of the buffalo as a commodity changed to that of an animal symbolic of America's past that was worth saving. In fact, by 1913, Hornaday boasted that the buffalo no longer was on the verge of extinction. He stated, "The efforts of man to atone for the great bison slaughter by preserving the species from extinction have been crowned with success. Two governments and two thousand individuals have shared this task, -solely for sentimental reasons."<sup>168</sup> Hornaday deserved to boast about the buffalo's comeback. In a truly national effort, people of different backgrounds had come together to preserve the buffalo, albeit for radically different reasons. While the movement began in 1871 as a countermovement to the widely held belief that the animals needed to be killed to subjugate the Great Plains Indian tribes, in a few short years this movement evolved into a cultural prerogative on the part of wealthy easterners to save the animals as a part of America's "wilder" past. Yet, without the economic incentive to save the animals that developed among the western ranchers, the efforts of the eastern preservationists would have been for naught, since these individuals provided the basic element that the preservationists needed to fulfill their dreams. With the advent of the American Bison Society, the relationship between the preservationists and the ranchers began working as each side had hoped it would, with the preservationists getting their buffalo and the ranchers getting their money. In the end, the creation of the buffalo as a cultural symbol became cemented in the American psyche during this period, thanks to the foresight of economically minded individuals.

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<sup>168</sup> Hornaday, *Our Vanishing Wildlife*, 180.

### **CHAPTER 3: A DELICATE BALANCING ACT**

While the previous two chapters have dealt with the destruction and preservation of the buffalo for cultural and economic reasons, this chapter deals with the consequences of those actions. The cultural preservationists, more than they ever could have imagined, created a cultural icon for Americans that only would grow in popularity through to the present day. However, even the preservationists who pushed so hard to create the image of the buffalo as a cultural icon for Americans never could have imagined the role of the buffalo as a contemporary symbol of environmental restoration on the Great Plains. In this respect, the buffalo has taken on a new cultural symbolism and importance, as people fight over the “proper” use of western lands. In addition, buffalo are at the center of controversy in Yellowstone National Park, as economic and cultural agendas clash over the management of the herd. Although the Yellowstone herd draws much of the national attention about buffalo, other herds throughout the country present interesting test cases for the management of both privately and publicly held buffalo herds. Furthermore, the emergence of the buffalo industry in the last thirty years marks the coming to fruition of the dreams of nineteenth century buffalo ranchers, such as Charles Goodnight and Charles “Buffalo” Jones. This chapter examines these different agendas and ideas about buffalo from 1914 to the present with special emphasis placed on the last twenty-five years.

## **End of the American Bison Society**

For much of the period after 1914, the emphasis of the American Bison Society revolved around drawing potential buyers and sellers together, as well as promoting the addition of buffalo to new and existing state parks. The largest potential problem for the Society came during the waning years of World War I. The threat in this case came from western ranchers who wanted to open up federal parks for grazing to help alleviate the shortage of meat in the country and abroad. The president of the Society, Edmund Seymour, and Secretary Martin S. Garretson, knew that the potential to open up federal lands meant the end of the small public buffalo herds, which the American Bison Society labored to create. In this case, buffalo, as well as elk would be killed and fed to the nation. Afterwards, the ranchers could move in and use the national parks and game refuges for their own interests, leading to the end of the parks and wildlife refuges. Fortunately, this threat never grew beyond the nascent stage, due to the quick action of Garretson and Seymour to gain congressional assurances that this would not happen.<sup>1</sup>

With the derailment of the single largest threat to the buffalo during this time period completed, the Society turned its attention to other causes. Even though the Society kept up its work connecting buyers and sellers in the establishment of public herds, by 1922 the American Bison Society focused on other wildlife issues, most notably the preservation of another former plains denizen, the pronghorn antelope. The reason for this shift in focus can be attributed to the Society's belief that the buffalo was safe from extinction and no longer threatened by outside interests.<sup>2</sup> While the Society

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<sup>1</sup> Larry Barsness, *Heads, Hides, and Horns: The Compleat Buffalo Book* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1985), 172.

remained viable through the 1930s, by this point it lost most of its influence. After the publication of Martin S. Garretson's two works about buffalo in 1934 and 1938, much of the public interest in the Society gradually disappeared.<sup>3</sup> By this point many of the founding members of the Society and the buffalo preservation movement, including William T. Hornaday, Theodore Roosevelt, and George Bird Grinnell had died, leaving Garretson and Seymour as the sole founders left. In 1953, the Society officially ceased to exist, after having accomplished its original purpose of the preservation of the buffalo.<sup>4</sup>

### **Public Herd Management and Brucellosis**

As the American Bison Society faded away, it left the unenviable problem of how to manage a cultural icon. In 1923, the Society reported that there were nine federally owned government herds in the United States that contained 1,472 animals, the largest concentrations of which were in Wind Cave National Park, the National Bison Range, the Wichita National Forest and Game Preserve, and Yellowstone National Park.<sup>5</sup> Unlike later years, the federally owned herds operated under an active management system, in

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<sup>2</sup> American Bison Society, *Report of the American Bison Society, 1922-23* (New York: American Bison Society, 1923), 10-11, 14-15. The Society became the first entity to undertake a survey of the pronghorn in the United States, finding 11,749 animals nationwide in 1922. In 1921, the Society received recognition for their work in preserving the buffalo when they received the Grand Medal of Honor from the Société Nationale d'Acclimatation de France, the leading zoological society in France at the time.

<sup>3</sup> Martin S. Garretson, *The American Bison: The Story of Its Extermination as a Wild Species and Its Restoration under Federal Protection* (New York: New York Zoological Society, 1938); Martin S. Garretson, *A Short History of the American Bison: Distribution, Habits, Trails, Extermination, Etc., for Use in Schools* (1934; repr., Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971).

<sup>4</sup> David A. Dary, *The Buffalo Book: The Full Saga of the American Animal* (Chicago: Sage, 1974), 237.

<sup>5</sup> American Bison Society, *Report of the American Bison Society, 1922-23*, 26-27. The National Bison Range cared for 459 animals, Wind Cave National Park 92, Wichita National Forest and Game Preserve 146, and Yellowstone National Park 702 animals. Worldwide, the Society found a total of 12,521 animals, 7,579 of which lived in Canada, while 3,753 resided in the United States.



which park and game refuge managers treated the buffalo like domestic stock, feeding the herds and caring for them. Because of this active management, by 1923, Yellowstone sought outlets for its buffalo, so that it could maintain its herd size at a static level. To alleviate the population crunch, Congress granted the Secretary of the Interior the power to authorize the park superintendent at Yellowstone to dispose of excess buffalo as he saw fit. While some animals moved to other parks, others were simply shipped out and slaughtered. In 1925, this program picked up steam, as park managers culled animals, including elk, over concerns about how much grass the land could support. This practice, in which active management became standard practice, continued for the next forty years until 1967.<sup>6</sup> Yet, in a sign of the growing reverence for the animals, in 1920 a privately owned herd of 235 buffalo on Antelope Island, Utah, received public attention after the owner of the animals, John E. Dooley, offered to have a hunt to lower the size of the herd, to reduce the stress on the island's vegetation. While Dooley based his suggestion on a sense of land stewardship and the opportunity to turn a profit from the fees associated with hunting his animals, the negative public reaction convinced him to not hold the hunt on the scale he wanted, instead only killing a few select animals.<sup>7</sup>

In 1934, Yellowstone began a moderate shift away from active herd management. At this point, herd managers quit fencing in the Yellowstone herd and allowed them to run where they wanted to in the park. This meant that the buffalo and their descendants

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<sup>6</sup> George Bird Grinnell, and Charles Sheldon, eds., *Hunting and Conservation: The Book of the Boone and Crockett Club* (1925; repr., New York: Arno, 1970), 397; National Park Service, *Yellowstone: When Bison Leave the Park*, Department of the Interior (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, January 2007), 1, [www.nps.gov/yell/naturescience/upload/bisonsb.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/yell/naturescience/upload/bisonsb.pdf). (accessed May 30, 2009). Managers did not have a formula for removing animals at this time. They simply picked out animals to dispose of, regardless of age.

<sup>7</sup> Grinnell, *Hunting and Conservation*, 403. Antelope Island, located in the Great Salt Lake, is now a state park. The island still houses a large herd of several hundred buffalo.

transplanted in 1902 from private owners to Yellowstone could now mingle with the survivors of the wild herd in Yellowstone, which still existed in the Pelican Valley in Yellowstone. This course of action required less direct interference in the lives of the animals; however, periodic culling of animals still occurred. Rather than slaughter the animals or continue to send them to other parks, Yellowstone began a program of distributing animals to Indian tribes that wanted them. Wind Cave National Park in South Dakota also began its own dispersal of animals to Indian tribes around this time too. The first recipients of the excess animals, the Crow in Montana, and the Ogallala Sioux at the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, became the first tribes to take part in a program to distribute excess buffalo from public lands. This practice continues into the present day.<sup>8</sup>

The 1930s through the 1970s marked a relatively quiet period in the history of the American buffalo. However, issues that only grew in importance began to form during this period, so that by the 1980s through the present, the economic and cultural issues that currently govern how Americans deal with the animals entrenched themselves, creating a host of problems for the present day. Also, during this period, the different parks, refuges, and private owners began to follow increasingly different paths. The birth of the buffalo meat industry and the parks in Alaska, Wind Cave National Park, and Custer State Park in South Dakota all provide representative examples of how Americans balance cultural and economic prerogatives in regards to the animals. As will be seen though, Yellowstone National Park and the issues surrounding the park and its herd of

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Ann Franke, *To Save the Wild Bison: Life on the Edge in Yellowstone* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 77, 79; National Park Service, *Bison Management Plan and Environmental Documentation: Wind Cave National Park*, Department of the Interior (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 2006), 9, [www.nps.gov/...son Management Plan - December 2006.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/...son Management Plan - December 2006.pdf) (accessed December 1, 2009).

buffalo have come to dominate all of the work that has been completed on other state and federal herds, in addition to overshadowing the buffalo industry.

The issue that all of the buffalo herds in the nation dealt with and the Yellowstone region continues to deal with is the disease brucellosis. Brucellosis, spread by the bacteria *brucella abortus*, is a disease that causes cattle to abort their calves. It is spread by animals grazing around areas where the afterbirth or the aborted fetus from an infected animal has contaminated the ground. The bacteria are only viable for a few weeks once they have contaminated the soil. Throughout most of the history of cattle, the disease has been known to exist, with efforts commencing in the twentieth century to eradicate it in the continental United States. Beginning in 1934, joint state and federal eradication efforts began in earnest under the direction of the United States Department of Agriculture. At this point, approximately 11.5% of all cattle tested positive for exposure to the bacteria. In 1954, the Department of Agriculture implemented a more stringent program designed to eradicate the disease in American cattle herds, the National Brucellosis Eradication Program. Program officials immediately found 124,000 infected cattle herds, which they believed represented only one-half to one-third of all the infected cattle in the country.<sup>9</sup> However, the disease is exceedingly difficult to control and eliminate, despite the best efforts of the federal government. As of November 2000, two states, Florida and Texas, still had brucellosis positive herds. Only in February 2008 were all fifty states in the United States officially declared brucellosis free by the Animal

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<sup>9</sup> National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, and U.S. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, *Record of Decision for Final Environmental Impact Statement and Bison Management Plan for the State of Montana and Yellowstone National Park*, U.S. Department of the Interior and U.S. Department of Agriculture, December 20, 2000, 3.

and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), the wing of the Department of Agriculture responsible for managing the disease. In the end, the program cost billions of dollars.<sup>10</sup>

Buffalo, which are susceptible to brucellosis too, first had the disease confirmed in the Yellowstone National Park herd. Unlike cattle, which have lived with the disease for thousands of years, buffalo and elk, the two principal hosts in native wildlife, suffered exposure from domestic stock. While there is no way to know exactly when the disease made the leap from cattle to elk and buffalo, by 1917 the first confirmed case was found in the Yellowstone buffalo herd. In this case, the dairy cows found in the park to provide milk to tourists and guests are suspected of transferring the disease to the buffalo in the park.<sup>11</sup> After this, increased testing for brucellosis as part of federal efforts to prevent its spread in the nation's cattle herds resulted in the discovery of the disease in multiple buffalo herds across the nation.

While the various parks took different approaches to how they managed their herds, in the case of brucellosis management in buffalo, all of the federal and state parks, except Yellowstone, followed the same general pattern. Wind Cave National Park provides a representative example. The park, one of the first federal parks to examine buffalo, started testing in 1945 for brucellosis and found that out of sixty animals inspected, thirty-three were reactors, meaning they had been exposed to the bacteria but

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<sup>10</sup> National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, and U.S. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, *Record of Decision for Final Environmental Impact*, 4; U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Yellowstone Bison: Interagency Plan and Agencies' Management Need Improvement to Better Address Bison-Cattle Brucellosis Controversy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, March 2008), 3. Brucellosis causes undulant fever in people, a recurring problem that can affect individuals for months or in some cases, years. There is no known cure for people. Historically, the disease spread from people drinking infected milk or being exposed to the bacteria. Today, cases in people in the United States are exceedingly rare. Veterinarians and hunters are two of the most likely categories of people to come into contact with the bacteria, and even they do not have much risk of contracting undulant fever.

<sup>11</sup> Dary, *The Buffalo Book*, 295.

did not necessarily have an active infection, while another eighteen were suspected of harboring the disease. In response, park officials commenced a vaccination program that lasted for the next two years. Unlike the sustained efforts for cattle, Wind Cave's herd ceased being vaccinated from 1948 to 1965, when testing resumed. In 1964, the park killed 220 animals suspected of harboring the disease out of 400 total. This action caused a negative public reaction in the form of letter writing and newspaper editorials, since no vaccination to help prevent the spread of the disease had taken place since 1948. The outcry convinced park officials to resume its vaccination program.<sup>12</sup> Despite the policy being in place, the park underwent quarantine in November 1982 as a result of the continued prevalence of brucellosis. Under this process, animals from the park could not be sold or shipped elsewhere. While the quarantine lasted until December 1986, vaccinations continued until 2001, when the state of South Dakota received its brucellosis free status, at which point the animals ceased being vaccinated.<sup>13</sup>

### **Brucellosis Management in Yellowstone National Park**

Yellowstone National Park took a different approach to its brucellosis problem, one that has had a continued impact. From 1947 to 1949, Yellowstone, like other federal and state parks, implemented a testing and vaccination program for its animals. Unlike

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<sup>12</sup> National Park Service, *Bison Management Plan and Environmental Documentation: Wind Cave*, 9. Part of the problem with vaccinating buffalo is that there is no fully effective vaccine designed only for them. Instead, modified cattle vaccines are used, leading to fears that vaccinating animals might actually give buffalo brucellosis. Even in cattle, the vaccine's success rate is only 65% to 85%. The issue of vaccinating buffalo is particularly acute in Yellowstone, where bitter debate exists over whether or not to vaccinate animals. Throughout this chapter, the idea of "negative publicity" and "public outcries" keeps emerging. Negative publicity and outcries came in a variety of formats, including letters to herd managers, paper editorials, pictures of individuals shooting buffalo, and new to the latter half of the twentieth century, television and internet coverage of public buffalo herd management.

<sup>13</sup> National Park Service, *Bison Management Plan and Environmental Documentation: Wind Cave*, 10.

other parks though, Yellowstone stopped vaccinating after this point for multiple reasons. The first such reason was the difficulty associated with capturing animals. Unlike other publicly owned buffalo at this time, Yellowstone did not have perimeter fences. Also, Yellowstone covered a much larger area than any other state or federal herd at that time. Furthermore, the buffalo herd in Yellowstone was (and continues to be) the largest publicly owned, wild, free ranging herd of buffalo found anywhere in the United States. Unlike other herds, the Yellowstone buffalo could be reintroduced easily to brucellosis, due to the large numbers of infected elk in the region. Fears of having a so called “clean” herd, with no resistance to the disease, prompted the managers of the park, the National Park Service, to state that the special circumstances surrounding the Yellowstone buffalo, the only free-ranging, wild herd left in the United States, overruled concerns about eliminating the disease. This stance, in direct contrast to livestock industry concerns, created a controversy between the two sides that only increased in the coming decades.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the disagreement between the National Park Service and livestock officials over brucellosis in the Yellowstone herd, the issue failed to draw much public attention through the 1980s. Starting in 1967, the Yellowstone buffalo underwent a management strategy change that emphasized natural regulation. This plan emphasized that the size of the buffalo herd and other animals should be regulated by natural forces, instead of active human involvement that included culling animals. By allowing natural selection to take place, the park managers hoped to create a healthier ecosystem governed by natural factors, instead of human ones.<sup>15</sup> The one exception to natural management

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<sup>14</sup> Franke, *To Save the Wild Bison*, 105-106. The Department of Agriculture thought that it would have brucellosis eliminated from the nation’s livestock herds by 1975. Elk, like buffalo, do not seem to be as affected by brucellosis as cattle are.

occurred when buffalo tried to leave Yellowstone National Park and go into Montana. The problem that arose revolved around the fact that cattle grazed on the lands around Yellowstone on national forest and privately owned lands. Montana officials, fearful over cross contamination between the brucellosis infected buffalo and non-infected cattle, required the Yellowstone park rangers to shoot buffalo that tried to leave the park. Starting in 1978, the National Park Service shifted this authority over to the state of Montana. The reason for this change was attributed to negative publicity and complaints against the National Park Service killing animals it was supposed to protect. At this point, Montana implemented a lottery system in which hunters got the chance to shoot a buffalo if it left the park. With over 3,000 applicants for a handful of permits that cost \$200 for residents of the state and \$1,000 for non-residents, Montana now had to deal with the problem of negative publicity from the hunts. Until the winter of 1988-89 this system worked well for all parties, with few animals leaving the park. In 1988-89 though, the mass exodus of buffalo from the park created a public relations nightmare that marked the beginning of a protracted management struggle that is directly attributed to cultural and economic factors.<sup>16</sup>

### **The 1988-1989 Yellowstone Buffalo Hunt and Its Aftermath**

By the winter of 1988-89, the Yellowstone National Park herd had grown to over 2,700 animals. While the park could support this many animals in a normal year, the prior summer the region suffered a drought, leading to fires which destroyed a great deal of the available forage available to the animals in the park. As less and less food became

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<sup>15</sup> National Park Service, *Yellowstone: When Bison Leave the Park*, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Franke, *To Save the Wild Bison*, 110, 113.

available, more and more animals migrated out of the park in search of available grass in the late winter.<sup>17</sup> By this point, APHIS declared the state of Montana brucellosis free, meaning that any brucellosis re-infection found in two separate cattle herds meant the state's free status would be revoked, adding impetus to kill any buffalo that left the park.

Hence, the winter of 1988-89 provided the first test case for what would happen if a mass exodus of buffalo from Yellowstone happened. Furthermore, unlike elk and antelope, buffalo had no protected forage areas outside of the park that provided a safe haven for the animals.<sup>18</sup> The state of Montana, which was still in charge of managing animals that roamed outside of the park, mobilized a veritable firing line of hunters along the park boundary. In a public relations disaster, the buffalo, which had grown accustomed to humans from living in the park, did not flee the hunters. Opponents of the hunt, such as the Fund for Animals organization, took pictures of the hunters, leading to television coverage of the event. The television coverage of the event sparked a firestorm of protest against the hunts, in which individuals wrote letters and newspapers featured articles condemning the hunts, leading the state of Montana to cancel the hunts and refuse to act alone when dealing with the buffalo leaving the park. Most responses followed the reasoning that the buffalo in the park were culturally significant and some even went so far as to say that buffalo should not be killed under any circumstances. These ideas harkened back to the days of Grinnell, Hornaday, and Roosevelt and their efforts to promote buffalo as a key part of the nation's history and natural world. While the

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<sup>17</sup> Sharon Begley, "A Firing Squad for Buffalo," *Newsweek*, March 6, 1989, 51; U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, *Brucellosis and Yellowstone Bison*, 2002, 1.

<sup>18</sup> "Yellowstone to Help Montana Shoot Bison," *National Parks* 65, no. 1/2 (January/February 1991): 11, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=9102040776&site=ehost-live> (accessed December 9, 2009).



wildlife advocates may not have known who exactly crafted these ideas, they did understand that the buffalo were a key part of Yellowstone that was under siege. Despite the cessation of the hunts, 467 animals were killed through March 6, 1989. Cleveland Amory of the Fund for Animals told *Newsweek*, “I don’t think anything has incited pro-animal people more than this ruthless, stupid shooting of the buffalo.”<sup>19</sup> Altogether, hunters and state officials killed 569 animals, representing slightly more than one-half of Yellowstone’s northern buffalo herd.<sup>20</sup> As a result of the public relations backlash, the National Park Service, the Department of Agriculture’s APHIS, the U.S. Forest Service, the Montana Department of Livestock, and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MFWP) all agreed to come together to form a joint plan for managing the buffalo that left Yellowstone National Park and entered the state of Montana.<sup>21</sup>

Despite promising action, competing ideologies and management practices among the agencies resulted in a lack of progress towards a solution as of 1995. Fortunately, the buffalo in Yellowstone did not leave the park during this period in any great numbers. The state of Montana, tired of being thrust into an untenable position between the National Park Service, which refused to manage its buffalo herd based on cultural principles of “hands off” management, and APHIS, which threatened to revoke the state’s brucellosis free status, resulting in grave economic losses for the state’s multi-million

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<sup>19</sup> Begley, “A Firing Squad for Buffalo,” 51.

<sup>20</sup> “Yellowstone to Help Montana Shoot Bison,” *National Parks*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, and U.S. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, *Record of Decision for Final Environmental Impact Statement*, 6.

dollar cattle industry, brought suit against both parties in the search for a solution.<sup>22</sup> Further alarming the state was a 1990 study completed by researchers at Texas A&M University that examined the transmission possibilities between buffalo and cattle. The infamous study, conducted in two acre paddocks and not under real world, natural conditions, demonstrated the possibility of transmission of brucellosis from buffalo to cattle. The study has since been used as the justification for controlling buffalo, even though no cases have ever been reported or even suspected in the wild in which buffalo have given cattle brucellosis.<sup>23</sup> As a result, an interim plan went into effect that allowed buffalo to migrate into certain narrow corridors in Montana outside of the park. Outside of these areas, the animals were to be captured and tested for brucellosis on both the west side of the park near West Yellowstone, Montana, and in the north near Gardiner, Montana. While Montana officials took care of the animals in the west, the National Park Service handled the animals near Gardiner. Under the terms of the agreement, animals were to be hazed back into the park if possible and if not, captured and tested for brucellosis. Those testing seropositive, meaning they had been exposed to the bacteria, but did not necessarily have the brucellosis were to be slaughtered along with positive cases. Those found negative could be released in the spring. After holding facilities filled up, officials would then shoot all animals without testing. The plan went into effect

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<sup>22</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Wildlife Management: Negotiations on a Long-Term Plan for Managing Yellowstone Bison Still Ongoing* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, November 1999), 8.

<sup>23</sup> Doug Peacock, "The Yellowstone Massacre," *Audubon*, May/June 1997, 46; Donald Davis, Joe Templeton, Thomas A. Ficht, John D. Williams, John D. Kopec, and L. Garry Adams, "Brucella Abortus in Captive Bison: I. Serology, Bacteriology, Parthenogenesis, and Transmission to Cattle," *Journal of Wildlife Diseases* 25, no. 3 (1990): 360-371. The Texas A&M study was funded by APHIS. All parties to the interim plan acknowledged that there have been no buffalo to cattle transmissions ever recorded in the wild.

in 1996, just prior to the largest exodus of buffalo from the park in Yellowstone's history up to that point.<sup>24</sup>

### **The 1996-1997 Winter Hunt**

The winter of 1996-97 provided the first test case of the viability of the interim plan. That winter, heavy snow fell in Yellowstone, quickly followed by a brief thawing period and heavy rains, and then a prolonged cold snap. As a result, the buffalo in the park could not break through the hard frozen layer of ice to reach the grass. With a total herd size of approximately 3,000 animals in a starvation state, the animals started leaving the park by the hundreds.<sup>25</sup> The heavy snow had an unintended effect on the human managers too. As record numbers of animals left the park, officials from the state of Montana's Department of Livestock and the National Park Service could not get the animals hazed back into the park or to the designated capture facilities outside of Yellowstone where the animals could be tested for brucellosis. Therefore, the managers began shooting buffalo that left the park in search of food per the interim agreement.<sup>26</sup>

At issue was the possible threat of brucellosis transmission to the state's cattle herds and the loss of millions of dollars from the state's cattle industry. According to Montana Department of Livestock estimates, industry wide testing and vaccination to secure a brucellosis free status again if an outbreak occurred ranged from five to sixteen million dollars per year in 1997. As far as actual income loss from other states not buying Montana cattle, the Department of Livestock estimated this total at five to twenty-

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<sup>24</sup> Peacock, "The Yellowstone Massacre," 44.

<sup>25</sup> Franke, *To Save the Wild Bison*, 143, 146.

<sup>26</sup> Peacock, "The Yellowstone Massacre," 44.

three million dollars over an extended period of time.<sup>27</sup> Clarence Siroky, the head veterinarian for the state of Montana during this time, likened the threat of transmission to being struck by lightning, but quickly added that the threat still existed.<sup>28</sup> In regards to the slaughter of buffalo, Siroky stated, “It’s horrible; I detest it, but it has to be done, even though the risk may be small.”<sup>29</sup> Also, starting in 1995, Montana transferred the management of buffalo that left the park to the Department of Livestock from the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, meaning that an agency with primarily economic interests had control over wild animals.<sup>30</sup>

While the Department of Livestock insisted that the threat of brucellosis transmission existed, the National Park Service remained incredulous about the slaughter of the buffalo leaving the park. As more and more buffalo were killed as the winter wore on, the Park Service increasingly encouraged negative publicity of the hunts to take place, in order to force the cessation of the killings. The Superintendent of Yellowstone, Mike Finley, compared the strategy of shooting buffalo that might have brucellosis to a strategy of shooting every person suspected of carrying HIV. Finley agreed with the term “national tragedy” that wildlife groups, such as the Fund for Animals, the National Wildlife Federation, and other opponents used to describe the slaughter of buffalo.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Wildlife Management*, 22.

<sup>28</sup> Todd Wilkinson, “Yellowstone Bison War,” *National Parks* 71, No. 11/12 (November/December 1997): np, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=9712071112&site=ehost-live> (accessed December 7, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Peacock, “The Yellowstone Massacre,” 43.

<sup>30</sup> Ruth Rudner, *A Chorus of Buffalo* (Short Hills, NJ: Buford, 2000), 9. Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks attempted to regain control of the buffalo in 1999 and have the animals reclassified as wildlife instead of livestock in the state of Montana, but had their request rebuffed. As of the writing of this thesis, they still do not have the ultimate jurisdiction over animals that leave Yellowstone.

Marvin Jensen, the Assistant Superintendent of Yellowstone, noted the prevalence of brucellosis in elk, which went unnoticed by the Department of Livestock and other officials. Jensen, who addressed the issue in the July/August 1997 edition of *National Parks*, attributed the spread of brucellosis to cattle and buffalo squarely at elk. Jensen wrote that the Jackson Hole, Wyoming, herd of buffalo never had tested positive for brucellosis prior to the 1980s. The elk in this area did have the disease, and soon enough, the buffalo soon tested positive too. Jensen, like other opponents of killing buffalo, tackled the prickly issue of ignoring elk, which numbered in the tens of thousands and could go anywhere they wanted in search of forage without restrictions, while buffalo, with only a few thousand animals, could not.<sup>32</sup>

The unspoken purpose behind allowing elk to roam free while placing strict guidelines on buffalo movements goes back to the issue of revenue. Elk, unlike buffalo, are considered a game animal by the state of Montana, meaning that they can be hunted. Since there are tens of thousands of elk in the state, hunters come to Montana and spend millions of dollars in license fees and in the local economy when they outfit for their expeditions. In addition, because of the high density of elk in the Yellowstone region, the animals are fed hay outside of Yellowstone National Park, creating an additional incentive for ranchers to tolerate the animals, since they can sell hay to the state to feed the elk. Hence, even though elk have brucellosis, APHIS and the state of Montana tend to ignore or downplay the dangers associated with the transmission of brucellosis from

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<sup>31</sup> Wilkinson, "Yellowstone Bison War," np.

<sup>32</sup> Marvin Jensen, "Buffaloed," *National Parks* 71, no. 7 (July/August 1997): 43-45. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=9709171729&site=ehost-live> (accessed December 8, 2009).

elk to cattle, even though, as will be seen later, this danger has been proven to exist in the wild.<sup>33</sup>

Eventually, as the winter wore on, the suffering of the buffalo and the continued shooting of the animals as they left the park started greater protests that something should be done to protect the animals there. Citizen groups like the National Parks and Conservation Association pushed for the National Park Service to repeal their policy of non-interference with the lives of the animals in Yellowstone and begin feeding the animals hay. Mary Meagher, a Yellowstone biologist whose work focused on the buffalo in the park, opposed this step even though she predicted a major crash in the animals' population even in the best case scenario. In the worst case scenario, a system crash, in which the animals in the park could never recover without human interference, could be expected. Despite this gloomy forecast, Meagher still opposed interfering with the animals by feeding them, since doing so would have broken the National Park Service's overarching guidelines of non-interference in the lives of animals in Yellowstone National Park.<sup>34</sup>

Elsewhere, other authorities joined the National Park Service in questioning the possibility of brucellosis transmission from buffalo to cattle. At the University of Florida, Paul Niccoletti, a leading authority on brucellosis, described the possibility of cross contamination between buffalo and cattle as having "no firm foundation in science." Niccoletti noted that no study in real world natural conditions had ever proven

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<sup>33</sup> Wilkinson, "Yellowstone Bison War," np; Christopher Ketcham, "They Shoot Buffalo, Don't They: Hazing America's Last Wild Herd," *Harper's Magazine*, June 2008, 72.

<sup>34</sup> Todd Wilkinson, "Last Stand for Bison Herd at Yellowstone?" *Christian Science Monitor* 89, no. 60 (February 21, 1997): 3, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=9702270077&site=ehost-live> (accessed December 9, 2009).

the possibility of buffalo to cattle brucellosis contamination. As such, he described the alarmist, doomsday attitudes of the Montana Department of Livestock and APHIS as “scare tactics.”<sup>35</sup> Another report seemed to confirm this assessment. C&C Meats, the company contracted by the state of Montana to slaughter animals shipped out of Yellowstone that tested seropositive for brucellosis, found that only two of the two hundred animals killed by them actually tested positive for brucellosis. Despite this report, the state veterinarian, Clarence Siroky, disputed the findings and insisted that the shooting of buffalo continue.<sup>36</sup> To frame the issue in another light, John Varley, the chief scientist at Yellowstone, described the brucellosis issue as “a struggle between the park and agribusiness and we’re losing badly.”<sup>37</sup> To wildlife advocates and to the National Park Service, the buffalo only left the park based on natural needs and should be favored, since the lands they were attempting to go to in search of food were mostly public lands, such as national forests. In addition, no cattle would be allowed onto the range until June anyway, ensuring the animals would not co-mingle. To the ranchers though, the buffalo represented a sinister threat that needed to be dealt with. In addition, the animals represented a land use struggle, in which land could be taken away from individuals, to promote “public” causes.<sup>38</sup>

Soon enough, the disgust and public pressure brought against the National Park Service convinced it that shooting buffalo that left the park could not continue. Comments brought by the National Parks and Conservation Association described the

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<sup>35</sup> Peacock, “The Yellowstone Massacre,” 46.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>38</sup> Wilkinson, “Yellowstone Bison War,” np.



This photo of a billboard in Montana illustrates the strong feelings associated with the slaughter of buffalo during the 1996-1997 winter kill. (Photo by Steve Kelley, 1997, courtesy of the National Park Service)



killings as going against the purpose of the National Park Service. In a released statement the organization stated, “This may be the worst intentional assault on a native species in national park history.”<sup>39</sup> Comments like these soon became common place as Yellowstone managers became inundated by angry and concerned citizens’ letters, who wished to see the buffalo live. Going against the wishes of Montana, Superintendent Finley ordered that 147 animals in his rangers’ area of control would not be killed, despite the interim agreement requiring this action.<sup>40</sup> While most wildlife groups, such as the National Wildlife Federation and Fund for Animals, supported this action, harsh criticism awaited Finley from some Montana residents. A “New Age” church which borders Yellowstone in the north, called the Church Universal and Triumphant, insisted that buffalo be shot that wandered onto church property grounds. United States Senator Conrad Burns of Montana called Finley a “jughead” and resisted all calls for the snowmobile trails in Yellowstone to be closed.<sup>41</sup> According to wildlife advocates, these trails, which are really roads within the park that have been groomed over to allow snowmobiles, permitted the buffalo to travel outside the park easier. However, snowmobilers provided a great deal of money to the local economy, meaning that the closure of the trails was not a popular option.<sup>42</sup>

Eventually, the total cessation of the shooting of buffalo by Montana officials and National Park Service rangers happened as the animals quit coming out of the park in the

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<sup>39</sup> “Yellowstone Buffalo Slaughtered in Record Numbers,” *National Parks* 71, no. 3/4 (March/April 1997): 12, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=9704110448&site=ehost-live> (accessed December 7, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> Wilkinson, “Last Stand,” 3.

<sup>41</sup> Peacock, “The Yellowstone Massacre,” 49, 107.

<sup>42</sup> Peacock, “The Yellowstone Massacre,” 108; Wilkinson, “Yellowstone Bison War,” np.

spring months. Yet, even this issue offered some contentiousness between the National Park Service and the state of Montana. The issue here arose over APHIS allowing Montana to cease shooting buffalo and not lose its brucellosis free status. The National Park Service officials, which never wanted to shoot the animals in the first place, felt relief at this pronouncement and action, since they no longer had to shoot animals. Ignoring this order, Department of Livestock officials continued to shoot buffalo that wandered from the park. The refusal of Montana to acknowledge APHIS's pronouncement immediately left lingering hard feelings between the National Park Service and the state.<sup>43</sup> In the end, the mandated shooting of buffalo that left the park in winter 1996-97 resulted in 1,084 animals being killed by either the state of Montana or the National Park Service.<sup>44</sup> This total did not include the animals which did not leave the park and died of starvation within the park's interior. According to federal government estimates, approximately 1,300 animals died within the park, meaning that over two thirds of the pre-winter 1996-97 Yellowstone National Park herd died, an ecological disaster that no one wanted to be attached to in any way.<sup>45</sup>

### **Aftermath of the 1996-1997 Hunts and the Development of the Interagency Plan**

In light of the disastrous winter of 1996-97, officials from all the involved parties in the Department of Agriculture, Department of the Interior, and the state of Montana agreed to increase talks on a permanent plan to govern the management of the buffalo

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<sup>43</sup> Franke, *To Save the Wild Bison*, 140.

<sup>44</sup> Ketcham, "They Shoot Buffalo," 67.

<sup>45</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. *Brucellosis and Yellowstone Bison*, 2.

herd at Yellowstone and what to do if animals left the park. This plan, in the works since the aftermath of the 1988-89 hunts, gained momentum amid demands that something should finally be done to settle the vexing Yellowstone issue once and for all.

Nevertheless, as the previous years had proven, this was easier said than done. Over the next two years, officials from the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, the Department of Agriculture's APHIS, the Montana Department of Livestock, and the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Department worked together amid competing ideologies to permanently settle the issue.<sup>46</sup>

Indicative of the disagreements and competing ideologies at play in the creation of an interagency plan, several proposals underwent consideration by the agencies, in addition to numerous citizen plans. Seven government proposals made it through the initial stages. These plans ranged from a strict enforcement of park boundaries and a continuation of the 1996 interim policy on a permanent basis to minimal management of the buffalo, resulting in a change in cattle operations and minimal, non-lethal interference to ensure separation if needed. Other plans considered by the government involved aggressive brucellosis control through testing and vaccinating animals within Yellowstone over a three-year period and slaughtering all the animals that tested positive for brucellosis, or following the interim plan and instituting a quarantine and limited public hunting program to control animals that left the park.<sup>47</sup>

While the government plans ranged from minimal management to active management, citizen plans also fell under this broad spectrum. Unlike the government

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<sup>46</sup> National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, and U.S. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. *Record of Decision for Final Environmental Impact Statement*, 6.

<sup>47</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Wildlife Management*, 9.

proposals, most citizen group strategies took a decidedly pro-buffalo stance. Although the plans differed, wildlife and Native American groups, like the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Fund for Animals, the National Wildlife Federation, the InterTribal Bison Cooperative, the Wilderness Society, the Fort Belknap Indian Community Government of Montana, and various other environmental and Indian groups all agreed that in cases where discrepancies and conflict arose, buffalo, not cattle should be favored. The reason for this thought process can be attributed to the fact that most of the lands outside of Yellowstone's border are public lands, such as national forests, and as such, should have public use in mind, meaning that wild animals should have the priority over private concerns, such as cattle ranching, in which ranchers merely lease the land. Furthermore, many of these plans played off the symbolism of buffalo as a dominant feature of the Yellowstone landscape representative of America's past. Killing buffalo or hampering their movements was anathema to the idea of the animals being a "proud" species that seemingly was in "control" of its environment.<sup>48</sup> The one citizen group proposal that most went against the grain came from the U.S. Animal Health Association, an organization of animal health officials, livestock producers, and researchers. This group suggested that the buffalo herd in Yellowstone should actually be decreased, and that no buffalo should ever be allowed outside of the park. Moreover, a strict brucellosis eradication program should go into effect, in which testing, vaccination, quarantine, and removal of infected animals would take place.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Wildlife Management*, 11. The InterTribal Bison Cooperative is a national group established in 1992 that helps coordinate Native American purchases of buffalo for member tribes. The Fort Belknap Community consists of the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine tribes.

<sup>49</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Wildlife Management*, 11.

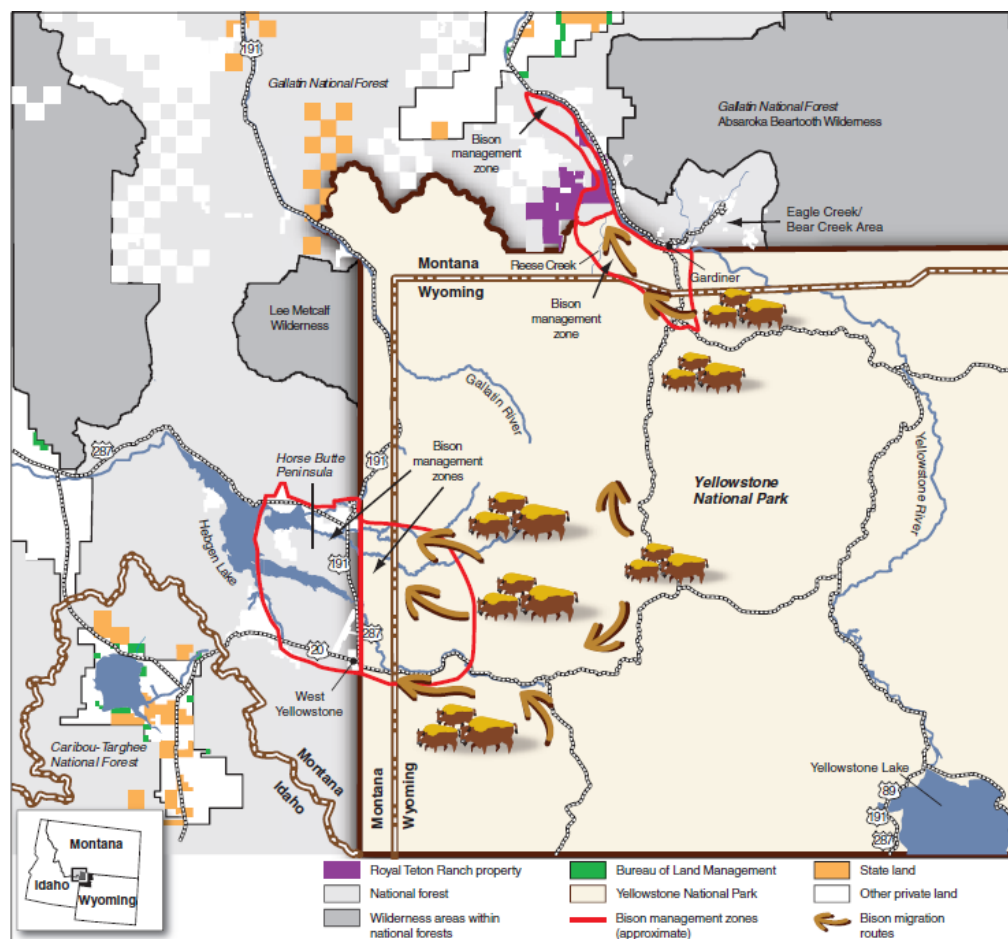
The plan that all the government parties found most palatable though involved managing the buffalo as they approached the park boundary in the north and west. This strategy, which utilized hazing to push animals back from the edge of the park, mimicked the interim plan in that animals that tested positive or seropositive would be shipped to slaughter facilities. In addition, the policy made use of a sliding scale, based on population numbers, in which more action took place with greater population numbers. While not originally set, the population figures eventually settled on were 1,700 to 2,500 animals on the low end, in which less management took place, while if the population exceeded 3,000 animals, no testing needed to be done at all, meaning the animals could be shipped to slaughter without being tested for brucellosis first.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the plan called for all cattle in the region to be vaccinated against brucellosis and a strict policy of separation, in which buffalo would be allowed outside of the park in certain areas, but had to be gone off of the range forty-five days prior to cattle being reintroduced into the region. As an added precaution, only two hundred animals total, one hundred in the west near West Yellowstone, Montana, and one hundred in the north near Gardiner, Montana, could be outside of the park at any one time.<sup>51</sup> This strategy, after a public review session, would direct the management of the Yellowstone herd for the next fifteen years.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Wildlife Management*, 9, 26-29.

<sup>51</sup> National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, and U.S. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, *Record of Decision for Final Environmental Impact Statement*, 19-20. The National Park Service agreed to manage the animals leaving the park in the north, while the state of Montana agreed to watch over the western exits.

<sup>52</sup> Rudner, *A Chorus of Buffalo*, 6.



The General Accounting Office developed this map by drawing on data compiled by the National Park Service and National Forest Service over the life of the interagency management plan from 2000 to 2008. The map indicates the working area of the plan. The map shows where buffalo leave the park and the location of public and private landholdings. (Map courtesy of the Government Accountability Office)

Indicative of the strong feelings and difficulties associated with managing the herd at Yellowstone, the proposed plan that the agencies developed did not meet most people's expectations. When the public comment period arrived, people presented their opinions about the interagency plans. The planning committee soon discovered just how strong the public felt about the Yellowstone herd. From mid-June to November 1998, the interagency planning group received 67,520 pages of documents about the interagency plan, representing 212,249 individual comments. Of this total, seventy percent opposed the plan.<sup>53</sup> Of these comments, most supported the idea that cattle, not buffalo, should be managed more proactively. The National Wildlife Federation and InterTribal Bison Cooperative alone delivered ten boxes of comments, representing 40,000 individuals.<sup>54</sup> In a recurring trend, the National Wildlife Federation joined other organizations soon after this, including the Wyoming Wildlife Federation, in openly questioning the fiscal soundness of implementing the interagency plan, since the grazing leases for the national forest lands in question that buffalo ranged onto only yielded \$1,200 per year, while the interagency plan cost \$824,000 per year to haze and shoot buffalo that wandered outside the park.<sup>55</sup>

Despite dissent over the cost and purpose of the interagency plan, it did go into effect in late 2000. Overwhelmingly, wildlife advocates saw the continued capture,

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<sup>53</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Wildlife Management*, 25.

<sup>54</sup> "Bison Plan Sparks Huge Response from NWF Members," *International Wildlife* 29, no. 2 (March/April 1999): 7, <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.wiu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=1579776&site=ehost-live> (May 1, 2009).

<sup>55</sup> Phyllis McIntosh, "NWF, Affiliate Go to Court to Protect Yellowstone Bison," *International Wildlife* 31, no. 5 (September/October 2001): 6, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=5104495&site=ehost-live> (accessed December 9, 2009); National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, and U.S. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, *Record of Decision for Final Environmental Impact Statement*, 43.

hazing, and slaughter of buffalo as infringing on the natural “aura” of the buffalo, which seemed to stress independence and the “wildness” inherent in America prior to European contact. Furthermore, by sanctioning the killing of buffalo in the interagency plan, the planners were no better than those who had ravaged the species in the nineteenth century. On the other hand, cattle ranchers saw their way of life in danger as buffalo left the park. Not only did the interagency plan allow for the continued existence of brucellosis in the herds, but additionally permitted buffalo outside of the park, a step that the ranchers felt was one step towards eventually eliminating livestock grazing from public lands forever in favor of wildlife. The issues brought up by the public over which side should have the right of way, cattle or buffalo, continues to be a problem that harbors deep dissatisfaction among wildlife and livestock interests even today, with each side arguing that its opinion has been ignored.<sup>56</sup>

Over the last decade, several new strategies have developed to deal with the problems that still exist around Yellowstone. Quarantine protocols developed by the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Department (MFWP) in 2004 and subjected to public inquiry show that the Yellowstone herd continues to draw an inordinate amount of attention. The department undertook the long-term study to determine whether or not quarantining the buffalo that left the park could become a viable option for sending buffalo to other places throughout the country, and to achieve “broader objectives related to bison conservation in North America.”<sup>57</sup> Only by ensuring the buffalo were

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<sup>56</sup> McIntosh, “NWF, Affiliate Go to Court to Protect Yellowstone Bison,” 44. As of the writing of this thesis, no expansion of buffalo grazing outside of Yellowstone beyond that permitted in the interagency plan has been permitted.

<sup>57</sup> Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, *Bison Quarantine Feasibility Study Q & A*, 2005, 6; Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, *Decision Notice: Bison Quarantine Feasibility Study*, 2005, 8-9. The long term plan called for separating 200 animals into two groups of 100 over a period of four years. In



completely free of brucellosis over a prolonged period of time could MFWP send the animals' offspring elsewhere to other parks and facilities. In 2004-05, Yellowstone contained approximately 4,900 buffalo, meaning that if animals left the park, they could be killed without testing them first if the animals could not be hazed back into the park first, per the terms of the interagency plan. MFWP, by capturing and quarantining the animals, hoped to save a few animals while testing the viability of quarantine procedures.<sup>58</sup> Unlike their fellow state agency, the Department of Livestock, MFWP admitted that elk, with 8-10,000 animals in the Northern Yellowstone area alone and infected with brucellosis, could re-infect the quarantined animals if they were reintroduced into the park. In addition, the buffalo in the park, which already had the disease, could also contaminate the quarantined animals if they went back into the park, hence the need to find a new home for the animals after the quarantine period ended in 2009.<sup>59</sup> As of December 2009, MFWP determined that two herds, one private and one public, made adequate places to send the animal's quarantined offspring. Under the terms of the quarantine plan, Ted Turner, the nation's largest private owner of buffalo, was to receive part of the quarantined animals' offspring, while Guernsey State Park in Wyoming was to receive the rest.<sup>60</sup>

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order to see if brucellosis still exists in the test animals, the periodic slaughter and testing of animals is necessary. This step, in which animals are killed for scientific reasons, received most of the negative public attention in regards to the quarantine plan.

<sup>58</sup> Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Services, *Bison Quarantine Feasibility Study: Phase II/III*, December 12, 2005, 33, <http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/show.aspx?id=987>. The total estimated cost of the quarantine plan is \$2.17 million.

<sup>59</sup> Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Services, *Bison Quarantine Feasibility Study: Phase II/III*, 35.

<sup>60</sup> Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, *Draft Environmental Assessment: Bison Translocation, Bison Quarantine Phase IV*, December 2009, 11. Under the terms of the agreement, the quarantined

Another reason behind the quarantine process is to create a viable pool of genetically pure buffalo to draw from for future use. Today, unknown to most people, there are few buffalo left in the world which are genetically clean of cattle genes. The process of cattle gene infiltration in buffalo, called introgression, is a direct result of the cattle and buffalo cross breeding that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when only a few buffalo remained. Based on a 1999 to 2001 study conducted by Texas A&M scientists, only two federal herds possess buffalo that are free of cattle genes and large enough to provide animals to other herds. These herds, located in Wind Cave National Park and Yellowstone, are critical to the future of the species long-term, since if anything catastrophic should happen to the other herd, the remaining herd would be the only one left free of cattle gene introgression.<sup>61</sup> Because Yellowstone's herd has brucellosis in it, the animals that leave it need to be cleared of having the disease first, hence the importance of the quarantine process. Because of the importance of the Yellowstone herd in maintaining a genetically pure buffalo population, petitioners attempted to get the animals in Yellowstone classified as endangered in 2004, although the request failed. Had this request been successful, the interagency plan would have

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buffalo sent to other sites needed to be kept separate for several more years, in order to be one hundred percent sure that no brucellosis transmission from generation to generation happened. The seventy-four animals to be shipped to Turner are going to his Green Ranch near Bozeman, Montana, while the other fourteen are going to Guernsey State Park, near Guernsey, Wyoming. This process is still being finalized at the writing of this thesis. Turner and his role in the buffalo industry will be examined later. Turner owns several thousand buffalo spread over several states, including Montana, New Mexico, and Nebraska.

<sup>61</sup> Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, *Decision Notice: Bison Quarantine Feasibility Study*, 13; National Park Service, *Bison Management Plan and Environmental Documentation: Wind Cave*, 10, 21-22. Sully's Hill National Park in North Dakota and the Grand Teton National Park herds also have no cattle gene introgression, but the population sample used in both locations is too small to draw definitive conclusions about whether or not introgression has occurred or not. Nationwide, out of a total of 300,000-500,000 buffalo alive today, fewer than 8,600 are clear of introgression.

been nullified, since no animals would have been allowed to be killed outside or inside of the park.<sup>62</sup>

Even today, the outlook on the interagency plan is clouded by the emotions that buffalo evoke in a broad cross section of American society. Soon after the 1996-97 disaster, an activist group known as the Buffalo Field Campaign formed. This group devoted itself to year round surveillance of the buffalo in the park and attempted to haze animals back into the park as they left, in order to avoid having them be captured or worse, killed. Furthermore, the group, derisively called “buffalo hippies” by some local individuals, sent videotape of buffalo being killed to local television stations in order to raise public ire at the deaths of the animals.<sup>63</sup> Even with added public attention drawn to Yellowstone, MFWP decided to try to re-implement public hunts of buffalo on a limited scale and under the terms of the interagency plan, meaning that only when animals reached the threshold of a population over 3,000 would hunting be allowed, and even then, on a limited scale.<sup>64</sup> Despite being forewarned about the possibility of negative publicity upon arriving at Yellowstone to hunt buffalo, in 2005, 6,000 applicants applied for the fifty licenses provided by Montana to hunt buffalo, illustrating that buffalo

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<sup>62</sup> U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, *Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; 90-Day Finding on a Petition to List the Yellowstone National Park Bison Herd as Endangered*, Department of the Interior, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, August 15, 2007), np, <http://www.epa.gov/fedrgstr/EPA-IMPACT/2007/August/Day-15/i16004.htm> (accessed May 30, 2009). For more information about the nineteenth century cattle-buffalo cross breeding programs, see Chapter 2.

<sup>63</sup> “Yellowstone Bison: To Shoot or Not to Shoot?” *Christian Science Monitor* 96, no. 92 (April 7, 2004): 3, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=12730083&site=ehost-live> (accessed December 9, 2009). From 1997 to 2004, the Buffalo Field Campaign drew 1,700 volunteers from around the world to protect the buffalo on the western boundary of Yellowstone.

<sup>64</sup> Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, *Decision Notice: Bison Hunting*, October 2004, 14-15.



This picture, taken near the northern exit, shows just how easily buffalo can leave Yellowstone. Note the lack of fencing that could prevent buffalo from leaving their protected area. This picture was taken near the northern exit to the park. (Photo by Jim Peaco, 1997, courtesy of the National Park Service)

hunting still had its adherents regardless of opponents who tied the long history of destroying buffalo directly to the newly founded hunts and the interagency plan.<sup>65</sup>

Recently, even governmental agencies and employees have openly questioned the interagency plan. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) conducted a study of the plan that found that it was making little progress in controlling brucellosis and had no real quantitative goals that could be measured to show progress. As evidence, the study group found that brucellosis still existed in the Greater Yellowstone Area, an area that covers 20 million acres encompassing portions of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming and includes Grand Teton National Park, Yellowstone National Park, and six national forests. The group also raised environmental concerns. It found that few management practices were in place for elk, which roamed freely, as opposed to buffalo, which had strict movement guidelines.<sup>66</sup> In addition, the GAO noted the lack of transparency in what each agency was doing as part of its role in the interagency plan. This lack of transparency has led to difficulties in finding information about what each agency has and continues to do, leading to frustration and more partisanship among wildlife and livestock groups.<sup>67</sup> Even Department of Agriculture officials have begun questioning the interagency policy and the charge to keep the two species separate. Paul Niccoletti, formerly of the University of Florida and now an epidemiologist with the department,

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<sup>65</sup> Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, *Decision Notice: Bison Hunting*, 10; “The Shaggiest Prize,” *The Economist* 377, no. 8454 (November 26, 2005): 40, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=18976887&site=ehost-live> (accessed December 8, 2009). Even some hunters expressed uneasiness with hunting the Yellowstone buffalo because of the negative publicity associated with doing anything that “hurt” this herd of animals. Furthermore, many hunters were concerned over the lack of “fair chase” principles, as the buffalo from the park are used to seeing people and have no fear of them.

<sup>66</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Yellowstone Bison*, 2, 6-7, 8, 33.

<sup>67</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Yellowstone Bison*, 32.

described the risk of transmission from buffalo to cattle as nearly risk free, citing the thousands of times before this that cattle and buffalo mingled together over the previous fifty years with no proof of transmission outside of one study in unnatural conditions.<sup>68</sup>

In response to these concerns, supporters of the interagency plan pointed out that there have been no cases of transmission of brucellosis from buffalo to cattle since the plan went into effect.<sup>69</sup> In regards to elk transmissions of brucellosis, responders from the Department of the Interior noted that elk have a lower prevalence of brucellosis proportionally than buffalo. Hence, even though elk have greater numbers, the actions that are used on buffalo are not needed for elk. Yet, this response rings hollow when one considers that confirmed cases of elk spreading brucellosis to cattle have been recorded in 2003 in Idaho and in 2007 in Montana.<sup>70</sup> Even after the GAO report went public, another confirmed case of elk to cattle brucellosis transmission occurred in May 2008 in Montana. Because of these transmissions, the state of Montana did in fact lose its brucellosis free status.<sup>71</sup> However, even in light of the fact that elk were transmitting brucellosis, efforts still focused on buffalo transmission, though some local residents in Montana questioned this policy. Hank Rate, a local rancher who lives next to Yellowstone, notes that brucellosis prevention in buffalo is now an industry in and of itself, regardless of the probability of actual transmission.<sup>72</sup> Instead, the issue today is who gets to control the land, private interests represented by the livestock industry, or

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<sup>68</sup> Ketcham, "They Shoot Buffalo," 72.

<sup>69</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Yellowstone Bison*, 2.

<sup>70</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Yellowstone Bison*, 13, 40.

<sup>71</sup> Ketcham, "They Shoot Buffalo, Don't They," 72.

<sup>72</sup> Ketcham, "They Shoot Buffalo, Don't They," 73.

public interests, represented by the wildlife groups. Each side is unwilling to back down and purports to know what is best for the land. Buffalo, the unwitting victim of these disputes, are caught in between the two groups as they struggle for control in an acrimonious dispute that is no closer to a solution than it was in 1988-89, when the issue first appeared in force.<sup>73</sup>

Surprisingly, the state of Wyoming does not take the alarmist outlook that Montana does in dealing with its own buffalo population. Most of the reason for this is because animals do not leave Yellowstone in mass like they do on the northern borders of the park. However, buffalo with brucellosis do live in Grand Teton National Park and Jackson Hole, Wyoming, meaning that transmission is an issue here too. Unlike Montana, Wyoming took added steps to prevent elk to cattle transmission of brucellosis after the state lost its brucellosis free status in 2004 after authorities discovered cases of the disease that they suspected came from elk.<sup>74</sup> Following a policy of separation of cattle and wildlife species, such as elk and buffalo, and requiring vaccination of cattle on public lands, Wyoming has been able to prevent another outbreak of brucellosis.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, in order to control the population, Wyoming instituted public hunts of the buffalo in Jackson Hole. Despite wanting to keep the population levels low, at around fifty animals as of 1987, the herd size has constantly increased amid public pressure. In

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<sup>73</sup> Rudner, 78-79.

<sup>74</sup> Wyoming Game and Fish Department, *Jackson Bison Herd (B101) Brucellosis Management Action Plan*, May 20, 2008, 5.

<sup>75</sup> Wyoming Game and Fish Department, *Jackson Bison Herd*, 11-12, 15. In one of the few tests of the prevalence of brucellosis in elk, Wyoming officials found that anywhere from seventeen to forty-two percent of the elk fed by the state in the Gros Ventre Valley were infected with brucellosis.

2007, despite wanting a target herd size of five hundred animals, Jackson Hole had over one thousand animals.<sup>76</sup>

### **Creating an Image: Non-Yellowstone Public Herd Management**

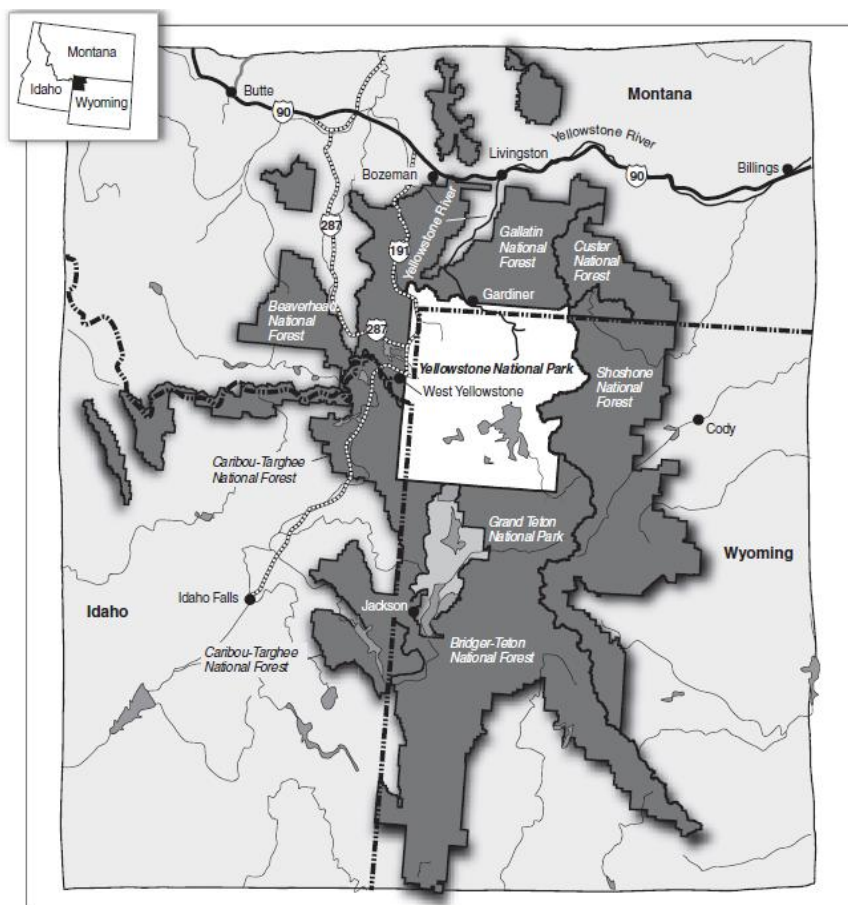
At other parks outside of the Yellowstone area, management issues with herds are far less polarizing. For instance, in Alaska hunts are held in natural conditions and draw citizens from out of state. Indicative of the enormous interest in hunting buffalo in this “exotic” location, in which the animals roam over giant tracts of land, over 10,000 people applied for the opportunity for one of 200 permits to hunt buffalo in 1997. In order to fund herd management and care and provide money for the state, half of the \$10 application fee goes towards the herds. In addition, a tag fee of \$450 per animal is charged for those that are successful in their quest. While not all hunters are successful, the allure of “getting back to nature” still holds and people continue to apply for the few permits that are available for Alaska’s state herds.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Wyoming Game and Fish Department, *Jackson Bison Herd*, 7, 24.

<sup>77</sup> Harold P. Danz, *Of Bison and Men: From the Annals of a Bison Yesterday to a Refreshing Outcome from Human Involvement with America’s Most Valiant of Beasts* (Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1997), 191; Alaska Department of Fish and Game, *Bison Management Report of Survey-Inventory Activities, 1 July 2003-30 June 2005*, ed. Patricia Harper, December 2006, 31. All of Alaska’s herds are descendants of twenty-three animals brought to Alaska from the National Bison Range in 1928. Altogether, there are approximately 700-900 animals total in Alaska’s three buffalo herds. For a more specific account of one of these hunts held in Alaska by someone who took part in one, see Steven Rinella, *American Buffalo: In Search of a Lost Icon* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2008).





This map reveals the Greater Yellowstone Area, including national forests and Grand Teton National Park. The Government Accountability Office created the image based on information drawn from the National Park Service from 2000 to 2008. (Map courtesy of the Government Accountability Office)

Elsewhere, other federal and state parks also draw attention to the buffalo in their parks as they actively promote them to tourists. Badlands National Park, Theodore Roosevelt National Park, Wind Cave National Park, Antelope Island State Park in Utah, and Custer State Park all emphasize the importance of their animals.<sup>78</sup> Custer State Park's role will be discussed in more detail shortly. Wind Cave, the oldest of these federal parks, describe buffalo as "a wildlife species that visitors can readily view within the park and provide an educational opportunity about nature that few other species can rival."<sup>79</sup> Yet, because so much emphasis is placed on buffalo in these federal parks, a new set of problems have emerged. In all of these parks, animals need to be periodically culled, since only a limited amount of space is available to them. Because attention is directed at the buffalo, organizing hunts to control the population is not considered the optimal solution to population control. Instead, animals are sold live to buyers. This provides income to the parks and lessens the strain on the carrying capacity of the park lands. In addition, many buyers are Indian groups, like the InterTribal Bison Cooperative, which then are able to keep the animals from being slaughtered while allowing individual tribes to buy buffalo and start their own herds while promoting their individual tribe's cultural agendas. Other buyers are zoos, state and federal parks, and privately owned conservation groups, like the American Prairie Foundation, which want buffalo for their own needs.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Danz, *Of Bison and Men*, 182.

<sup>79</sup> National Park Service, *Bison Management Plan and Environmental Documentation: Wind Cave*, 1.

<sup>80</sup> National Park Service, *Bison Management Plan and Environmental Documentation: Wind Cave*, 7, 10-11, 18. Of a total of 1,402 animals shipped out from 1987 through 2006, over 92% went to Indian tribes. The price range for Wind Cave animals was \$250 to \$450 per animal during this period, a

Directly to the north of Wind Cave National Park in South Dakota is Custer State Park, which holds the second largest publicly held herd of buffalo in the nation and, more than any other place, promotes buffalo as the central part of its park. Custer State Park, a 72,000 acre park, is second in the nation behind Yellowstone with a buffalo population of 1,100 to 1,500, and is actively managed and promoted as a buffalo attraction worldwide. Annually, 1.7 million people visit the park, which purchased 36 buffalo in 1914 from the executors of the Scotty Philip estate.<sup>81</sup> Officials make no secret that the management of the herd is intensive, describing the process as “a very hands on bison herd management plan.” Under this plan, in which animals are vaccinated and branded in yearly roundups, even radio collars are used to track animal movements. Even older animals are examined by veterinarians during the roundups held in late September.<sup>82</sup> Because such active management is used, the buffalo in the park are sought out by buyers and regarded as some of the best stock in the country by private customers. In a process that began in 1966 with 200 people, annual auctions of approximately 500 animals now draw 11,000 people worldwide and are streamed live on the Internet. Leading up to the auction, roundups of the park’s herd “re-create” the image of a herd of buffalo moving across the plains for visitors, in the process forming an image of what the Great Plains must have looked like prior to American settlement.<sup>83</sup> In addition to the sales and buffalo inspired activities sponsored by the park, annual hunts for ten ten-year old bulls take place. The

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price kept intentionally low to keep buyers interested and able to afford their animals. Approximately 800,000 people visit the park yearly.

<sup>81</sup> South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks, *Tatanka: The 2009 Guide to Custer State Park* (Pierre, SD: South Dakota Game Fish and Parks, 2009), 4, 12.

<sup>82</sup> South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks, *Tatanka*, 17.

fee for this hunt is \$4,000 and success is guaranteed. Furthermore, non-trophy hunts for young bulls and cows have been held. Because of the buffalo sales, hunts, and tourism, Custer State Park is the only publicly owned park in the nation that is entirely self-sufficient and does not require public funding to operate. In this regard, Custer State Park best illustrates how cultural motives, which include “transporting” individuals to a past time in American history, have come together with economic motives in a public setting.<sup>84</sup>

### **The Modern Buffalo Industry**

Thus far, the publicly owned herds and the reactions to these herds have been examined. In particular, the herd in Yellowstone has drawn the attention of Americans as individuals struggle over how to deal with brucellosis, land management, and an animal that evokes strong reactions among the general populace. As a key part of visitors’ experiences at Yellowstone and other publicly held parks, buffalo are visible reminders of a past time that parks work to promote, perhaps none more so than Custer State Park. Yet, overshadowed by public attention on the public herds, a small, growing buffalo industry emerged beginning in the 1960s, but gained momentum only in the late 1980s. Like the public herds, the private herds also have to deal with the challenges of culture and economics in an industry that relies on promoting a cultural icon while still trying to turn a profit.

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<sup>83</sup> South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks, *Tatanka*, 7, 17. In addition to the round-up, barbeques and other games that involve a “buffalo” theme take place at Custer State Park throughout the year.

<sup>84</sup> Franke, *To Save the Wild Bison*, 222, 259.



These photos are from the annual Custer State Park Buffalo Roundup. These photos are from October 2009. Note the large crowd in the background watching. The buffalo are directed by riders on horseback in order to create the most “authentic” vision of the Old American West. (Photo courtesy Chad Coppess/South Dakota Tourism and State Development)

One of the first moves to create the buffalo industry on a viable scale occurred in March 1967, when the first national buffalo association formed under the direction of South Dakota buffalo rancher L. Roy Houck. This organization, called the National Buffalo Association, wanted to create more dialogue among buffalo owners and in general, promote the use of buffalo products among the general public. Furthermore, the organization hoped to promote “buffalo recreation” opportunities and seek equal regulations on par with cattle and other animal industries.<sup>85</sup> Perhaps convincing owners that buffalo were the wave of the future was a 1952-1953 and 1956-1957 study in Canada conducted under feedlot conditions between Hereford cattle and buffalo. The study, one of the few existing which compares feed utilization between cattle and buffalo, showed that buffalo made better use of feed per pound than the Herefords did, boosting the morale of potential buffalo producers in the process.<sup>86</sup>

The problems associated with creating a new organization and industry from scratch soon resulted in disagreements between producers about the future of buffalo in America. In 1975, some disenchanted members formed a new organization, the American Buffalo Association (later the American Bison Association after 1987). Unlike the National Buffalo Association, which derived its power and goals from its board of directors, the American Buffalo Association intended to use the suggestions of its membership to guide the organization. Soon enough, this group grew to be larger than its predecessor.<sup>87</sup> Yet, the problems of standardization continued to exist in the industry.

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<sup>85</sup> Danz, *Of Bison and Men*, 157. Buffalo recreation to the National Buffalo Association can be understood as private hunting opportunities or taking tours and showing people their privately owned buffalo.

<sup>86</sup> J. Albert Rorabacher, *The American Buffalo in Transition: A Historical and Economic Survey of the Bison in America* (St. Cloud, MN: North Star Press, 1970), 71-73.

The largest problem was that the grading of meat and testing facilities that came free to the beef, pork, chicken, and other established meat industries were not available for buffalo. This problem still exists today, although producers can pay to have this service. The reason for this discrepancy is that buffalo are considered wildlife by the Department of Agriculture and on the agriculture census, are classified as “other” animals along with such exotic animals as emus and ostriches.<sup>88</sup>

Despite the inherent challenges associated with classifying and starting up buffalo herds for private producers, the industry underwent a period of rapid growth throughout the late 1980s and the 1990s.<sup>89</sup> During this time, prices rose from an average of approximately \$500 from 1973 to 1980 for live animals, to \$1,000 per animal from 1986-1993. At Custer State Park, prices soared to over \$2,500 in 1998.<sup>90</sup> The reasons for this boom came from a mix of people just wanting a few animals for themselves, to large scale buyers looking to get into what they viewed as a surefire industry. The different reasons for getting into buffalo raising created a rift between the large and small producers that still continues today. While smaller producers tend to get into the business for cultural reasons and want to have only a few animals that they can grass feed, larger producers view buffalo as a business and tend to own hundreds and in some cases, thousands of animals. While many of these large producers, such as Ted Turner,

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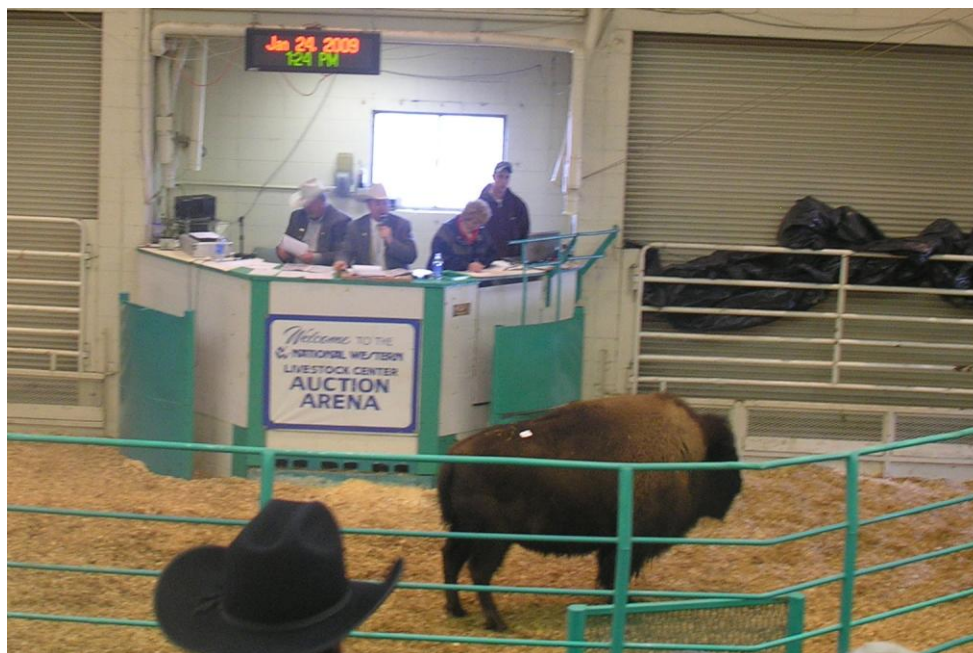
<sup>87</sup> Danz, *Of Bison and Men*, 159. The American Buffalo Association became the American Bison Association to delineate the species from the African cape buffalo. Some people sold cape buffalo meat and marketed it as the animal found in North America. The organization hoped to delineate the differences between the two species and avoid confusion in the future.

<sup>88</sup> Danz, *Of Bison and Men*, 160; Ernest Callenbach, *Bring Back the Buffalo: A Sustainable Future for America's Great Plains* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 75.

<sup>89</sup> Buffalo are harder to control than cattle and require much stronger and higher fencing than that needed for cattle, resulting in higher start up costs.

<sup>90</sup> David Lulka, “The Paradoxical Nature of Growth in the US Bison Industry,” *Journal of Cultural Geography* 25, no. 1 (February 2008): 37.





This photo was taken at the Gold Trophy Stock Show in Denver, Colorado, in January 2009. Many buffalo are sold at auctions such as this one. (Photo courtesy of the National Bison Association)



originally got into the business as a way of connecting with and owning a symbol of nature, they still need to have marketable animals that possess uniform meat quality. This has led to finishing animals on grain to create a more consistent flavor and appearance.<sup>91</sup> The differences between raising animals on a mix of grain and grass or completely on one or the other have created a breach of sorts within the industry that will be examined later.

Further muddying the divergence in opinions is the emergence of the InterTribal Bison Cooperative, established in 1992, which coordinates the creation of new buffalo herds and projects on Indian reservations across the country. This organization, while founded on cultural principles, also seeks to promote economic agendas as tribes raise and sell buffalo meat to buyers on their reservations.<sup>92</sup> While the tribes attempt to recreate the historical cultural bonds that existed between their tribes and buffalo, the reality of the situation is that many of the tribes use the buffalo as a source of income while still trying to maintain the animals in a wild state. For instance, the tribes, like many other American private owners, have turned to private hunts as a way to augment their incomes. At a price of \$2,000 for non-tribal members, Indian managers take people out on guided hunts and show them animals that they can kill.<sup>93</sup> In other privately owned herds outside of Indian reservations, hunting expeditions cost even more. Prices can range over \$4,000 for expeditions which “guarantee” successes. Another way for both tribes and private owners to maximize value is to tap into tourism. On one of the larger

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<sup>91</sup> Lulka, “The Paradoxical Nature,” 38-39.

<sup>92</sup> Sebastian Felix Braun, *Buffalo Inc.: American Indians and Economic Development* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 40, 60.

<sup>93</sup> Ken Zontek, *Buffalo Nation: American Indian Efforts to Restore the Bison* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 164.

buffalo ranches in Wyoming, the Terry Bison Ranch, tram tours take up to four hundred people per day out to see the animals owned by the ranch.<sup>94</sup> The underlying reason behind these attempts by the owners, whether tribal or not, is to capitalize on the deep cultural feelings that Americans feel for the animals.

In spite of apparently similar goals and reasons for getting into the business, deep mistrust exists between the various factions of the buffalo industry. Harold Danz, a former director of the American Bison Association, attempted to conduct a survey as part of the association's effort to help the industry as a whole in 1992. However, Danz discovered that people did not want to reveal the numbers of animals in their herds, nor did they want to share information about how they managed their herds with others. This lack of forthrightness led to the formation of numerous splinter groups until 1995, when the National Bison Association (NBA) formed as a merger between the National Buffalo Association and American Bison Association.<sup>95</sup> Still, even this new organization had to deal with the problem of how to implement standardization within the industry.

The problem of standardization revolves around the idea that grass fed and grain fed animals are inherently different. While the NBA promotes the idea of the environmental sustainability of buffalo meat versus cattle, which are predominantly grain fed, the issue is not as simple as it first appears. Promoters of buffalo push the health benefits of buffalo versus cattle, due to the low percentage of fat found in buffalo meat. Even the American Heart Association has found that buffalo is healthier than other types

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<sup>94</sup> Danz, *Of Bison and Men*, 173; Rinella, *American Buffalo*, 91; Callenbach, *Bring Back the Buffalo*, 126-27, 140.

<sup>95</sup> Danz, *Of Bison and Men*, 156.

of meat due to this fact.<sup>96</sup> The problem arises in the area of uniformity. Because less buffalo meat is available to the public at large, image and taste are major factors in the industry, since if someone gets bad tasting meat due to a lack of uniformity and standardization in the industry as a whole, people could be turned off of buffalo meat. Hence, many producers, including Ted Turner, the single largest private owner of buffalo in the world, finish off their animals with grain for a few months before selling them. This process creates a uniform appearance in meat with marbled white fat throughout. By doing this though, the producers negate much of the benefits of grass feeding and the health benefits derived from their animals. Moreover, a concern among the larger producers is that smaller producers will create and market an inferior product due to their lower volume, thereby creating a breach between the small and large producers and undermining the industry.<sup>97</sup>

Further complicating the issue of grass versus grain fed animals is how animals are managed and the public perception of these management techniques. Most people at large believe buffalo should roam free in pastures. The NBA, which has examined this issue, tries to run the gamut of balancing this perception while having to deal with the reality that many buffalo are grain fed and finished in feedlots for a few months prior to slaughter.<sup>98</sup> Yet, an even larger problem arises as producers begin to selectively breed to make buffalo more manageable to handle. This means eliminating wilder bulls and animals and in some cases, even dehorning animals so that they do not gore one another

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<sup>96</sup> National Bison Association, "Industry Data and Statistics," <http://www.bisoncentral.com> (accessed December 10, 2009).

<sup>97</sup> David Lulka, "Grass or Grain?: Assessing the Nature of the U.S. Bison Industry," *Sociologia Ruralis* 46, no. 3 (July 2006): 175-78, 180.

<sup>98</sup> Franke, *To Save the Wild Bison*, 257.

in feedlot settings. The great fear that exists is that the “wildness” in buffalo will eventually be eliminated, and the animals as we think of them today may cease to exist in the long run as more selective breeding takes place to improve or eliminate certain characteristics, such as “more rump and less hump.”<sup>99</sup> This issue takes on increased importance when one considers the cattle introgression issue, since all but one private herd tested already has cattle genes in their blood.<sup>100</sup> In the aftermath of a dramatic crash in the buffalo market in the early 2000s, which resulted when producers could not afford stock and the meat market flooded with low end cuts of meat like hamburger, this issue has only increased in importance as a new buffalo organization, the Great Plains Buffalo Association formed. Unlike the NBA, the new organization is not ambivalent about grain fed versus grass fed buffalo. Instead, the association ardently supports creating an industry that relies on grass fed buffalo, which are not selectively bred, and are free roaming. Nevertheless, like its fellow organization, the NBA, the Great Plains Buffalo Association still has to confront the issue of standardization that continues to confound both organizations.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Eric W. Sanderson, et. al., “The Ecological Future of the North *American Bison*: Conceiving Long-Term, Large-Scale Conservation of Wildlife,” *Conservation Biology* 22, no. 2 (April 2008): 258. <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.wiu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=31574203&site=ehost-live> (accessed April 30, 2009).

<sup>100</sup> Curtis H. Freese, et. al., “Second Chance for Plains Bison,” *Biological Conservation* 136, no. 2 (April 2007): 178, <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.wiu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=24249656&site=ehost-live> (April 30, 2009). Only Ted Turner’s herd at his Vermejo Park Ranch in New Mexico is free of cattle genes.

<sup>101</sup> Great Plains Buffalo Association, “Mission Statement,” <http://www.gpbuffalo.org/mission.html> (accessed December 10, 2009); National Bison Association, “The Bison Industry,” <http://www.bisoncentral.com> (accessed December 10, 2009). The market for buffalo has rebounded since the crash of the first part of the 2000s. Starting in 2003, the industry has grown by double digits annually.

## Return to the Great Plains

As can be seen, in both the private and public sector, buffalo evoke strong feelings that can be traced back to cultural and economic responses to the animal. However, a new way of thinking about the animals and the future of the Great Plains has emerged and recently has picked up steam. The basic idea is to reintroduce buffalo back to the Great Plains on a vast scale and recreate a sustainable natural environment in the process. Originally proposed by demographers Frank and Deborah Popper in the mid 1980s, the concept of a “buffalo commons” developed because of the declining human population of the Great Plains. Although the two meant to use the term “buffalo commons” as a metaphor for ecological restoration on a vast scale, the two used the term “buffalo” because of the symbolism of the animal. While they meant to stir up dialogue, the immediate response to their idea was met by protests from people living on the Great Plains, who saw the idea as a danger to their way of life. Though the Poppers were ahead of their time in 1987, today they admit that the idea is now acceptable to talk about in the open on the Great Plains as the population has continued to decline.<sup>102</sup>

Today, multiple groups are working and discussing the idea of returning buffalo to the Great Plains. The Nature Conservancy’s Tallgrass Prairie Project based out of Pawhuska, Oklahoma, and the American Prairie Foundation have both converted large tracts of land back into prairie. Buffalo, as a keystone species of these historical environments, are key to both groups’ plans.<sup>103</sup> Even a newly founded American Bison

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<sup>102</sup> Deborah E. Popper and Frank J. Popper, “The Onset of the Buffalo Commons,” *Journal of the West* 45, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 31, 33; Callenbach, *Bring Back the Buffalo*, 200-01. Part of the problem with the Poppers is that they were perceived as outsiders to Great Plains dwellers, since they taught in New York City and Rutgers. Due to their status as outsiders, the Poppers appeared to be judging people who lived on the plains their whole lives, leading to the icy reception of their idea by citizens of the region.

Society now exists to aid in the reintroduction of the animal to the Great Plains.<sup>104</sup> Yet, the plans to reintroduce buffalo go far beyond these two groups. In a 2005-2006 series of meetings sponsored by the Wildlife Conservation Society, multiple constituencies and groups, representing Native Americans, private owners of buffalo, conservation organizations, and government and land managers from throughout North America met at Ted Turner's Vermejo Park Ranch in New Mexico and crafted the Vermejo Statement. Under the terms of this plan the groups agreed to work towards a recovery of buffalo on an enormous scale across the animals' historic habitat. While some areas could not feasibly be repopulated, others, like the Great Plains, could be. The key to this plan, which the planners hoped to implement over the coming century, needs as much cooperation as possible. Most important, no group can be left in the dark, including the private owners of buffalo, who have the means to make the plan a success. The planners acknowledged that while many Native American groups have a profound relationship with the animals, they are not the only ones who have strong opinions and feelings about buffalo. In fact, most people interviewed during the crafting of the plan expressed some strong sentiments towards the animals, whether they lived close to buffalo or not. The planners found these feelings often times "transcend economics, class, ethnicity, and

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<sup>103</sup> The Nature Conservancy, "Oklahoma: How We Work," [http://www.nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/oklahoma/about/ok\\_how\\_we\\_work.html](http://www.nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/oklahoma/about/ok_how_we_work.html) (accessed December 11, 2009); American Prairie Foundation, "Goals," <http://www.americanprairie.org/goals.html> (accessed December 11, 2009). The Nature Conservancy has several tracts of land in several states, including Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa. The American Prairie Foundation is centered out of north central Montana and though a private entity, is partially funded by the state of Montana.

<sup>104</sup> American Bison Society, <http://www.americanbisonsocietyonline.org/> (accessed December 12, 2009). The new American Bison Society, founded in 2005 by the Wildlife Conservation Society, is now concerned with the large scale ecological restoration of buffalo.

nationality,” and are shared both by owners and non-owners of the animals.<sup>105</sup> Only the future will tell if this plan will succeed, but with changing ideas about land use and sustainability, the ideas crafted in the Vermejo Statement only stand to draw more attention, with buffalo playing a key role.

As can be seen, from 1914 onwards, buffalo continued to invoke strong feelings in Americans, whether those feelings are motivated by culture or economics. Through the 1960s, buffalo endured a relatively quiet period in the animals’ often checkered history, as herds expanded and became more accessible to the public. However, a return to the turbulence characteristic of the animal’s history happened around the 1970s, accelerating in the late 1980s as differences of opinion over how the animals should be managed emerged to plague managers in both the private and public sectors. Despite this tumultuous past and present, today approximately 450,000 animals are found in North America, with approximately half these found in the United States. Also, despite disagreements in the buffalo industry, the demand for buffalo meat keeps increasing, as evidenced by 70,000 animals being slaughtered in 2008 for meat consumption, more than doubling the total from 2002.<sup>106</sup> In other areas though, strong feelings continue to dominate, as public and private concerns clash over buffalo in places such as Yellowstone National Park. In the midst of this fighting, the position of the animal in the eyes of Americans has grown stronger, as movements towards a sustainable future for the Great Plains focus squarely on restoring the animals to their historic home on an unprecedented scale. Moving forward, the position of the buffalo in the eyes of

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<sup>105</sup> Sanderson, “The Ecological Future of the North American Bison,” 254-57, 263.

<sup>106</sup> National Bison Association, “Industry Data and Statistics,” <http://www.bisoncentral.com> (accessed December 10, 2009). Approximately 20,000 animals are found in public herds in the United States. The other half of the 450,000 animals are found in Canada.

Americans, for both cultural and economic reasons, seems to have never been greater, although questions over management will continue to draw the most attention as the animals and their relationship with Americans move into the future.



## CONCLUSION

Over the course of two centuries, Americans have had dramatically different attitudes toward the buffalo. Yet, the common element that this study argues is that evolving cultural and economic factors determined the relationships that Americans had with the animal. These factors evolved in tandem with the overarching trends in their respective eras. For instance, in the nineteenth century unrestricted natural resource use, regardless of the consequences, prevailed in Americans' relationship with buffalo. The thought that something as numerous and widespread as buffalo could actually disappear and go extinct was something few Americans considered possible. The federal government, although never putting it in writing, saw the destruction of the buffalo as the key to finally forcing the American Indian tribes on the Great Plains onto reservations. Only after this process was complete could settlers finally move peaceably into the region and settle the Great Plains. Furthermore, in the effort to commodify buffalo, Native Americans were integrated into the American economy. While this thesis does not directly address the Native American perspective on this trade, the possibility for future research does exist in this area. Economic outlets for buffalo hides, and later bones, made the animals the focus of a burgeoning industry that soon wiped millions of animals off the face of the planet.

Yet, because of the destruction of the animals, efforts emerged to save the buffalo based on a sense of cultural heritage and the potential for economic gain. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the destruction of the buffalo from a few years earlier galvanized Northeastern intellectual and political elites to move to save the

animals before they completely disappeared. Initially an elitist cause, soon enough more democratic organizations, such as the American Bison Society, emerged to direct the preservation of the species. This movement, based on a sense of cultural nationalism in which a key part of the “American natural experience” appeared on the verge of extinction, marked a watershed moment in the history of Americans’ perception of nature and wildlife. If buffalo, the most numerous native land animal of its kind in North America, could go extinct, other animals could follow, leading to the destruction of the country’s unique natural environments. For many of these early preservationists, the animals and environs of the United States were what helped set apart this country from the Old World, where natural resources were scarce. Furthermore, the natural landscape and its animals had an awe inspiring effect for Americans, as they became increasingly urbanized by the end of the nineteenth century. In this case, the open spaces and their inhabitants offered an outlet for Americans in the city and elsewhere to “see” what America had previously been prior to European development.

Because of its sheer size, numbers, range, and importance in American development, perhaps no animal could represent American nature like the buffalo. This realization led to the efforts still in effect today to manage and preserve America’s wildlife species and their habitats. Helping this process come to fruition were western ranchers, who not only felt compelled to save the animals out of a sense of cultural responsibility, but also a desire to turn a profit while doing so. These individuals saw that one day buffalo might become symbolic of an American past. When that day arrived, they would be there to sell the animals, offering the means for the nation to see buffalo first hand. Together, these two groups driven by opposing motives of cultural symbolism

and capitalistic opportunity, forged an alliance with federal and state governments in the early years of the twentieth century that resulted in the spread of the animals across the nation in zoos, municipal parks, national and state parks, wildlife refuges, and private ranches. Because of this alliance, buffalo escaped extinction, becoming an entrenched national symbol of the American West in the process. Hence, while this thesis does not directly invoke the greater field of the history of the West, it does provide a place where the ideas of the Progressive Era and the history of the West converged to deal with one of the foremost symbols of the West, the buffalo.

In the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, buffalo still were governed by cultural and economic considerations. During this period, the emergence of the buffalo industry has created a reason to raise animals for meat on a large scale. This industry, however, relied on the perception of the animals as culturally significant and a key part of America's past in addition to being viewed as a healthy meat compared to other food sources. Yet, even this enterprise had to deal with the problem of how to manage the industry's direction while still focusing on maintaining a popular image of the animals. Elsewhere, federal and state parks wrestle with the proper way to manage a cultural icon without drawing public ire. This issue, particularly felt in Yellowstone National Park and the surrounding areas, thrust buffalo squarely into a battle between wildlife and livestock interests based superficially on preventing the spread of a disease, but really going much deeper into the concept of who should have control of the land. In the midst of these struggles and dilemmas, buffalo now are emerging as a symbol of Great Plains land restoration on an unprecedented scale. Joint efforts, both private and public, see the possibility of reintroducing buffalo, along with other native species of animals and plants,

to the Great Plains. In light of declining human populations in the region, it appears possible to move toward restoring the plains to the ecological diversity of an earlier era. In the end, it can be said with certainty that throughout history no matter what the era, Americans' relationship with buffalo has been governed by a mix of cultural and economic factors, and whether for good or ill, these two issues look to guide the relationship into the future.



(Photo by J. Schmidt, 1977, courtesy of the National Park Service)

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