

## **Bison Restoration: Resources for Learning about Contemporary American Indian Issues**

Dear Students, Thank you for your interest in learning more about Montana American Indian tribes. In this lesson, you will learn about bison restoration efforts that several Montana tribes are working on. We hope you will understand how important these restoration efforts are for the tribes and the profound ongoing cultural and spiritual connection tribes have with bison (buffalo).

This lesson contains links to several video clips and links to on-line articles about bison restoration efforts. Also included are links to several organizations that provide basic background information about bison.

The video clips vary from 5 – 30 minutes and feature footage of tribal members sharing their current efforts to maintain their cultural connections with bison.

### **Your Assignment (submit your paper to the appropriate teacher via email)**

Aim to watch at least two videos. Write a short summary along with what you learned and liked about the videos.

There are also four recent news articles about bison restoration efforts in Montana. Read each article and write a brief summary. Try to include at least three new things you learned from each article and make sure to use complete sentences and proper grammar.

This lesson can help provide you with a better awareness of the Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians, in particular Essential Understanding 3 and 6.

- ✓ The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life as tribal cultures, traditions, and languages are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs. Additionally, each tribe has its own oral histories, which are as valid as written histories. These histories predate the “discovery” of North America (Essential Understanding 3).
- ✓ History is a story most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. With the inclusion of more and varied voices, histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from American Indian perspectives frequently conflicts with the stories mainstream historians tell (Essential Understanding 6).
- ✓ For more information about the Essential Understandings check out these [key concepts](#).

As an introductory exercise, watch the following video clip about bison restoration efforts on the Fort Belknap reservation.

- ✓ ["Buffalo Should Be Everywhere"](#) (2019) The American Bison, or buffalo, once roamed free across the continent, but was nearly wiped out by the end of the 19th century. Native Americans and a handful of conservation groups are leading the way toward restoration of North America's most iconic animal to public and tribal lands in the western United States. The tribes of Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in north central Montana are at the forefront of this effort.
- ✓ American bison were pushed to the brink of extinction in the late 1800s, and with them, an entire Indigenous culture was nearly destroyed. Now, the Dakota and Nakoda people are re-connecting their youth to a culture that many thought to be lost forever. In their efforts, they bring hope, healing, and unity to a new generation. The Buffalo Unity Project is a program created by Poplar Middle School on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in Montana. The goal is to connect students to the importance of the buffalo to the Dakota and Nakoda people, and to teach them that communities thrive when they are united in common purpose. Written and filmed by the students of Poplar Middle School, this film was produced in collaboration with MAPS Media Institute. The MAPS Media Lab taught students how to direct interviews, record sound, and operate camera and lights for one week in the spring of 2019. MAPS then worked with Poplar Middle School to edit and finish the film. [In This Together, We Are One: The Buffalo Unity Project](#)
- ✓ The tribes of the Fort Peck and Fort Belknap Indian Reservations in Montana are leaders in the conservation of wild bison in North America. [THE BUFFALO PEOPLE](#) documents the creation of a new conservation herd of wild bison on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in north central Montana.

## **Resources for learning about bison and restoration efforts**

[Intertribal Buffalo Council](#) (The seven reservations in Montana and the tribes that reside on them are all members of this national council, which is comprised of 69 tribal nations)

[Background information about bison from Yellowstone National Park](#)

[15 Facts About Our National Mammal: The American Bison](#)

## **In the News....Recent articles related to bison**

[Blackfeet welcome the return of bison to Montana Reservation](#) (article from the Great Falls Tribune – June 3, 2019)

[55 Yellowstone bison moved to Montana Indian reservation](#) (article from the Salt Lake Tribune – August 24, 2019)

[Slow drip: Bison quarantine creating path from Yellowstone to Fort Peck](#) (article from the Bozeman Daily Chronicle – December 8, 2019)

[More than 460 Yellowstone bison killed so far this season](#) (article from the Billings Gazette – March 27, 2020)

## Extension Activities

If you have any questions regarding this topic, consult with your teacher about developing an inquiry based lesson to help guide you in your research. You may want to consider interviewing a few tribal members and ask them about their individual perspective regarding their tribe's relationship to bison. Feel free to contact [Indian Education for All staff](#) at OPI to assist you in your research.

Check out this recent film from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes to further your understanding about bison and their relationships to tribes in Montana.

- ✓ [In the Spirit of Atatic: The Untold Story of the National Bison Range](#) The film tells the story of the National Bison Range, a national wildlife refuge within the Flathead Indian Reservation. The whole goal for this film is to let people know more about the tribes' long-running quest for greater involvement with the Bison Range.

For further information about bison in Montana, view this [online exhibit](#) developed by the Montana Memory Project.