

Coordinating Diverse Environmental Interests: Bison Restoration in Alberta and Montana

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Introduction

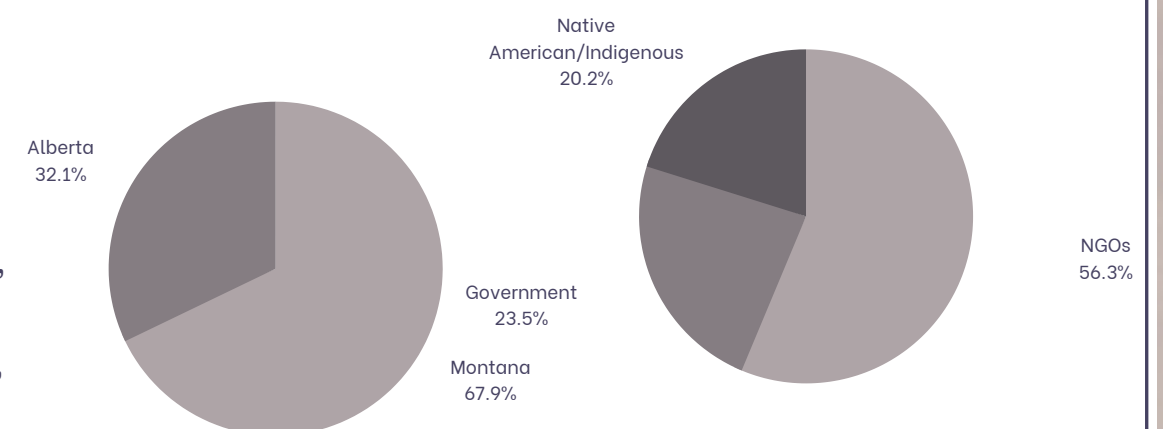
This summer, I studied how current actors in bison restoration work and interrelate. A common thread across species conservation and other environmental issues is that often so many interests are involved that cooperation becomes both difficult and essential [1]. Bison restoration, however, has shown promising progress even with a wide variety of actors involved. I found that this success may occur because of these differences, not despite them. The diverse actors involved in bison restoration can make unique contributions to restoration as a whole; when their strengths are combined, massive restoration schemes can succeed.

Methodology

I analyzed 114 actors involved in bison restoration in Alberta and Montana. I gathered information primarily from their websites, and a short review of the literature on bison conservation and restoration. I recorded and standardized goals, methods, levels of involvement, levels of success, and connections between various actors. I then analyzed the information I gathered, looking at how various characteristics were distributed and where connections between actors occurred.

General:

There are three core categories that most bison restoration actors fall into: Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Government actors, and Native American/Indigenous Actors. Most goals and approaches differed based on the category in which a particular actor fell. However, one significant shared goal was the creation of wild bison herds. Another shared feature among all actors was level of involvement; the majority of actors were minimally involved in bison restoration, with a select group taking the majority of the action.



NGOs:

Favored Approaches: Lobbying, Outreach, Funding, Legal Action
Favored Goals: Protecting existing bison herds, genetic conservation
Less likely to: Manage Bison
This category includes both minutely local and widely international actors, all of which make unique contributions to bison restoration as a whole. NGOs are the most varied category of bison actors, taking on a wide variety of approaches and goals.

Government:

Favored Approaches: Managing bison
Favored Goals: Disease prevention
Less likely To: Support reintroducing wild bison
This category includes both governing bodies and national parks. National parks are in a particularly important position to establish wild bison herds, while governing bodies are uniquely able to set the stage for other bison action. In the US, the national and local government is more likely to be involved in bison restoration and set clear goals.

Native American/Indigenous:

Favored Approaches: Managing bison, facilitating collaboration
Favored Goals: Reintroducing wild bison, cultural restoration, promoting bison as a species
This category includes both individual tribes/nations and collaborative efforts like the Buffalo Treaty. These actors are the most united in goals and approaches. Many individual peoples have acquired and now manage bison herds from wild populations.

Others:

Other significant bison actors include commercial bison actors and actors that are against certain restoration initiatives. Commercial bison ranchers have collaborated with bison collaboration actors for initiatives like National Bison Day, but may resist restoration actions that work against their interests. Similarly, a number of local organizations, particularly in Montana, are vocally against bison restoration, fearing its effect on their lives and livelihoods.

Connections

Both local and non-local actors are most likely to collaborate with local actors. Actors in Montana most often collaborate with other Montana actors, while Alberta actors collaborate with other Alberta actors. On average, each actor in all categories collaborates with approximately one NGO, one government body, and one Native American/Indigenous actor, suggesting that many collaborative efforts are occurring with support from actors within a myriad of categories.

Conclusion

Some of the most significant recent bison restoration initiatives are born of a wide variety of actors joining forces, each taking actions in line with their own approaches but working toward common goals. Moving forward, I recommend that bison restoration actors work to increase international cooperation. The amount of cross-border actors and cross-border cooperation was quite low, and establishing such efforts could further bison restoration as a whole. I also recommend that local groups are given more support to involve themselves in bison restoration. Opposition to bison restoration often forms on local levels, so local groups are in a unique position to address these problems [2]. On a broader level, in other situations where multiple groups of actors with differing approaches and goals all are involved in addressing species restoration or an environmental problem, a stakeholder analysis focusing on the approaches and goals each group takes could be useful. allowing plans to be made that play off each groups specialty and work toward shared goals. Bison restoration has shown that collaborative action is far from impossible, and differences can become the key to effective change.

References

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Acknowledgements

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