



Media Contact:

Irene Serrano, WWF-US

irene.serrano@wwfus.org | 202-352-0744

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Efforts to Restore Buffalo and Re-Establish Indigenous Lifeways Expands in Unprecedented Alliance Between Indigenous Leaders, Environmental Nonprofits, the U.S. Department of the Interior

Washington, D.C. (July 17, 2024)—The Tribal Buffalo Lifeways Collaboration was announced today by the [InterTribal Buffalo Council](#), [Native Americans in Philanthropy](#), [The Nature Conservancy](#) and [World Wildlife Fund](#). This new, historic alliance was created to stabilize, establish, and expand Tribal-led buffalo (bison) restoration, and foster cultural, spiritual, ecological, and economic revitalization within Native communities. Together, the groups have committed to work with the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture to build on the momentum created by Indigenous leaders to bring lasting structural change and return buffalo to Tribal lands at an unprecedented scale.

The Collaboration seeks to support Tribal communities with necessary resources to ensure the success of buffalo reintegration. This includes improved infrastructure (e.g., fencing), training for herd managers, and access to land through co-stewardship, leasing, and acquisition.

“Buffalo are essential to the health, well-being, and prosperity of Native communities across Indian Country. We are pleased to support this collaboration of nonprofits and intertribal organizations to help Tribal communities further restore and create sustainable healthy buffalo herds on Tribal lands,” said Wizipan Garriott, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs at the Department of the Interior. “Strong public and private sector partnerships such as this, enhance Tribal ecosystem restoration projects, and improve the cultural revitalization of buffalo in Tribal communities.”

Buffalo are ecological and cultural keystone species whose role is integral to thousands of natural relationships across North America. Their restoration on Tribal lands is an essential step in repairing these relationships which were intentionally severed by the United States government, enabling colonization by European settlers and the ensuing violence against Native people as well as the extensive conversion of natural areas. The InterTribal Buffalo Council is a nationwide leader in buffalo restoration whose vision continues to heal these harms, supporting 83 Tribes in the management of more than 25,000 buffalo across 22 states. Collectively, the InterTribal Buffalo Council and its members manage more than 10% of the nation’s buffalo population, larger than the herd managed by the U.S. National Park Service.

“Since 1992, ITBC has worked tirelessly to restore buffalo to Tribes and provide critical technical assistance for healthy herd management on extremely limited funds,” said Ervin Carlson, President, ITBC. On behalf of the organization and its member Tribes, ITBC is grateful for this collaboration that has been inclusive of the Tribal vision for buffalo restoration and has the opportunity to provide meaningful funding to enhance Tribal restoration efforts.

Despite representing close to 3% of the U.S. population, Native American communities receive less than 0.4 % of U.S. philanthropic dollars. This groundbreaking Collaborative brings together Tribal values, ecological stewardship, and economic revitalization to increase funding and resources for cultural preservation and restoration of Buffalo lifeways for future generations. Under this Collaboration, partners will prioritize and center their efforts around Native people to ensure their voices are leading this work.

“This collaboration marks a historic milestone in our journey to restore buffalo to Tribal lands and revitalize Indigenous lifeways,” says Erik Stegman, CEO of Native Americans in Philanthropy. “By uniting our efforts, we are not only fostering ecological and cultural renewal but also ensuring that the leadership and vision of Native communities are at the forefront of this crucial work. Together, we can honor our traditions but also pave the way for lasting economic and environmental benefits.”

InterTribal Buffalo Council’s members were foundational to this Collaboration, as values, goals, and needs articulated by herd managers during a September 2023 gathering are reflected in this Charter. These commitments build upon [an Order issued by](#) Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland to restore wild and healthy populations of buffalo and the prairie grassland ecosystem through the use of more than \$25 million from the Inflation Reduction Act. This order empowers the Department’s bureaus and partners to utilize the best available science and Indigenous Knowledge to restore buffalo across the country.

For more information, visit TribalBuffalo.org.

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Additional quotes:

“Together as four committed organizations, the Tribal Buffalo Lifeways Collaboration combines our diverse strengths to accelerate Tribal-led efforts to strengthen the spiritual and cultural ties with the buffalo. The Nature Conservancy is honored to join the Collaboration to support the vision of our Indigenous partners to restore buffalo and expand the sovereignty of Tribal Nations,” said Jan Glendening, North America Managing Director of The Nature Conservancy.

“This collaboration is about restoring and strengthening the deep and fundamental connection between Indigenous people, buffalo, and the land that is their home,” said Carter Roberts, President and CEO of WWF. “The work of this partnership will be Native-led to ensure the alliance meets the immediate and long-term needs of Indigenous communities. Our ultimate goal is to support the vision of Native Nations to foster cultural, ecological, and economic revitalization for people and nature alike.”

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The Tribal Buffalo Lifeways Collaboration Partners

InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC): Since 1992, the ITBC has been the nationwide leader in buffalo restoration, supporting 83 Tribes in the management of 25,000 buffalo across 22 states. ITBC members manage more than 32 million acres of Tribal lands and have restored buffalo to nearly 1 million of those acres. Collectively, ITBC members manage over 10% of the nation's buffalo population which is larger than the herds managed by the U.S. National Park Service. From the large intact grasslands of Montana to the small desert herds of New Mexico, ITBC is committed to reestablishing buffalo herds on Tribal lands in a manner that promotes cultural enhancement, spiritual revitalization, ecological restoration, and economic development. ITBC is also committed to educating the philanthropic sector as a part of this Project to showcase how to best support Tribal-led buffalo restoration.

Native Americans in Philanthropy (NAP): For more than 30 years, NAP has promoted equitable and effective philanthropy in Native communities. Grounded in relationships and collaboration with counterpart organizations, NAP catalyzes greater philanthropic support for Native communities and Tribal Nations, who receive less than 0.4% of philanthropic funding, despite representing close to 3% of the U.S. population. NAP works with the philanthropic community to promote, foster and grow philanthropic support within and for Native communities to address the systemic invisibility. NAP aims to make new and existing support more effective, by ensuring that funding aligns with the goals and needs of Native peoples across the U.S., and accounts for their values, concerns, and capacity challenges in taking on and leveraging funding. NAP is focused on building resources and relationships to advance Native-led efforts in the global movement toward environmental sustainability. This movement comes at a time of increased appreciation for Indigenous lifeways and knowledge.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC): TNC has been dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, TNC creates innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges, working in every US state and more than 70 countries and territories. TNC's collaborative approach engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners to advance conservation. To date TNC has protected 50 million hectares of land and improved the management of over 40 million hectares of ocean. TNC manages over 7,000 buffalo across 113,000 acres at 11 of its preserves in the U.S. in support of conservation and restoration of grasslands. In 2022, TNC established its Buffalo Restoration Program whereby more than 1,600 buffalo from preserves have been transferred to Indigenous organizations to support Tribal herds and communities around the country. TNC is committed to the ongoing restoration of buffalo for their cultural, spiritual, ecological, and economic importance to Indigenous communities, and supporting Indigenous-led conservation which includes supporting land acquisition and transfers back to Native communities.

World Wildlife Fund, Inc. (WWF): WWF's mission is to build a future in which people and nature thrive together. WWF has been working with Native Nations to restore bison to Tribal lands in the Northern Great Plains for a decade. We support each Nation's unique, self-determined goals for their program. When invited, we assist as needed on bison habitat acquisition, management planning, infrastructure development, capacity, economic development, community engagement, ecological monitoring, fundraising, communications, and making connections to a broader network of support.