



Prints and posters of Cynthia Fisher's painting symbolizing the "Montana Matters Collaboration for Conservation" effort to promote the restoration of bison to Montana's Northern Great Plains are available for purchase. Proceeds from poster and print sales are dedicated to this restoration effort. National Wildlife Federation and Montana Wildlife Federation are taking the lead in this effort. To learn more about our efforts to promote and enhance the value, visibility, awareness and stewardship of Montana's wildlife and habitat, visit www.MontanaMatters.com. For more information and to learn how you can get involved, please contact us.



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Cover Photo by Skip Kowalski

Restoring America's Heritage

*the Return of Bison to
Montana's Northern Great Plains*



When stepping onto the unpopulated plains of eastern Montana, it is not difficult to imagine thousands of bison spread across this vast landscape. In every direction a blanket of sagebrush and prairie grasses paint the canvas of this incredible backdrop.

The American Bison

The American bison has largely been overlooked as a valued wildlife resource in North America and specifically in Montana. The bison, an iconic wildlife species, was once the most abundant species in North America, its presence dominating the Great Plains. For many, it remains “the symbol of the American West”. Unfortunately, for the last 100+ years, the recovery of bison as free-ranging wildlife has been left behind during the recovery of nearly all the native large animals. We believe it is time to bring the bison back into the mainstream as a valued wildlife species.

Montana’s Northern Great Plains—A Restoration Vision

This incredible landscape, including the vast 1.1 million acre Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge (CMR), is one of the most viable remaining habitats for species like sage-grouse, black-tailed prairie dogs, black-footed ferrets, swift fox, and many other rare prairie and sagebrush-steppe species. Although the region hosts a mere fraction of the incredible wildlife numbers that awed the Lewis and Clark Expedition, it still remains the largest intact shortgrass prairie in North America.

- To create a reserve of over three million acres—twice the size of Yellowstone park—where a wild bison population could be restored to their native prairie habitat (www.nwf.org/RestoringBison).
- During the last 20 years, the CMR has phased out livestock grazing on more than 250,000 acres and this land could now be available for bison restoration without livestock conflict. This success is due largely in part to National Wildlife Federation’s Wildlife Conflict Resolution Program (www.nwf-wcr.org).



A Return of Sportsmen Conservationists

The unique history and vastness of this landscape is what makes this area the most compelling place for bison restoration in the United States.

- By 1900, all of Montana’s big game species had been nearly exterminated. But through historic conservation efforts — led primarily by sportsmen like Theodore Roosevelt and George Bird Grinnell — important wildlife species like elk, bighorn sheep, pronghorn and deer were restored to their native habitats.
- The one big game species for which significant restoration has not occurred on the Northern Great Plains is bison.
- Sportsmen remain an extremely potent political force in Montana. Over 20% of Montanans take to the field each year—the highest participation rate in the country. A study done in 2008 concluded that the CMR is the single most popular hunting area in Montana.

Montana Poll Favors Bison Restoration

In an effort to accurately gauge support for bison restoration in Montana and to educate policy-makers, National Wildlife Federation recently commissioned a public opinion poll of Montana voters and sportsmen. The results indicate that a vast majority of Montanans would like to see a huntable population of bison restored to the landscape—including Montana’s Northern Great Plains.

The survey was conducted February 23-24, 2011 by Moore Information, Inc., a national public opinion research company. Telephone interviews were conducted among a representative sample of 400 registered voters statewide. The potential sampling error associated with the 400 statewide interviews is +/-5% at the 95% confidence level.

“To this end,” said Tim Aldrich, President of the Montana Wildlife Federation, “it supports MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks’ investigations of possible locations for future bison populations, in part because they, like all other species of wildlife, belong on our landscapes and would support continuing positive economic results through tourism and hunting.”



Bison Photo by Robin Poole

Wild Bison Can Be Managed in the Same Way as Other Wildlife

Response	Voters	Sportsmen
Yes	63%	63%
Don't know	10%	6%
No	27%	31%

“In your opinion, is it possible for Montana to manage wild bison in the same way that other wildlife species are managed in the state, such as elk and deer, or not?”

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Restoring Wild Bison in and Around the CMR

Response	Voters	Sportsmen
Support	70%	60%
Don't know	5%	4%
Oppose	25%	36%

“The Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge in north-central Montana is a 1.1-million-acre wildlife refuge, commonly known as the ‘CMR.’ The CMR is managed by the federal US Fish & Wildlife Service, in cooperation with the State of Montana. Would you support or oppose restoration of a wild bison population in and around the CMR in northcentral Montana?”

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Allow Hunting of Wild Bison?

Response	Voters	Sportsmen
Favor	70%	84%
Don't know	7%	3%
Oppose	23%	13%

“Would you favor or oppose allowing hunters to hunt wild bison populations in Montana the same way they hunt other species like deer and elk?”