



## RESOLUTION 2

The resolution proposal below is a 'Zero Draft'

# Through the Eyes of Buffalo: A Strategic Platform to Restore All Natural World Relationships

## PREAMBLE

The world faces an unprecedented trebled crisis of biodiversity loss, climate change, and social injustice, with over one million species on the brink of extinction. We recognize at the heart of this crisis lies a fundamental breakdown in our relationships with ourselves, each other, and the natural world. This resolution is based on the *Through the Eyes of Buffalo Declaration*, which illuminates the challenges we face and presents an opportunity for transformative change with a campaign and policy goals. By embracing and supporting Indigenous-led bison conservation, we can restore our relationship with nature and each other, drawing on the wisdom of the past, present forces, and a bold vision for a just and equitable future.

## WHEREAS

Humanity finds itself at the center of interconnected crises—biodiversity, climate, and justice—which root in a crisis of relationship with ourselves, each other, and the planet. The extraordinary juncture we collectively find ourselves offers significant opportunities for transformational change to revitalize our relationship with nature and dissolve barriers dividing us from the natural world and each other.

Not long ago, an estimated 30-60 million bison lived in synchronicity with the land we now call North America. Due to extirpation efforts enforced by non-Indigenous governments in the late 1800's, only an estimated 500 individual bison were left, creating a devastating impact on bison herds, the land they lived on, and the Indigenous communities they lived in reciprocity with.

As a result of rematriation efforts by Indigenous communities and governments across North America, more than half a million bison exist in North America today. However, more than 400,000 are in commercial herds. In contrast, only about 31,000 are in conservation herds managed by public agencies and environmental organizations and about 25,000 are in Tribal/Indigenous-managed herds.

Honoring Indigenous Peoples' relationship with the land since time immemorial and their knowledge, wisdom and science systems thus as stewards and guardians of keystone relatives and their homelands.

Indigenous-led conservation and regeneration are critical to meeting the challenges of biodiversity and climate crises and healing relational fault lines. Indigenized approaches are proven to be the best way forward for the land and all that it sustains. Eighty percent of the world's remaining biodiversity and nearly a quarter of above-ground carbon stores are on Indigenous lands<sup>1</sup>. Restoring bison at meaningful ecological and cultural scales mandates a conservation paradigm recognizing buffalo as a cultural species and keystone relative—a species with extraordinary effects, both measurable and immeasurable, on the biocultural system in which it lives.

Co-creating a multi-dimensional, Indigenous-led conservation and rematriation strategy centering ecological and cultural restoration of bison at a continental scale can serve as a model for relational conservation and ecosystem regeneration. Returning Buffalo to the landscape revitalizes Indigenous lifeways and the full suite of grassland biodiversity, from plants and insects to prairie dogs and large mammals. Understanding the need to recognize, uplift, enforce and protect Indigenous rights as enunciated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and also to the universal need for humans to respect and act responsibly to each other and all life on Earth.

Buffalo can help us define and elevate an entirely new, Indigenous-led model to guide the next era of North American conservation. By framing conservation through a biocultural lens, we can co-create a paradigm suited to the complex, systemic challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A model that embodies concepts like relationship and reciprocity, respect and reconciliation, equity and justice. There is no better frame for this critical work than the biocultural restoration of bison, which lays the foundation for a durable conservation approach able to work effectively across the complex matrix of land ownership and rights that fragment the continent—private, public, Tribal/Nation, communal—and deliver large-scale, resilient outcomes that address the crises of our times, while healing and renewing the fractured relationship at the heart of these crises.

## **THEREFORE**

The delegates to the 12th World Wilderness Congress (WILD12), convening in Hé Sapa. The Black Hills of the Lakota People are hereby

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<sup>1</sup> <https://soe.dcceew.gov.au>

## **RESOLVED**

That, to achieve the goal of at least one million wild bison on 100 million acres by 2050 and to further expand their numbers and range during the last half of the Century, all relevant institutions, governments, and civil society in all sectors at all levels:

1. Design & Implement Strategies that Advance & Demonstrate Multi-Jurisdictional Partnerships for Bison Rematriation & Stewardship.
2. Support the Indian Buffalo Management Act (IBMA).
3. Sustain & Implement the United States Department of Interior's Commitment to the Bison Conservation Initiative (BCI).
4. Engage in Strategic International & Transboundary Agreements & Collaborations to support continental-scale restoration of bison.
5. Establish an Expanded Set of Protected Area Strategies & Designations that Help Define a More Equitable and Enduring Set of 30x30 Targets.
6. Recognize & Incentivize Bison Restoration as a Nature Based Solution.
7. Increase the Social Acceptance & Political Will Needed for Scaled Bison Restoration.
8. Establish Durable Funding Mechanisms that Reflect the Ecological, Cultural & Social Value of Continental Buffalo Restoration.
9. Develop a Strategy for Conservation through Reconciliation.
10. Recognize the Inherent Responsibility of Indigenous Peoples to Steward Buffalo and Grasslands by Honoring Treaties and Enforcing Traditional Territorial Treaty Boundaries.

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