

Science Unit 1: Introduction to Bison

Have you “Herd” of Bison?

**What is a bison? Where does it live? What
does it eat?**

**What behaviors and adaptations have
helped it survive?**

What is a Bison?



COW



YACK



BUFFALO



BISON!!!

Although we say “Buffalo,” this name is actually incorrect. Buffalo are technically a separate species that live in Africa and Asia. Bison, however, are a separate species that live in North America.

The American BISON

- Bison were once numerous across much of North America, ranging from Mexico to parts of Canada and Alaska. There use to be **MILLIONS** of bison on the Great Plains.

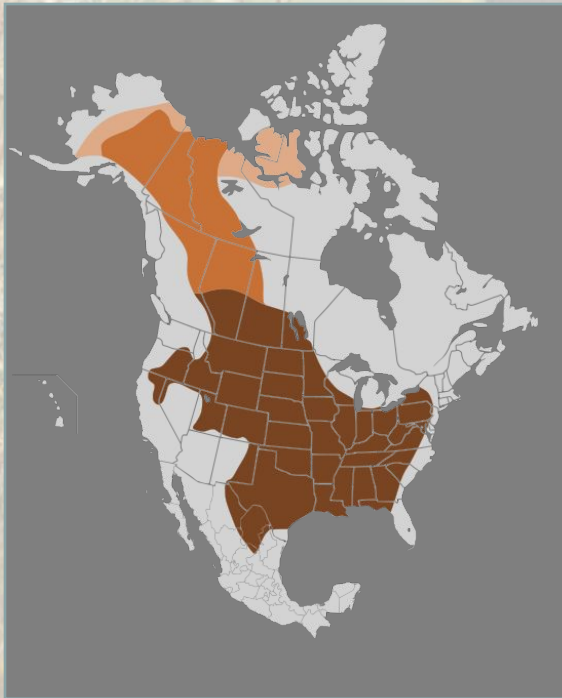


Photo Credit: Left: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bison_original_range_map.svg Photo Credit: Left:

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bison_original_range_map.svg Right:

http://shelley mesa k12.co.us/staff/computerlab/ColoradoLifeZones/Plains_Adaptations.html

But then...



Photo Credit:

http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Largest_mass_extinction_in_65_million_years_underway_scientists_say#/media/File:Bison_skull_pile,_ca1870.png

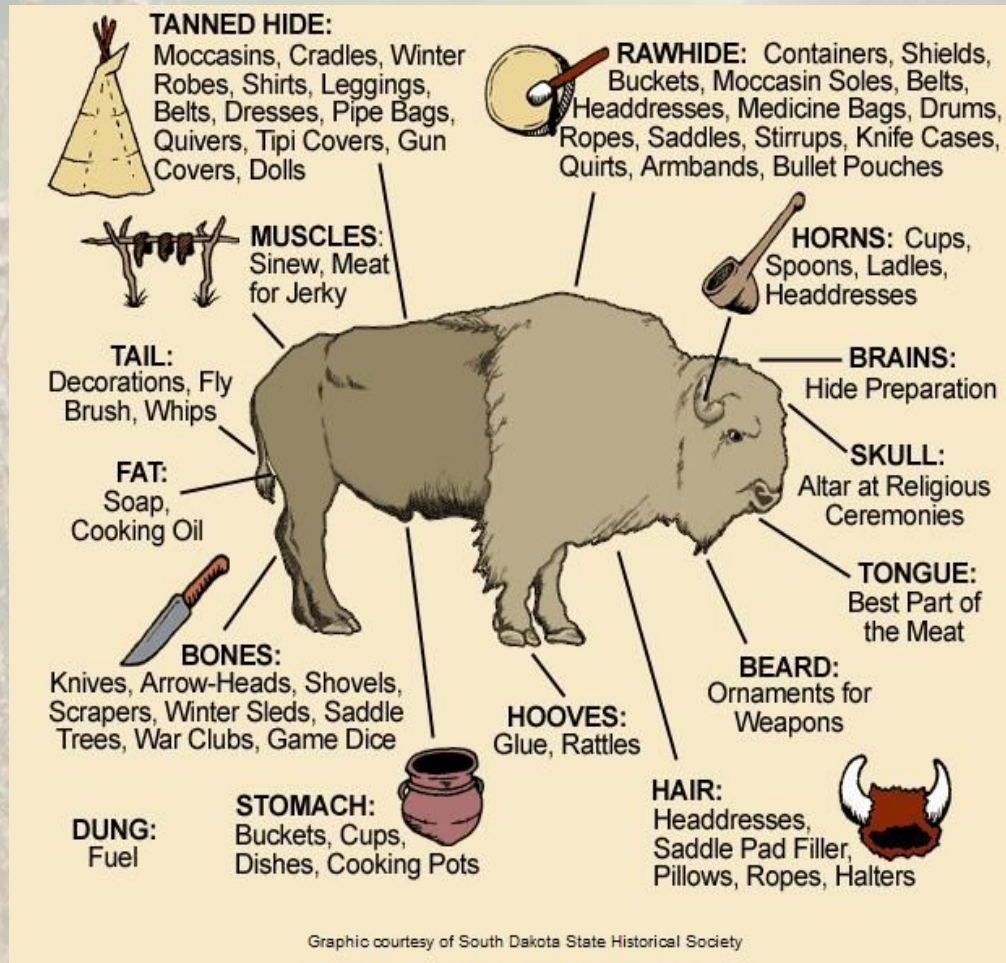
- Bison were **ALMOST** hunted to **extinction**: when no living animals remain.
- The photo on the left is a pile of bison skulls hunted by early settlers and fur traders.
- Bison were hunted for their meat, but mostly for their hide which could be made into conveyor belts within industrial factories.

Bison Restoration

- Luckily, before they were fully **exterminated** (hunted to extinction), people began opening vast tracts of land to save the remaining bison.
- One such place is Yellowstone National Park.
- *Do you know where Yellowstone National Park is?*



Parts of the Bison That Were Used



For many, many thousands of years before European settlers came to North America, bison were hunted by Native Americans for food, clothing, and tools.

Intro to Bison Behaviors and Adaptations

- Bison have adapted to the specific environment on the North American continent for many thousands of years.
- Bison have a thick hide which is perfect during the cold, harsh winters of the North American Plains. They can tolerate the hot, dry summers of the Great Plains too.
- The story of the American Bison is one of **survival**, a story that still continues today.



Photo Credit: Left: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:WR- Snow covered bison_%285370905688%29.jpg Photo Credit: Left: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:WR- Snow covered bison_%285370905688%29.jpg Right: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Commons:Featured_pictures/Animals/Mammals

Male bison will compete for females during “rutting” or mating season in mid-to-late summer.



Photo Credit: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_bison

Bison face many predators year round. Foremost among these predators are wolves and humans, but grizzly bears also have been known to take down a bison.



Photo Credit: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_bison#/media/File:Canis_lupus_pack_surrounding_Bison.jpg

Born in the early spring to give them time to mature before winter, bison calves are ready to run within a few short hours of birth. This is necessary for a herd always on the move and to keep away from hungry predators!



Photo Credit: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_bison

Bison frequently “wallow”: take dust baths that leave small depressions in the ground.



Photo Credit: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/yellowstonenps/16771066426/>

Bison have strong neck muscles as well as huge, powerful heads which allow them to “plow” through the snow much like a snowplow. This helps them get at all the grass hiding below the snow during the long, cold winters.



Photo Credit: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/yellowstoneps/11951082235/>