

# INDIAN BUFFALO MANAGEMENT ACT



## **Background:**

The American Plains Bison, also known as the American Buffalo, is deeply connected to many Tribes, and has always held great meaning for Indian peoples. Prior to the systematic destruction of the buffalo in 1800s, there were over 60 million of these majestic animals roaming freely throughout much of the United States. They provided the tribes everything from clothing, to food, to shelter, to utensils, to pouches, to headdresses, to containers, to arrows and much more. It is impossible to overstate their importance to Indian people historically and to this day, culturally.

The Department of Interior has provided nominal funds for buffalo management for over 20 years but in a rather piecemeal and arbitrary fashion, depending on who was running the BIA in any given year. This legislation continues that commitment and authorizes a permanent buffalo management program. This will provide secure, consistent funding for Tribes and Tribal organizations that already have established buffalo herds and management programs and provides the opportunity to expand the program to other interested Tribes. There are now 80 tribes in 20 states who are members of the InterTribal Buffalo Council. There were 19 tribal members in 1991.

## **Summary of the Legislation:**

This legislation would create a permanent buffalo program at the Department of the Interior. This will help to promote and develop Tribal capacity to manage buffalo and buffalo habitat, and to protect, conserve, and enhance tribes' connection to buffalo as important to Native culture, subsistence, and economic development. The bill would authorize up to \$14 million in funding for the program each year, but would not appropriate funds.

## **Specifically:**

- The bill creates a permanent buffalo restoration and management program within the Interior Department to:
  - Promote and develop the capacity of Indian Tribes and Tribal organizations to manage buffalo and buffalo habitat.
  - Protect and enhance buffalo herds for the maximum benefit of Tribes.
  - Include Tribes in the Interior Department's decision-making regarding buffalo.
- The bill authorizes the Secretary to enter into contracts or agreements, or to award grants to Tribes or eligible entities to:
  - Create or maintain a buffalo restoration or management program.
  - Plan and execute commercial activities for buffalo or buffalo products.
- The Secretary is also able to provide technical assistance as Tribes and Tribal organizations create or carry out their buffalo management programs.
- The Secretary is required to consult and coordinate their policies relating to buffalo and buffalo habitat management with Tribes and Tribal organizations.
- The bill provides Tribes continued access to surplus buffalo from Federal lands, helping entities like National Parks keep their buffalo populations within the carrying capacity of the Park's lands while requiring compliance with Federal or State law (including regulations) regarding diseased buffalo or buffalo that escape from Indian land.
- The bill also ensures that treaty rights of Tribes are not affected.