

RESTORING BUFFALO TO TRIBAL LANDS

Passed: 373-52

SUMMARY:

The House passed a bill that would support efforts by tribes and tribal organizations to restore buffalo and their habitat on tribal lands. (*December 8, 2021, Roll Call No. 427*)

BACKGROUND:

Buffalo, or the American bison, have been central to the ecosystems and peoples of North America for millennia. The continent's largest mammals once roamed from the boreal forest of Canada to the woodlands of the southeast. Buffalo are a keystone species, playing a critical role in their environment by consuming vast amounts of plant material, aerating the soil, dispersing seeds and creating habitat for other grassland species. Buffalo are also an important historical source of food for Native American Plains tribes and integral to tribal cultures, traditions and spiritual lives. An extermination campaign sanctioned by the U.S. government nearly drove the species to extinction in the 19th century. A few survived in Yellowstone National Park and other places, and over the past century, conservationists, tribes and government agencies have been working to restore the species by establishing herds on private, tribal and federal lands across the West.

Rep. Don Young (R-Alaska) introduced H.R. 2074, the Indian Buffalo Management Act, on March 18, 2021, to support tribes and tribal organizations seeking to restore buffalo and their habitat on tribal lands. The bill would establish a permanent program in the Department of the Interior (DOI) to increase the ability of tribes to manage buffalo and buffalo habitat, promote the sustainable use of buffalo for the benefit of Indigenous communities, and ensure tribes are included in decision-making related to buffalo. It would also enable DOI to enter into contracts and cooperative agreements with tribes to assist with bison restoration and management and encourage the transfer of buffalo from federal to tribal land at no cost to tribes and tribal organizations. H.R. 2074 would help return buffalo to tribal lands under tribal management, helping to write a historic wrong and restore this important species.

OUTCOME:

On December 8, 2021, the House passed H.R. 803, 373-52. "Yea" was the pro-conservation vote.