



Arapaho Herd Management Support - Range Unit 24 Expansion



Proposal Questions

Mission/History Of Organization

The vision of the Wind River Tribal Buffalo Initiative is to see thousands of Buffalo roaming across hundreds of thousands of acres, all protected under Tribal law as wildlife. We support land repatriation, community revitalization, and youth education through the restoration of Buffalo to Tribal lands.

JEDI Efforts and Impact

The Wind River Tribal Buffalo Initiative advances equity, justice, and inclusion through land repatriation, returning stewardship to the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes and rectifying historical land injustices. WRTBI emphasizes community engagement and youth education,

WRTBI started with the return of 10 "conservation buffalo" to the Wind River Reservation in 2016 and has grown into a nonprofit with over 200 buffalo. The reintroduction helped to revitalize the relationships between the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes and the buffalo, a species deeply intertwined with history and identity. Under the leadership of individuals like Jason Baldes, an Eastern Shoshone biologist, the focus has been on expanding the herd through natural increase and introducing genetically pure buffalo from other conservation herds to be managed as wildlife on the Wind River Reservation.

Final Success

Final success is achieved with 500 buffalo thriving across 17,000 acres of fully restored habitat on the Wind River Reservation.

Location Details

ensuring future generations understand and participate in buffalo conservation. Furthermore, it addresses historical injustices by restoring a keystone species that was systematically eradicated, and by its very nature, the return of the buffalo promotes ecological justice. This specific project prioritizes Indigenous-led ecological restoration, centered on traditional knowledge. Community engagement in harvesting and processing ensures cultural continuity. Hiring Frank Martel, a Northern Arapaho Tribal member, directly supports local employment and strengthens Tribal sovereignty with local land management.

Range Unit 24 on the Wind River Reservation is a 17,000-acre expanse of grasslands, historically vital to the Arapaho people and buffalo. Range Unit 24 is in the process of being converted from a Tribal cattle grazing unit to a Tribal Buffalo grazing unit. It has approval from the BIA and fencing is the main holdup. This landscape is part of the Wind River watershed and currently underutilized, holds immense potential for ecological recovery and is crucial for biodiversity and soil health. Restoring buffalo here revitalizes ancestral ecosystems, reversing degradation and re-establishing native flora and fauna - many traditionally used for ceremony and medicines. The goal is to return it to a state of ecological balance by rematriating buffalo, promoting cultural and environmental sustainability.

The Wind River Reservation offers a compelling setting for buffalo restoration due to its expansive, diverse landscape and the strong commitment of the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes to conservation. The reservation's vast grasslands, river valleys, and mountainous terrain provide suitable habitat for buffalo, as it is literally their historical range. Moreover, the Tribes have a proven track record of successful conservation efforts, which lays a robust foundation for buffalo restoration. This legacy includes the establishment of the first roadless area in the United States, demonstrating a long-standing dedication to preserving wild landscapes. Additionally, successful restoration programs for bighorn sheep and antelope, along with the protection of large carnivores like wolves and bears, highlight the Tribes' expertise in wildlife management and their commitment to ecosystem health. These conservation successes, coupled with the reservation's suitable habitat and the cultural significance of the buffalo to the Tribes, make the Wind River Reservation

Biodiversity in Project Area

Successful buffalo restoration will enhance climate resiliency by improving grassland carbon sequestration and soil health. Buffalo grazing promotes diverse plant communities, boosting biodiversity. This project increases connectivity by expanding the buffalo's range, linking fragmented habitats within the Wind River Reservation. Healthy grasslands are more resilient to drought and extreme weather, mitigating climate change impacts. The project also contributes to the broader goal of restoring native ecosystems, mirroring efforts on other protected lands.

Expected Economic & Recreational Impact

an ideal location for thriving buffalo restoration.

Restored buffalo herds will attract cultural tourism, supporting local businesses through guided tours and educational programs. Traditional buffalo processing, local crafts, and the draw of ecotourism will generate diverse income streams to the Reservation. Returning buffalo to the landscape provide wildlife viewing opportunities that enhances outdoor recreation, fostering deeper connections to the land. The project will also promote sustainable land restoration practices, contributing to long-term economic stability within the Arapaho community.

Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

Strategy:
Immediate Support (Months 1-6): Secure hay for supplemental feeding, ensuring herd health during transition to Range Unit 24.
Infrastructure Development (Months 1-12): Complete perimeter fencing to enable herd expansion.
Cultural Revitalization (Ongoing): Conduct workshops on buffalo processing and tanning, preserving traditional knowledge.
Ecological Monitoring (Ongoing): Document changes in vegetation, soil health, and biodiversity.
Herd Expansion (Years 1-5): Gradually increase herd size to 500, reconnecting family groups. Currently the Arapaho herd has 100 buffalo and the Eastern Shoshone herd has 120.
Community Engagement (Ongoing): Organize educational programs and events to promote awareness and participation.

Key Decision Makers

Key decision-makers include: InterTribal leadership, Wind River Reservation land management, and community stakeholders. Support likelihood is high and has already been felt because of relationships that have been built by our Executive Director over the past decade, and due to alignment with Tribal goals and understanding of the ecological benefit. We continue to engage and support education through regular meetings, presentations, and collaborative planning. Business community engagement can provide funding for fencing and infrastructure, technical expertise in ecological restoration, and support for community outreach programs.

Role: The Arapaho Tribe, working closely with WRTBI and the Eastern Shoshone buffalo herd managers, will lead all aspects of herd management, ecological restoration, and community engagement. The Tribe will collaborate with partners for technical expertise and resources.

Timeline:
Year 1: Secure funding, provide supplemental feed, begin fencing, support laborer salary.
Years 2-5: Complete fencing, expand herd, monitor ecological impacts, enhance community engagement.

Elevate Voices

While WRTBI is an interTribal organization, this project is driven by the needs of the Arapaho Tribe specifically, ensuring their voices are central. Community engagement includes workshops on traditional practices, participation in herd management, and educational programming. Youth are involved in citizen science, fostering future stewards. Community events and

Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

1. Increased herd health, evidenced by overall health, weight gain and reduced stress indicators.
2. Completion of all 26 miles of the perimeter fencing.
3. Documented increase in native plant species diversity within Range Unit 24.
4. Number of Tribal members who participate in processing and tanning workshops.

outreach programs raise awareness and mobilize support for buffalo restoration.

5. Increase in community members attending educational events.

TCA Funding Plan

TCA's support will provide essential funding for infrastructure materials and herd health needs including supplemental feeding, labor, and initial ecological monitoring, enabling the Arapaho Tribe to effectively manage the herd during the critical expansion phase, bridging the gap until the fencing is complete.

How long it took to complete application

Confidential Items

Understood.

Other Relevant Application Details

Photo credit to Albert Mason, WRTBI Science Director

