
THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN BISON: DOMESTICATED OR WILD? (ORAL PRESENTATION & POSTER)

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I proceed from 3 assumptions: (1) Natural selection is necessary to maintain wild bison (*Bison bison*). (2) We don't leave bison to future generations; we leave the bison genome. (3) Wildness is the opposite, in a continuum, from domestication. South of Canada, more than 200,000 bison are being domesticated in about 4500 private, commercial herds. In contrast, there are about 44 conservation herds owned by government agencies, the Nature Conservancy and American Prairie Reserve. In these conservation herds, natural selection is weakened or replaced by synergistic actions of (1) cattle-gene introgression; (2) founder effects; (3) inbreeding; (4) genetic drift; and (5) artificial selection. I review the prevalence of 12 management practices diminishing natural selection in these conservation herds, and promote a broader understanding and appreciation of the needs and values of wildness in American bison.