

Minnesota Unraveled

## EP105 - Part Two: Bringing Bison Home

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### **Chantel Rodríguez:**

Walking back up toward that bison herd in Shakopee I saw things differently this time. I didn't just see a bunch of hulking creatures. I saw the wallows, the bison made in the ground, and the puddles inside them. The grass looked healthier. There were more birds flitting around now that I was looking to find them. I also couldn't help but notice one more important part, the fence, a sign this herd is under conservation management. In part one of this episode, I spoke with a historian, a resource manager, and a conservation biologist. They told me that historically, thousands of these animals called this area home. Large parts of the state were a part of their historic range. They'd also explained that slaughter, overhunting and habitat loss had driven bison populations out of Minnesota by the 1850s.

And I could only imagine that bringing them back would take a monumental effort because you'd have to restore not only the bison but the land that they call home. So how did this herd end up back here and why bring them back in the first place? This is part two, Bringing Bison Home. I wanted to understand the reasoning behind the massive undertaking of bringing herds of bison back to the state. Luckily, resource manager, Ferin Davis Anderson, and conservation biologist, Mary Mallinger could help me with that question too. And the answer isn't as simple as you might think. Here's Ferin. She's a natural resource manager with the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community and an enrolled citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa.

### ***Ferin Davis Anderson:***

When we were first bringing them back, we wanted the community involved. So we were trying to be very thoughtful about how and why we should bring them back, because we didn't want to just bring them back and have the community after say, "Well, here we go. These are bison. This is going to be great for our prairies." We needed to know why the community wanted them back. So we were very mindful of how the community was going to react to them being back. These community members, they wanted to reconnect with a part of their culture that was taken from them and have opportunities to learn about the bison, to learn bison teachings, to learn from their elders, to understand how you break down a bison, how you use the meat, different recipes that can be used. That was all a part of why they wanted to bring them back.

But they were also very mindful of the prairie that we've spent a lot of time and effort to make our prairies really healthy and thriving. And so they wanted to bring the

bison back to also be a part of that. And so they didn't want to bring them back and have any type of overgrazing or have any negative impacts that can occur if you have too many bison in an area. So that was really good to hear for me too, because I needed to know that they wanted this relative to be part of something that they had created and that they were taken care of.

**Chantel Rodríguez:**

The we that Ferin's talking about there is the Minnesota Bison Collaborative, a partnership between stakeholders across the state to coordinate the reintroduction of these animals. One of the key partners is the Minnesota Zoo, where Mary Mallinger is a conservation biologist.

**Mary Mallinger:**

The Minnesota Zoo and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources have had a partnership since about 2012 where, and we work together on bison conservation throughout the state, primarily with bison herds at state parks. We really manage them and treat them as one herd even though they're at several different physical locations. And part of that is because we recognize that unfortunately, the vast majority of prairie bison habitat in Minnesota is gone. It's been lost, and we don't have large pieces of land that can really support large herds of bison, upwards of 200, 500, thousands of animals that just doesn't currently exist in Minnesota. We've been doing that for over 10 years now, and it has really grown and as it's grown, we've also connected with and been really fortunate to work with a lot of other partners across the state who are doing bison conservation and bison reintroduction in other ways.

And we realized that there was an amazing opportunity and truly expand what that partnership looked like, and also to work together collectively in Minnesota instead of everyone doing their own separate thing and maybe communicating occasionally when there's a need or an ask. So this past spring, a variety over 35 individuals from a couple dozen organizations and nations and communities came together here at the Minnesota Zoo and we had a workshop and really came away with this desire and need to work together collectively, collaboratively on bison conservation, but not just bison conservation, but also how it connects to land and the people in Minnesota and our history. And so we came away with the Minnesota Bison Collaborative.

**Chantel Rodríguez:**

The mission of the collaborative embodies an idea we dug into during our last episode. The idea that the prairies are first and foremost part of an interconnected ecosystem.

**Mary Mallinger:**

So our mission is to be a statewide partnership for the shared stewardship and healing of three large facets that are very braided together, bison, land, and people throughout the state of Minnesota. So we also realized while working together that it didn't make any sense and it wasn't benefiting anyone and also just not practical or right to try to separate those three that really, they are very much intertwined. And so our vision is really that we'll have restored and sustainable populations of bison on healthy Native habitat throughout Minnesota while also supporting Indigenous cultures, food sovereignty, and security and nature, positive economies. So we're really trying to take a very holistic approach to bison conservation throughout the state of Minnesota. And there's a variety of partners, but they include nonprofits, government agencies, tribal nations, and communities. And so we're very excited and really honored to be working with such an incredible group of people and communities and nations.

**Chantel Rodríguez:**

And with so many different stakeholders or players or folks involved with the collaborative, I'm assuming everyone has their own sense of why they think it's important to reintroduce bison, right? And that it's okay within this context of the collaborative to have those different reasons. And I'm curious to know more about you as a wildlife ecologist. For you, why do you think it's important to reintroduce bison to Minnesota?

**Mary Mallinger:**

Absolutely, and you're absolutely right. There are a lot of different stories within the collaborative and we welcome all of those stories and those perspectives. From my perspective, I think it's important for, again, I go back to those three legs if you will, or three braids of the Minnesota Bison Collaborative of our mission that bison as themselves, buffalo as a native North American mammal have their own right and place and belonging here in Minnesota on our land. And so just that in itself, I think speaks to the value of having them here in Minnesota, returning them. We used to have far more than we do now historically. So there's certainly value there, but also there's the land piece, and from any way that you look at it, there is value in bringing bison back to land. They are ecosystem engineers. They are really an integral part of healthy prairie, healthy grasslands for a variety of reasons, but they are an integral part of that landscape and that healthy landscape.

So I really don't think you can take them out and have a very healthy, whole functioning grassland prairie ecosystem, especially the way that historically those ecosystems functioned. And also from the people perspective, obviously First Nations, Indigenous peoples of Minnesota and outside of Minnesota, of course to North America, throughout North America, many of them really depended on bison

on buffalo. And so there's such a deep connection and a deep history there, and I think it is 100% necessary to include that when we're talking about bison conservation.

**Chantel Rodríguez:**

That deep history also comes along with a deep well of knowledge in Native communities built on generations of learning and observation, generations of a relationship. Many Native nations have deep cultural ties to bison with bison figuring prominently in their spiritual lives. The Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community where Ferin works is part of the Oçeṭi Šakowiŋ or the Seven Council Fires. Their relationship to buffalo stems from their creation story. The stories of the people and the bison of the plains is one that is interconnected and relational. The bison's near extinction disrupted Native people's ability to access a deeply interconnected relative.

It sounds like a lot of what you're talking about there is this idea of returning the bison also seems like to be a revitalization of that knowledge that in some way, shape, or form that knowledge because of things that happened, colonization, US settlement, land cession treaties, all those things that happened in the 19th century resulted in if the bison are gone, you lose connection with that relative, right? And seemingly, and that knowledge stops. Is that really what's going on here? I'm just trying to figure out why it is that folks are feeling like I need that knowledge and I don't have it and I don't understand why, and I need to talk with my relatives, my elders, in order to get that information.

**Ferin Davis Anderson:**

Yeah. So I don't think it's a secret that the United States government had many different strategies to try to remove our people from their culture and try to assimilate us into their systems or ways of being. There was a couple different strategies, boarding schools, the Dawes Act, taking us away from areas that we had known for millennia, moving us from different areas. There's just so many different things that contributed to our loss of knowledge. And so again, I think our people are just at a point now where we want that back, and we are in a position now to get that knowledge back too, or to relearn some of the things that might've been lost because I've been told too that the land teaches us. And so we have so many things that we can learn if we're just willing to take the time.

**Chantel Rodríguez:**

The US government used a variety of methods to dispossess Native nations of their land and assimilate Native people into mainstream European-American culture. Passed in 1887 the Dawes Act empowered the US federal government to divide up tribal land into individual lots. Native people were encouraged to farm and ranch

these pieces of land, just like white homesteaders. Surplus land was sold to non-Native people. The explicit goal of the Dawes Act was to create division among Native Americans by having them think of themselves as individuals rather than as members of a tribe. A counterpart to this land policy was boarding schools. These schools, whether on or off the reservation work to sever Native children's cultural, physical, and spiritual connections to their tribes. Some Native people compare their experience to that of the bison, the loss of land, the eradication of culture, and their survival in the face of destruction. So just what would it mean to bring bison back to these prairies? Understanding the answer to that question has been vital to Ferin's work at the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community or SMSC.

***Ferin Davis Anderson:***

And so the process that we went through took a couple of years, and like I said, we wanted to be very thoughtful and mindful about how we brought them back. So we visited a lot of different tribes, different organizations, state agencies that had successfully brought bison back, and we wanted to take components of what were successful at other places and bring them back to the SMSC where it made sense. And so the process took three years in total to bring them back. They were a gift from the Sisseton Wahpeton tribe in South Dakota. And so yeah, we wanted to make sure that the people in the community were supportive of the project. We wanted to understand why they wanted the bison back. Was it because they wanted to connect with that part of their culture again, which was the case, and they wanted the bison to help the prairie?

That was something that was missing in our prairie stewardship. The bison are considered a keystone species in the prairie, and so that missing component can have know cascading effects on other species. And so that was something that we were mindful of too. We wanted to understand how bison were going to impact that prairie that we had spent so much time in. And so we started monitoring our birds that were in that prairie, the pollinators, the small mammals, the herptiles, the snakes. We just wanted a really good foundation of, okay, so this is what we have here currently. After we bring the bison back, how are they going to positively impact this area or negatively? And we're going to find out, but I have a feeling that it's going to be positive.

And so now we have opportunities to bring the community out and to learn about bison. Whereas if they weren't there, a lot of the community members would have to travel pretty far distances to even see a bison. In the state of Minnesota, there's a few conservation herds like Minneopa State Park, Dakota County has a herd now. There's another state park Blue Mounds out west that has bison. But typically if you wanted to see bison, you would have to go to South Dakota or North Dakota somewhere in the Great Plains. So having them here allows for the community to learn, to reconnect, and not have to travel hundreds of miles to be able to see their relative again.

**Chantel Rodríguez:**

So how exactly can that be facilitated? A large part of reconnecting with the relative is reconnecting with the cultural practices that bison's presence makes possible. One of those is something called cultural burns. These were one of the things that European Americans misunderstood. When they saw Native people wielding fire, they saw it as destructive or reckless. That idea stuck around for hundreds of years. Just think of the Smokey the Bear campaign. But now Western ecologists have come to recognize what Native people have always known, fire is a vital part of the prairie ecosystem.

***Ferin Davis Anderson:***

We've been restoring prairies for over 20 years here at the SMSC and so when that started happening, prescribed fire was also introduced because if you're going to restore a prairie, you also need to bring back fire because your prairies aren't going to look so good if you don't have fire. And so the community brought back that practice of prescribed burning, and that was specifically for the benefit of the plant community. Now I've been here and I'm relearning too what it means. What does cultural burning mean? In the Midwest, I think some of that knowledge has been lost, and I'm trying to get some of that back again, not only by talking to my elders but also just performing the practice and again, learning from the land.

**Chantel Rodríguez:**

Western resource managers have used prescribed burns in recent history, but a prescribed burn is not quite the same as a cultural burn.

***Ferin Davis Anderson:***

And we've had a few of the community members interested in doing a cultural burn. And so that would involve maybe using something other than a drip torch, which is a tool that has mixed fuel in it. And that's typically what you use to light a prescribed fire. It's a metal canister with a handle, and it has a long spout that has a tip on it with a wick. And so through the spout, the fuel goes around and it keeps the wick wet with fuel, and then you light the wick and then it stays lit because there's a constant fuel source on your wick. I would maybe use something that was a natural ignition source, so maybe a wooden torch with some pitch at the top of it, or maybe a flint, something like that, that is away from using a drip torch because a drip torch is awesome. They're fun. They're a lot of fun.

If you've ever seen a prescribed burn or been a part of it, I know you know what I'm talking about, but it's also a very powerful tool because when you put fire down with a torch, you can't take it back and you can get ahead of yourself more easily than you

would if you had a natural ignition source. So you have to be very thoughtful, methodical of how you're lighting an area with a natural ignition source. And so that's something that I would like to bring back here and get the community involved and do it in certain areas.

Another thing that is a barrier for doing cultural burns on tribal land is that a lot of tribal land is considered federal land. And so when it has that status, you have to have certain federal qualifications to conduct any type of burning. And so for me, I consider that a barrier because if an elder or a child or a teenager want to participate in a cultural burn, they essentially have to do all this training and take a physical test and do a lot of rigmarole to try to be able to burn on their lands. And I think that that's something that needs to be talked about a little bit more. And maybe there needs to be some type of policy shifting where that allows for our people to burn in areas when we want to do cultural burning versus prescribed burning.

### **Chantel Rodríguez:**

Cultural burns are a practice that Western ecologists now understand benefits the prairie. That ecosystem thrives most with fire. There's a real reciprocity to this relationship. The prairie grass benefits from the burn, the buffalo benefit from the prairie grass, and the peoples benefit from the buffalo. We know that Native Americans and Europeans alike hunted the bison for meat and hides. The buffalo robe trade was huge in the first half of the 1800s, but they benefited from more than just that. Oh, yeah. And I think that's such an important aspect of the Native experience just because I think when people hear about Native groups and their relationship to bison the picture that pops in their head is just hunting, just pure hunting.

### **Ferin Davis Anderson:**

Yeah, for sure. And one thing I wanted to mention about something that Richard Milda, he's our bison herd coordinator. He tells a story of how on the expedition of Lewis and Clark, they commented on how sweet our people smelled. And he said it was because of our people burning bison droppings or their poo. And so that too, again, nothing was unused. That was a significant fuel source for us when we didn't have wood on the prairies. And so I like to share that with people because again, this was something that they didn't understand.

Well, why are these people smelling so sweet? And well, it was because we were burning these droppings and using it as a fuel source, but it also, it smells really good. It smells like cinnamon. And recently we had a culture camp here at Hočokata Ti, our cultural center here at SMSC, and we brought some of the youth out to our field near our bison, and we burned their bison patties, and they were really surprised at how sweet that smell was too. So it was nice to be able to bring that back to the community and say, "See, this is an example of how our ancestors used to use these gifts from the bison."

**Chantel Rodríguez:**

The Native people and Western scientists behind the Minnesota Bison Collaborative are doing more than just repopulating bison herds in Minnesota. It's returning the ceremony, ritual, and knowledge that goes along with them. Now it can be revived and passed on to younger generations. There's just one problem, one Mary's already mentioned.

**Mary Mallinger:**

Unfortunately, the vast majority of prairie bison habitat in Minnesota is gone.

**Chantel Rodríguez:**

So what do you do when you want to bring a relative back to a home that's no longer there? It takes a bit of ingenuity and a lot of hard work.

**Mary Mallinger:**

Land is going to be one of the first things, right? You need land for bison, and they need quite a bit. If you want to have bison on a pretty sustainable piece of land where you're not necessarily doing a lot of supplemental feeding and things like that, they require several acres for every individual. So you can't throw a bunch of bison into a small area unless you're managing them in some other way, which you'd need to first evaluate how much land do you have access to, and how many bison might it be able to support year-round, and how much human intervention is also either going to be desired or needed. So do you want to, or can you feed them supplementally? Do you need to add a water source? Will they have a water source on that land? What might fencing look like?

That's another big one, because we live in an increasingly urbanized and developed world, and so they're often neighboring with maybe other cattle or even housing nearby and things like that. So you have to consider things like fencing to no one's surprise typically you need a fairly hardy fence for bison. That's something that you have to consider. So there's a whole suite checklist of things. If the land, again, requires some kind of restoration, there might be even years of restoring that. Oftentimes it might be covered with invasive species that aren't going to be beneficial and support bison. So you might have to really work on introducing a lot of those native plant species and things like that for them. And then where are the bison coming from? So that's another thing. Obviously, that will shape what the process looks like. Are they coming from far away or is it going to be a long process to get them here? Is it from a neighboring community or nation that maybe is donating or gifting buffalo somewhere? So that will depend on in terms of when what time of year they get introduced.



**Chantel Rodríguez:**

Being part of this reintroduction effort as part of the collaborative when you reintroduce the bison, are you also doing anything about the land along the way? Are you working with plant science folks to help, I don't know, reintroduce native plants to a prairie or even to the more woody areas? What does that look like? How does that work together with bison reintroduction?

**Mary Mallinger:**

Absolutely. We do all of that that you'd listed 100%. So if we're going to be working with a nation or a group or an organization to reintroduce bison, there's certainly, they will shape the landscape, but they also will need a fairly healthy landscape, to begin with to support them. So oftentimes, I'm thinking of a few herds that I know of where it was historically prairie and it had been degraded or not managed well because it's a whole nother podcast. We could just talk about prairie restoration and ecology of prairies, but it does require typically a certain amount of disturbance and a variety of other factors for it to maintain a grass, to be a grassland, to be a prairie, and to be healthy.

And bison is one of them, right? So if you remove bison, then that's a huge factor. So there is a lot of habitat restoration that goes into it. Absolutely. So that might involve burning a grassland and planting native grasses and native flowers, and maybe even continuing to do that multiple years for things to really get established. It can be very, very intensive work without a doubt. It's very involved before bringing bison home and back to those lands.

**Chantel Rodríguez:**

Another crucial part of ensuring the bison's present and future health is making sure there's a robust gene pool. Here's Ferin again.

**Ferin Davis Anderson:**

So this herd that we have, we were initially gifted 25 bison, but we decided that we're going to start with 10 of them. And the reason for that is because we wanted to make sure that we had everything in place for our herd to grow sustainably and so bison reproduce very quickly, your herd could essentially double in a year. And so we wanted to make sure again, that we weren't getting over our head and that we would do this in an ecologically beneficial way. And so we started with 10, they're all female, so we call them the girls, the Pté.

Next year we're planning on potentially introducing a bull. And so we wanted to do a wellness check this fall, and we'll genetically test all of the bison in our herd and try to diversify the gene pool and decide where our bull should come from. Because again,

if you think about there were millions of bison at one point, and there was a bottleneck in the gene pool when there were only 500 left. So right now, there are only a few herds in the United States that are considered bison bison and don't have any detectable cattle DNA. And so that's Yellowstone, Wind Cave, a lot of them are in national parks. And so to try to, again, diversify that gene pool, you want to try to get males from different herds and bring them into your herd. And that was important too for the community to make sure that we're helping to promote the conservation of the bison bison and to make sure that our bison remain without cattle DNA.

**Chantel Rodríguez:**

The reason behind the mix of cattle and bison genetics goes back to the late 1800s. Cattle ranchers hoped to breed sturdier breeds of cattle that could survive on the Great Plains. One strategy they took up was breeding cattle-bison, hybrids with the few remaining bison. Experts are divided on whether there are any true bison remaining of the estimated 400,000 bison in North America today, more than 90% are part of production herds raised for meat to be sold in grocery stores or restaurants.

**Mary Mallinger:**

There are hundreds of thousands of bison technically in North America, but the vast majority of those are in production herds. So those are managed for human consumption for meat and so those would not typically be considered wild. Although what's interesting is some of those places, and I've been to them, their herds of bison very much function on the landscape and in that ecosystem, as I would say, "wild bison".

**Chantel Rodríguez:**

But with the herds the collaborative is working with, there's something important to remember, even if they're behind fences, stewarded by resource managers, carefully watched by conservation biologists, they're still wild animals.

**Mary Mallinger:**

They are basically large, furry cows. They're bovine, they're related to cows. That is true. They are certainly not domesticated cattle. And so my little public service announcement is that they should, as I really believe all wildlife should be, but treated with respect, especially when you might encounter them in the wild. I should hope that someday any listener can encounter them because they're, as I've said, magnificent, but they're definitely not docile domesticated animals. You can go... Should even try ever try to get close to hand feed grass to or pet or things like that. And we see people get into a bit of trouble. That's not a good idea for many reasons. They're I think, a lot stronger and faster than people realize. I mean, they can run over

30 miles an hour. They're huge, but they're not awkward. They're fast and they're incredibly powerful.

Fencing is definitely something that I think a lot of people assume. If you're talking about wild, there's no fencing because it's not wild. But the reality also is that, again, given just human development and urbanization and things like that, we don't have a lot of spaces left where we cannot have fencing. It's just not super practical. It's not always very safe for buffalo and for the other animals and people they might interact with. So fencing is often involved, but I would say that doesn't necessarily strictly mean they are not "wild", but it is a very interesting question.

### **Chantel Rodríguez:**

This is a colossal task. Land needs restoring and enclosures need building all before bison ever set foot on the prairie. That fencing that Mary's talking about requires careful planning of its own to contain these powerful animals that can often weigh more than a ton. Fencing has to be pretty sturdy, add onto that, the fact that bison need large tracts of land to sustain themselves. More land needs more fence, it can get expensive very quickly. And once they're there, the bison's stewards need to find the best way to caretake for them. Will they have plenty of grazing or will they need to be fed throughout the year? What if they need medical care? How will vets access individual animals? That requires building a strong system of chutes and corrals to contain the bison without causing undue stress. Fences or no, having the bison back on the landscape has allowed Indigenous communities to reconnect with the practical side of stewarding the relationships between people, prairie, and bison, but it's offered a spiritual reconnection as well.

### **Ferin Davis Anderson:**

Culturally, there are lots of ways that the bison were a part of our lives, not only through food and materials but again, in our ceremonies. I don't think it's my place to talk about how we use bison in ceremonies, but if you wanted more knowledge about that, you reach out to your elders, you reach out to people in your community and you ask, how can I revitalize this practice? How can I bring this back to my community? And there's still people that have that knowledge that would be willing to share with you. You just have to, again, develop that relationship in a way that's reciprocal. You just don't take. For us here at SMSC, you have to think that after the bison we're violently removed from the landscape, that was also a part of our culture that was taken from us. And so there are stories, there are maybe teachings that have been lost, and so now a lot of communities are bringing those back.

We're trying to revitalize some of that knowledge and so having them on the landscape provides an opportunity for those activities to happen. And something that I wanted to talk about too when we were reintroducing our bison or thinking about reintroducing bison, was that we involved the community from the beginning because some of the responses that I got during that process of like, okay, so why

should we bring the bison back? Pretty much everybody in our group said that they wanted to bring this relative back. A lot of the responses were emotional too. So it was good for us to hear that because we needed to know that they wanted to bring them back. They viewed bison as a relative, and that's one of the reasons that they wanted to bring them back.

**Chantel Rodríguez:**

That emotional spiritual connection is one that the Minnesota Bison Collaborative actively considers in their work. Can you talk a little bit about how your work partnering with Native nations looks like to reintroduce Buffalo? Does that look any different than when you're working with a non-Native partner? What kind of considerations do they have that requires maybe more special attention or care?

**Mary Mallinger:**

I would say that it does look different in the primary sense that if the collaborative, which is an array of organizations and nations, if there is a need or a desire from a tribal nation or community for bison or maybe support of the current bison herd that they're caring for, it really is led by that nation, by those people. And so depending on what their desire is, if they want to have a certain number for food sovereignty, for field harvesting, for traditional ceremonial purposes, any and all of that, that's really led of course by them. And so you really have to start by just having an open-minded and really listening, like, what exactly is it that we're coming at instead of, we certainly wouldn't want to go in there and tell them, this is how much land you have. You have to have this many bison on there. That's not our goal. We would never approach it that way. So for very many obvious reasons, including the history of Indigenous peoples and buffalo in North America.

**Chantel Rodríguez:**

You've sort of referenced, well, historically speaking, the bison did this or historically speaking, the bison's relationship with people. And so I'm curious as a wildlife ecologist, how the past helps inform your reintroduction efforts in whatever way that might be.

**Mary Mallinger:**

I'm really glad you asked that because it's something I've been thinking about a lot in this work as the collaborative is taking shape. I think about it a lot more because I think from as having been trained in Western science and having that mindset as an ecologist, oftentimes it is really tempting to just focus on the here and now, and your A, B, and C like you form a hypothesis and you figure out what you need and you just write a plan and you collect data and there is some value to that approach for sure. But it's, I think, limiting and does not encompass the whole picture and with really

any system. But when we're speaking about bison in particular, because as you alluded to and mentioned, and as I have kind of as well because Buffalo are native to North America, they have been here for thousands and thousands of years.

So they have a rich, obviously, and very complex history that I can only even begin to understand as a human that's going to live on this planet for a very short amount of time with the land and with the people. And again, I am not a Native person and I can really only begin to grasp what that relationship entails. But certainly, it is a very important part of all of this work, and you really can't and I don't believe should even think about trying to separate the history of Bison. The history is a very rich, interesting, and also tragic history here in North America for both buffalo and people and the land for all of it really. And so that is, without a doubt carried through today. It's with the buffalo, it's with the land, it's with the people. So to not listen to that story and maybe try to facilitate it or tell it depending on who you are, is really doing, I think, an injustice to buffalo in Minnesota, to the land and the people of Minnesota.

### **Chantel Rodríguez:**

The story of Minnesota's bison, land, and people is one that is and always has been intertwined. In the eyes of the Minnesota Bison Collaborative, there are plentiful reasons to bring bison back, whether it's for the cultural benefits to Native communities or ecological benefits to the prairies. One of the overarching reasons to restore our historical and cultural connections to this landscape. To do this well requires an intimate understanding of the bison's history here. It also requires that we understand we cannot replicate the conditions of bison herds from more than two centuries ago. We can though look to the past for insight on what would best serve the present.

Special thanks to Dr. Amber Annis, Chloe Cashman, and Deacon DeBoer for their help on this episode. And to Pete DeCarlo for his contributions to the research. You've been listening to Minnesota Unraveled: Pulling on the Threads of Minnesota History. I'm your host, Dr. Chantel Rodríguez. You can find more information on this episode, including transcripts, bibliographic resources, and MNopedia articles at our website [MNHS.org/Unraveled](http://MNHS.org/Unraveled). Minnesota Unraveled is produced by the Minnesota Historical Society in partnership with Pod People. Special thanks to our production team, Rebecca Chaisson, Angela Yih, and Brett Baldwin, and sound design and editing by Carter Woghan. Lead research by me, Dr. Chantel Rodríguez. Our theme music is "Careless Wanderer" by Arthur Benson. Funding for Minnesota Unraveled is provided by the state of Minnesota, the Legacy Amendment through the vote of Minnesotans on November 4th, 2008, and our generous donors and members. Thank you for listening. Until next time stay curious and remember, the tapestries of history are all around you just waiting to be unraveled.