



THE BUFFALO: A TREATY OF COOPERATION, RENEWAL AND RESTORATION

January 7, 2021

Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson
Minister of Environment and Climate Change, resp. for Parks Canada Agency
Jonathan.wilkinson@parl.gc.ca

Dear Minister Wilkinson,

We are writing to you to support the Government of Canada's plans to work much more closely with First Nations and to urge you to implement the conservation goal of 30% by 2030, to work with the DOI, USA on a continental Bison Conservation Initiative, the Convention on Biodiversity and the Paris Agreement on Climate change.

But firstly, a little bit of background from a First Nation perspective. All societies, however, they may come into existence, at one time or another, lay claim to a territory. Within that territory a culture arises from the mutual relationship with the totality of the environment including the land, plants, animals, and the cosmos. A culture consists of paradigmatic concepts, values, and customs. Paradigms are the tacit infrastructure the members of the society utilize for their beliefs, behaviour, relationships, and interpretation of what they consider to be 'reality'. These beliefs, behaviour, relationship norms, and interpretive tools of the society one may refer to as the metaphysics of that society. The metaphysics of a society become the interpretive tool for explaining everything from science to human affairs. The metaphysics of one society may be very different from that of another society.

Thousands of generations of North American Indians have come and gone since before and after the last ice age. Through their mutual relationship with the land, they have developed icons, symbols, and images about the totality of their environment. Those icons, symbols, and images serve as repositories for the knowledge arising from the application of those paradigms, values, and customs of North American Indigenous peoples. In other words, **they embody the land.**

For North American Indigenous peoples, the ensoulment of the land is a web of relationships with the earth, animals, plants, inorganic matter, and the cosmos. The web of relationship is captured in the stories, songs, and ceremonies of the different nations. Land, as a very important referent in the minds of First Nations, can be referred to as a sacred responsibility. The land is 'mother': it cannot be separated from the actual being of Indians. According to Greg Cajete, "native people express a relationship to the natural world that could be called 'ensoulment'". The ensoulment of nature is one of the most ancient foundations of human psychology. Anne Waters, a native philosopher, observes 'American Indian identity and



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worldview, a history of place consciousness, preserved through oral history, manifests discrete geographical place symbols within consciousness that provide a conceptual framework of identity as place. First Nation consciousness, and, hence, First Nation identity, is cognitively of, and interdependent with, our land base.' For David Abram, events happen **somewhere**. Events belong to the place and to tell the story of events is to let the place speak through the telling. Consequently, the many stories First Nations have about their territories. Those stories are contained in many creation and other stories about places and events. One can say that Indigenous peoples mark their territories through their stories of events at different places often referred to as 'sacred sites'.

Sacred sites embody the environmental and ecological relationships of the land and many have stories, songs, and ceremonies specific to them. For instance, the plains had buffalo roam over it. The buffalo was part of the plains eco-system. North American Plains Indians, in turn, had strong cultural connections to the buffalo. But the near extinction of the buffalo not only resulted in cultural dysfunction of Plains Indians brought about by fruitless colonial attempts to 'westernize' North American Indians but resulted in the total disturbance of the North American plains eco-system caused by agriculture and industry for profit.

One cannot forget the importance of societal metaphysics. If the metaphysics of North American First Nations were understood and appreciated, one will quickly discover that those interpretive tools referred to earlier, when applied to land, speak to notions of sustainability, conservation, leaving the land as pristine as possible, giving the land a chance to bring about an ecological balance and having humans fit themselves into that ecological balance. All of the above is meant to point out that North American First Nations were the original and true stewards of North America. Our songs, our stories, and ceremonies are evidence of such stewardship. We know the land and embody it. It is from this perspective that native scientists such as Gregory Cajete from Santa Clara Pueblo and Robin Kimmer, an enrolled member of the Potawatomi Nation, speak from in their books, 'Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence' and 'Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teaching of Plants' respectively.

In view of 30x30, the inevitable crises being brought about by climate change and biodiversity loss, it seems that we, the human species, have gone overboard, in terms of our lack of care regarding the environment, to the point where we cannot correct the situation through human efforts alone: we need help!

Consequently, the Buffalo Treaty signatories, *infra*, strongly urge you, as Minister of Environment to strongly consider the 'buffalo' as one of those relatives that can assist us to restore an ecological balance. The buffalo is a keystone species for the environment. From time immemorial the buffalo has created a relationship with the natural environment resulting in an



THE BUFFALO: A TREATY OF COOPERATION, RENEWAL AND RESTORATION

eco-balance with other animals and the plant life on the land. The buffalo, one can say, is a great environmentalist.

The Buffalo Treaty signatories stand ready to explore ways and means to work and support your Administration to achieve the goals of conserving 30% of the land and sea by 2030, to work collaboratively your Department of Environment and with the Department of Interior in the USA on a continental Bison Conservation Initiative, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Leroy Little Bear". The signature is stylized and somewhat cursive.

Dr. Leroy Little Bear

List of the Buffalo Treaty Signatories available at www.buffalotreaty.org

Cc: Ron Hallman, Parks Canada CEO ron.hallman@canada.ca and Sue Milburn-Hopwood, ADM, CWS, ECCC sue.milburn-hopwood@canada.ca



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RELATIONSHIP TO BUFFALO

Since time immemorial, hundreds of generations of the first peoples of the FIRST NATIONS of North America have come and gone since before and after the melting of the glaciers that covered North America. For all those generations BUFFALO has been our relative. BUFFALO is part of us and WE are part of BUFFALO culturally, materially, and spiritually. Our on-going relationship is so close and so embodied in us that BUFFALO is the essence of our holistic eco-cultural life-ways.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE OF THE TREATY

To honor, recognize, and revitalize the time immemorial relationship we have with BUFFALO, it is the collective intention of WE, the undersigned NATIONS, to welcome BUFFALO to once again live among us as CREATOR intended by doing everything within our means so WE and BUFFALO will once again live together to nurture each other culturally and spiritually. It is our collective intention to recognize BUFFALO as a wild free-ranging animal and as an important part of the ecological system; to provide a safe space and environment across our historic homelands, on both sides of the United States and the Canadian border, so together WE can have our brother, the BUFFALO, lead us in nurturing our land, plants and other animals to once again realize THE BUFFALO WAYS for our future generations.

PARTIES TO THE TREATY

WE, the undersigned, include but not limited to BLACKFEET NATION, BLOOD TRIBE, SIKSIKA NATION, PIKANI NATION, THE ASSINIBOINE AND GROS VENTRE TRIBES OF FORT BELNAP INDIAN RESERVATION, THE ASSINIBOINE AND SIOUX TRIBES OF FORT PECK INDIAN RESERVATION, THE SALISH AND KOOTENAI TRIBES OF THE CONFEDERATED SALISH AND KOOTENAI INDIAN RESERVATION, TSUU T'INA NATION along with other nations.

ARTICLE I - CONSERVATION

Recognizing BUFFALO as a practitioner of conservation. We, collectively, agree to perpetuate conservation by respecting the interrelationships between us and 'all our relations' including animals, plants, and mother earth; to perpetuate and continue our spiritual ceremonies, sacred societies, sacred languages and sacred bundles to perpetuate and practice as a means to embody the thoughts and beliefs of ecological balance.

ARTICLE II - CULTURE

Realizing BUFFALO Ways as a foundation of our ways of life. We, collectively, agree to perpetuate all aspects of our respective cultures related to BUFFALO including customs, practices, harvesting, beliefs, songs, and ceremonies.

ARTICLE III - ECONOMICS

Recognizing BUFFALO as the centerpiece of our traditional and modern economies. We, collectively, agree to perpetuate economic development revolving around BUFFALO in an environmentally responsible manner including food, crafts, eco tourism, and other beneficial by products arising out of BUFFALO'S gifts to us.

ARTICLE IV - HEALTH

Taking into consideration all the social and health benefits of BUFFALO ecology. We, collectively, agree to perpetuate the health benefits of BUFFALO.

ARTICLE V - EDUCATION

Recognizing and continuing to embody all the teachings we have received from Buffalo. We, collectively, agree to develop programs revolving around BUFFALO as a means of transferring intergenerational knowledge to the younger and future generations and sharing knowledge amongst our respective NATIONS.

ARTICLE VI - RESEARCH

Realizing that learning is a life-long process. We, collectively, agree to perpetuate knowledge-gathering and knowledge-sharing according to our customs and inherent authorities revolving around BUFFALO that do not violate our traditional ethical standards as a means to expand our knowledge base regarding the environment, wildlife, plant life, water, and the role BUFFALO played in the history, spiritual, economic, and social life of our NATIONS.

ARTICLE VII - ADHESIONS

North American Tribes and First Nations, and NATIONS, STATES, AND PROVINCES may become signatories to this treaty providing they agree to the terms of this treaty.

ARTICLE VIII - PARTNERSHIPS AND SUPPORTERS

WE, collectively, invited Non-Governmental organizations, Corporations and others of the business and commercial community, to form partnerships with the signatories to bring about the manifestation of the intent of this treaty. Organizations and Individuals may become signatories to this treaty as partners and supporters providing they perpetuate the spirit and intent of this treaty.

ARTICLE VIII - AMENDMENTS

This treaty may be amended from time-to-time by a simple majority of the signatories.