

DID YOU KNOW? American Bison



Before the arrival of European settlers, tens of millions of American bison (*Bison bison*) ranged freely across much of North America. By the late 1800s, however, commercial slaughter had brought that number to less than 1,000 individuals. The survival of the species depended on conservation efforts that protected small herds and allowed them to repopulate, and thanks to multiple concurrent efforts over the past 150 years or so, bison numbers have rebounded to approximately 400,000 individuals today. Of these, about 15,000 live on public lands across the United States, and one of the best places to see them is Custer State Park in

southwestern South Dakota, USA. The park's 1,400 bison, informally known as "buffalo," comprise one of the largest publicly owned herds in the world. To manage the herd and keep the population at a sustainable level, park employees unite with volunteer cowboys and cowgirls on horseback each September to gather the bison in what has become known as the "Buffalo Roundup" — a critical park function that has blossomed into a popular public viewing event. Park staff members then check the cows for pregnancy, vaccinate new calves, and sort out any surplus animals before turning the majority back out to range for another year.

— Story and photo by Danielle Phillippi