

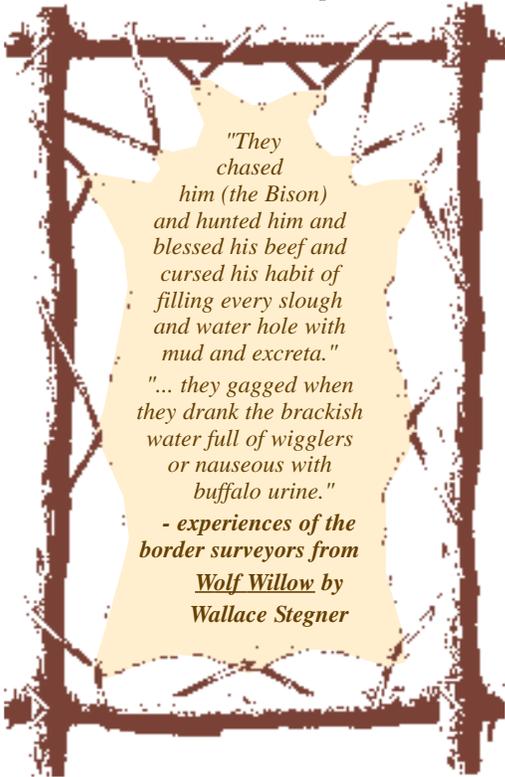
What Can We Learn from the Natural System?

The Canadian plains evolved with millions of grazing animals. Bison impacts on prairie, parkland and foothills ranges and riparian areas could, at times, be severe. However, these impacts were short-lived and riparian areas were maintained over thousands of years. The key feature of the natural system was that after there was grazing, there was rest and, often, long periods of rest.

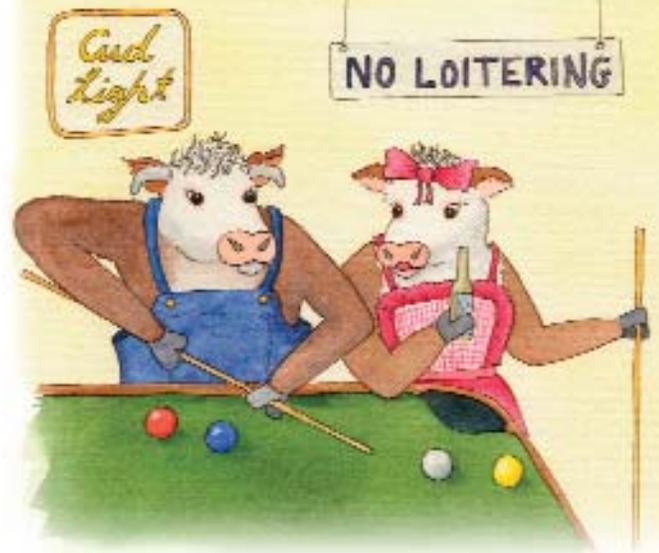


Bison impacts on the prairie and foothills ranges were often severe, but after grazing there was rest.

The yearly cycle of bison migration that incorporated summer use of the plains with winter use of the foothills and parkland provided effective rest for the riparian areas.

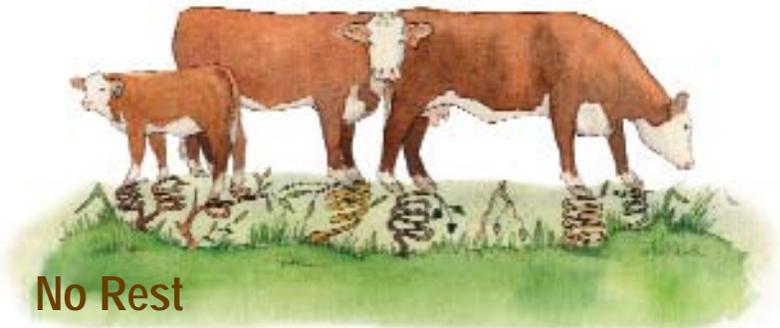


Early travellers often noted severe impacts to streams and wetlands from migrating herds of bison. Natural events such as floods, grazing from native ungulates, fire, drought, beavers and landslides did affect riparian condition and the results of these disturbances meant health could vary over time and from reach to reach. Because of the natural resilience of these systems and the long return intervals between use or disturbance, it is likely riparian areas healed quite quickly.



Compressing the Spring

When grazing is too intense, or happens during vulnerable periods, or occurs without rest, or when distribution is poor, livestock can hold down the "spring" of riparian plant succession.



No Rest

Releasing the Spring

When grazing management principles are carefully applied and in balance, riparian plant communities will "uncoil" and deep-rooted plants and woody species are released. Boing!



Rest

No Loitering Permitted!

Grazing, regrazing and trampling will damage vegetation and soil. In the natural system localized impacts were short-lived because animals did not loiter for long periods of time and use was followed by rest.