

OLSON BISON

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REWILDING THE
CANADIAN PRAIRIES

OLSON BISON REWILDING PROJECT

Location: Canada
Wilder Rangelands Case Study

*Rangelands Working Group,
Global Rewilding Alliance*

Rewilding
THE GLOBAL ALLIANCE

Photo credits: Olson Bison Rewilding Project

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Photo credit: Olson Bison Rewilding Project



Overview

The Global Rewilding Alliance has convened Alliance Partners — including Olson Bison Rewilding Project — and cross-sector experts through its Rangelands Working Group to launch the Rewilding Rangelands Initiative: a coordinated effort to restore ecological function and foster coexistence across the world's rangelands.

The Olson Bison Rewilding Project is **one of North America's most significant privately led rewilding initiatives**. For over 30 years, the Olson family has worked to restore degraded prairie ecosystems by reintroducing wild-type Bison as a keystone species.

Today, more than 5,000 free-roaming Bison inhabit tens of thousands of acres of restored grassland.



Photo credit: Patrick Thrash, Fin and Fur Films.

The Olson Bison Rewilding Project demonstrates how **private land stewardship can restore ecosystems at large scale**, support biodiversity, respect cultural histories, and inform global rewilding practice.



APPROACH:

Reintroducing Bison

Observing the Land

Instead of controlling nature, the Olsons observe and **respond to ecological feedback**, adapting responses accordingly. This supports the way they use **fences** mimicking historic herd movement patterns and allowing rest and disturbance cycles to regenerate landscapes.

Bison as Ecosystem Engineers

The presence of these large herds grazing **triggers biological renewal**. From their movement and migratory grazing which enhances soil, water and carbon dynamics to the seeds they disperse while roaming, which support native plant recovery. The disturbance regime they play on the landscape supports an array of **biodiversity cascades**.

Cultural Partnerships

The Olsons recognise the cultural importance to Bison, forming **partnerships with First Nations and Métis communities**. This integration of ecological restoration with cultural restoration reinforces community connections to land and heritage.



Photo credit: Patrick Thrash, Fin and Fur Films.



Outcomes & Impact

- **Restoration of large prairie landscapes** previously degraded by overgrazing and invasive species.
- Increased biodiversity, soil regeneration, and **carbon storage**.
- Support for **wide-ranging wildlife** including Elk, Moose, Wolves, Bears, and bird species.
- Strengthened cultural connections through partnerships with **First Nations communities**.



Photo credit: Olson Bison Rewilding Project

Private landowners can drive meaningful, landscape-scale conservation.

By restoring a keystone species and trusting natural processes, the project offers a powerful model for prairie restoration, climate resilience, and global rewilding efforts.



Part of a larger effort

These case studies are part of the the **Rewilding Rangelands Initiative** — a collaborative effort to restore ecological functionality and uplift coexistence across rangelands through coordinated action across disciplines, sectors, and geographies.

A growing coalition of the Global Rewilding Alliance, Alliance Partners and experts have joined the Rangelands Working Group.

Explore other [case studies](#) and learn more about the [Initiative](#).

ABOUT THE GLOBAL REWILDING ALLIANCE

The Global Rewilding Alliance is a worldwide organisation catalysing the rewilding movement by bringing together an active network of over 290 partners, working on every continent to help nature heal herself and secure a thriving future for people, nature and planet.

Our mission is to mainstream rewilding in science, policy and practice.

The core support of our Global Rewilding [Champions](#) is enabling us to build the hopeful, growing, global rewilding movement.



Published May 2026

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