



American Pronghorn Antelope



White-tailed Deer



Blue Grouse



GRASSLANDS

Although beautiful, grassland habitats are by no means gentle. More often than not, it is a harsh environment, making great demands on its inhabitants and exacting a merciless toll on those who fail. Although the Flathead

Valley is characterized by a relatively mild climate, dry spells can extend into drought, temperatures can at times be extreme, and fine soils are blown away if not protected by plant life.

Wild creatures of the grassland reflect the rigors of their environment. Each has adapted its own unique strategy for survival; consider the lack of cover on a grassland and the resulting lack of protection during severe winters. Bison, the prairie master, carry their shelter with them in the form of a thick, shaggy coat; ground squirrels burrow underground, away from the torturous elements; and finally, migratory birds avoid the problem altogether by flying south. Next stop 2.4 miles.

Continued from other side.

maximum level, 3300 square miles were flooded in western Montana. Water depth at headquarters would have been 1600 feet. Old shoreline contours can still be observed along the hillsides from many places along the tour. Next stop 3.9 miles.



RIPARIAN ZONES

Of all the refuge habitats, perhaps none is richer in life and diversity than the riparian, or streamside, communities. Riparian zones abound in broadleaf plantlife, in contrast to the dryer surrounding rangelands

where the predominate plants are slender-leaved grasses.

The thickets and marshes of the riparian zones and the resulting ecotones provide ideal habitats for a wide variety of wildlife including: white-tailed deer, songbirds, small mammals, birds of prey, and waterfowl. During the winter, as many as 10,000 mallards may concentrate along this stream within the Bison Range. Common summering waterfowl species include mallard and common merganser. Point of interest 1.0 miles.

⊙ Bison Corrals

The buffalo herd is worked here during the annual roundup in October. A predetermined number of animals is removed from the herd each fall to maintain a proper balance with the available food supply.

CAUTION!

To ensure a safe and enjoyable journey, please consider the following points.

- Buffalo are unpredictable and may be dangerous. Remain at your car at all times.
- Rattlesnakes are common along the tour route and throughout the area — Beware.
- Wildfire is the greatest threat to the range, be especially careful with cigarettes and matches.
- Steep downgrades — watch for caution signs and reduce speed as directed.
- Drive carefully.
- All firearms must be unloaded and dismantled, or encased, while on the Range.
- Motorcycles, bicycles, and trailers are prohibited on the tour route.

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Department of the Interior



RF-61540-10



February 1982

I 49.6/2: B 64

NATIONAL BISON RANGE

Self-Guided Auto Tour

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
JUL 02 1982
HISTORICAL





Bison



Tour Route Habitats



Elk



Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge

RED SLEEP MOUNTAIN

WELCOME: The Red Sleep Mountain self-guided auto tour is designed to provide you with an opportunity to see and enjoy the area and some of the 187 bird and 40 mammal species which have been observed on the range. The route is approximately 19 miles (30.5 kilometers) over a rather steep, but good, gravelled road. The tour takes approximately 2 hours, but you may wish to spend more time.

Please remember, your chance of seeing wildlife depends on the weather, time of day, habits of each species, the speed at which you drive, and your ability to "spot" birds and mammals. You will find binoculars or a spotting scope helpful. Have a good day!

⦿ Point of interest.

TOUR BEGINNING: Please be considerate. Your conduct governs the degree of enjoyment of those who follow. Enjoy the wildlife but disturb them as little as possible. Excessive noise or physical disturbance may cause various species to withdraw from the tour route where they can no longer be observed. Vehicles must remain on the tour road.

As you travel the tour route, notice the signs which identify interpretive stations and points of interest, they correspond to the paragraphs which follow. First stop 1.4 miles.



HABITATS

What is a habitat? A habitat is a place that provides a living creature with everything needed for survival. Habitats can be as small as a drop of pond water for some microscopic organisms, or as large as a continent for migratory

waterfowl. The Bison Range is capable of supporting a wide array of wildlife because it provides a wide variety of suitable habitats. You will travel through three major habitat types: grassland, forest, and streamside thickets. Each of these can be observed from this site. Point of interest, 2.7 miles.

⦿ Elk Lane

Originally constructed to aid in live-trapping of surplus elk which were used to restock other areas. It leads to a set of corrals and loading chutes about 1 mile north. The lane is now used principally for the annual buffalo roundup. Next stop 2.6 miles.



THE ECOTONES

When two or more habitats overlap, an edge or ecotone is the result. In these ecotonal areas, plant species from each of the habitat types reside together. These are important wildlife areas because not only are

animals from more than one habitat represented, but species unique to the ecotone are also present.

Here at station two, you will have an opportunity to stretch your legs while walking through an ecotone. The trailhead is situated on a moist, cool, north-facing slope. This habitat type is dominated by the short-needed Douglas fir tree. The end of the trail is located on a dry, warm, south-facing slope. This habitat type is dominated by the grasses, and the long-needed Ponderosa pine. In the spring, the yellow-flowered "balsamroot" turns the slopes a showy yellow.

Between these two distinct habitat types, the trail crosses over a ridge. You will probably notice that both the short-needed Douglas fir and the long-needed Ponderosa pine grow in this area along with the grasses. This is an ecotone, a good place to quietly watch for birds and small mammals. Next stop 0.7 miles.



OF GLACIERS AND DUCKS

Twelve thousand years ago, a massive glacier covered the valley below. As the glacier receded, portions melted faster than others, leaving behind large blocks of ice. These blocks of ice gradually

melted through the years, leaving depressions in the landscape. Today, these depressions are glacial potholes, or ponds.

Small ponds surrounded by cattails and bulrushes provide critical habitat for waterfowl. The Flathead Valley supports one of the largest breeding populations of redhead ducks on the continent, and a resident Canada goose population of 2,000 birds.

Wetland habitat is rapidly disappearing from our countryside as agricultural and urban priorities change. Since the beginning of this century, over 50 million acres of wetlands have been drained. Refuges such as Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge, administered by the Bison Range, and visible 8 miles to the north, are part of an effort to save this resource. Point of interest, 1.0 miles.

⦿ Ancient Lake Missoula

The highest peaks on the Bison Range were once islands in a prehistoric lake. The maximum level of Lake Missoula was 4200 feet. An ice dam on the Clark Fork River near the Montana-Idaho border created the lake. At

Continued at bottom of next page.