

### Buffalo: Controlling Population Growth

Buffalo have had a place in Custer State Park since the first herd of 36 animals was brought to the park in 1914. Thriving in their native habitat, the herd quickly outgrew the amount of forage available on the park's pastures and rangelands. Park managers faced the prospect of losing both the rangeland and the buffalo, but they knew that by occasionally gathering together almost all of the buffalo and culling a select few from the herd, the forage would be conserved and the buffalo and other grazing animals in the park would likely have enough to eat year after year.



Buffalo entering corral, Custer State Park. (Still from the film)

During this activity your students will learn about the efforts at Custer State Park and Badlands National Park to maintain a healthy buffalo (American Bison) population by facilitating an annual roundup. Your students will also learn about traditional uses of tatanka (buffalo) by Native Americans, about the size of a buffalo head and how organisms coexist in an ecosystem by playing a hands-on game.

### Process:

#### Day 1

- Introduce the activity by learning about Custer State Park's efforts to maintain a healthy buffalo population. View archival footage from a 1938 roundup at Custer State Park (Formats: [DLL](#) / [Watch PBS](#)). Then view additional video footage and photos on the following [website](#).
- An annual buffalo roundup also takes place at Badlands National Park. View "[Dakota Life: Badlands Bison Roundup](#)" to learn about similar efforts at the National Park to maintain a healthy population of buffalo. The history of buffalo in the region, the roundup and the reasons for it are discussed.

- Possible Activities:
  - Use an interactive whiteboard or a projector/screen to view the following interactive PowerPoint presentations about the traditional use of the buffalo by Native Americans. [Traditional use of Tatanka \(buffalo\)](#) is a 4 part PowerPoint series developed by Badlands National Park and South Dakota Public Broadcasting. The PowerPoint series includes a brief history of buffalo in South Dakota.



Buffalo roundup 1938, Custer State Park. (Still from the film)

Also, there are photos of buffalo parts, like a buffalo hide and tail. Your students should hypothesize the traditional use of each buffalo part and its location on the buffalo before the answer is revealed. Continue to click through the buffalo parts slides and answers.

- How Big Is a Buffalo? & Buffalo Fractions Activities (Provided by the South Dakota State Historical Society) The students will work together to create a life sized buffalo head.
  - Background information and the activities:
    - [Lesson plan and background information](#)
    - [Buffalo head sections](#)

### Day 2

- The students will learn about the interactions of organisms in an ecosystem by playing an interactive hands-on game called Chomp, Nibble, Grow, Grow, Grow.
  - [Video describing the rules of the game](#)
    - [Additional related video:](#)
      - Scroll down to "Otters, Urchins and Kelp" for related clip.
      - Scroll down to "An Urchin Matter" for entire episode.
  - [Chomp, Nibble, Grow, Grow, Grow Lesson Plan](#)