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Review of *Bring Back the Buffalo!: A Sustainable Future For America's Great Plains* By Ernest Callenbach

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Bring Back the Buffalo!: A Sustainable Future For America's Great Plains. By Ernest Callenbach. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1995. Maps, illustrations, photographs, notes, recipes, acknowledgements, index. 280 pp. \$25.00 cloth, \$16.96 paper.

"This book attempts to make a constructive contribution," writes Ernest Callenbach in *Bring Back the Buffalo!* The author hopes his work will assist in an unprecedented transformation of the Great Plains from "net-energy-negative agriculture" to "net-energy-positive agriculture" that will produce a sustainable future for the area currently suffering from population loss, reliance on government subsidies, corporate consolidation of family farms, and environmental degradation. Such change remains contingent upon bison and wind power. Callenbach presents his argument in three parts. First, he recounts the remarkable productivity achieved on the bison-rich Plains prior to Euro-American intervention and its subsequent alteration. The book's second part describes the socio-economic benefits of bison and their current status on Native American reservations, public lands, and private ranches. Third, Callenbach offers reasons and plans for bison range restoration accompanied by wind power.

Epic American opportunity and the need for local involvement highlight many of Callenbach's important themes. He contends that much of the world endures the degradation of land, laborers, and communities caused by short-sighted development and agribusiness. America's Great Plains possess nature's bounty of sun, grass, and wind which could allow the region to restore its indigenous flora and fauna for a healthy environment while providing clean energy for a self-reliant system. Bison prove critical to this improvement: their natural grazing tendencies cause range productivity, and they offer better financial profits than cattle. Natural bison raising and wind power, however, require local support. Native Americans lead the way in Plains reconstruction. Callenbach

explains that other Plains residents must share in the “communitarian ethic” to facilitate the conglomeration of lands necessary for range restoration. Wind power projects, which he sees working best for local energy consumption, require large plots of land as well. The dream of a sustainable future for the Plains will not come to fruition without local folks embracing the idea.

Callenbach’s work warrants reading by anyone interested in a sustainable future. With a journalist’s prose style, he offers provocative history, statistics, and polemics. Although the book contains endnotes, academicians may be bothered by a lack of citations for some historical information. Adequate supporting documentation exists for Callenbach’s main

arguments, however. Knowing that he must persuade traditionalist Plains residents, Callenbach offers revolutionary but not radical plans. The book calls for a smooth transformation of an enhanced Plains economy. Communication is a two-way process. Callenbach performs his part in this process by making a “constructive contribution” with *Bring Back the Buffalo!* The book deserves a receptive audience of policy-makers and Plains inhabitants. Its success could follow the “fate of the bison [which] may well prove emblematic of the future of our nation.”

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