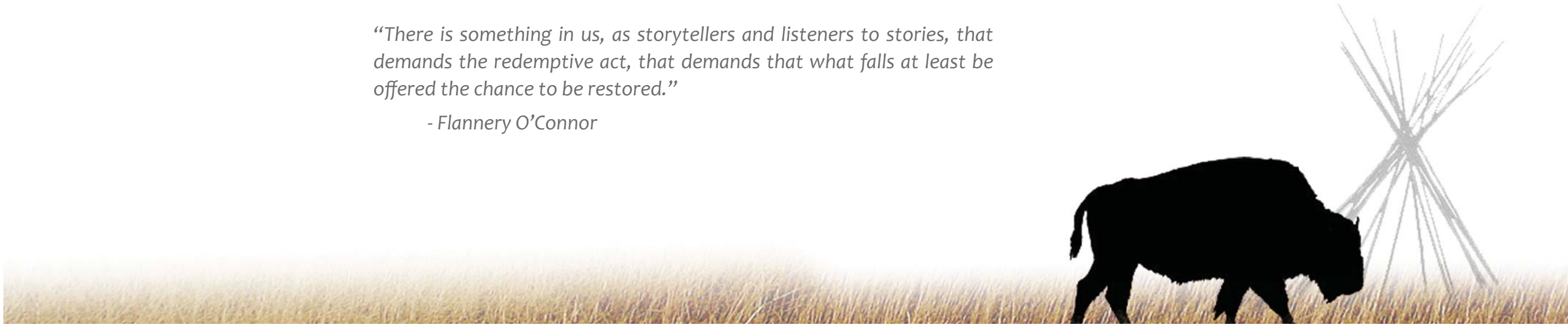


WIND CAVE BISON STATION

Hot Springs, South Dakota

A Bison Station within Wind Cave National Park walks the razor's edge between reverence and tourism.

"There is something in us, as storytellers and listeners to stories, that demands the redemptive act, that demands that what falls at least be offered the chance to be restored."
- Flannery O'Connor



INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

The United States' dealings with the Native Americans is one of the blackest parts of history. As American westward expansion claimed more and more indigenous lands, the Native Americans were eventually forced onto the reservations where many remain are today. Many were coerced to change their religion, clothing, and other important cultural aspects including their dwellings.

This raises the question of whether or not design can adapt to convey cultural narrative in a new way. Can a marginalized culture find redemption through an evolving built form?

"When I was older, I learned what the fighting was about that winter (1862) and the next summer. Up on the Madison Park the Wichitas (white men) had found much of the yellow metal that they worshiped and that makes them crazy, and they wanted to have a road through our country to the place where the yellow metal was. They told us that they only wanted to use a little land as much as a wagon would take between the wheels, but our people know better. And when you look about you now, you can see what it was they wanted!"
- Black Elk, Sioux medicine man

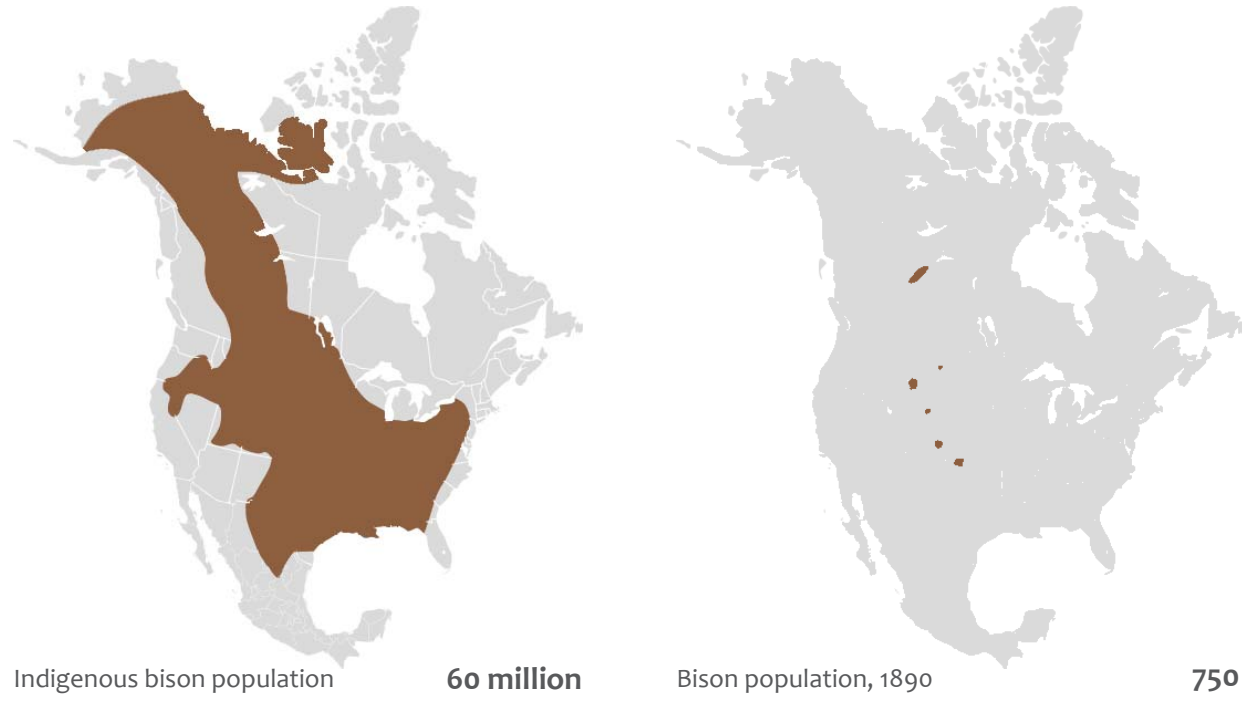


Map shows the change in land held by Native Americans from 1794-1890.

PLAINS BISON

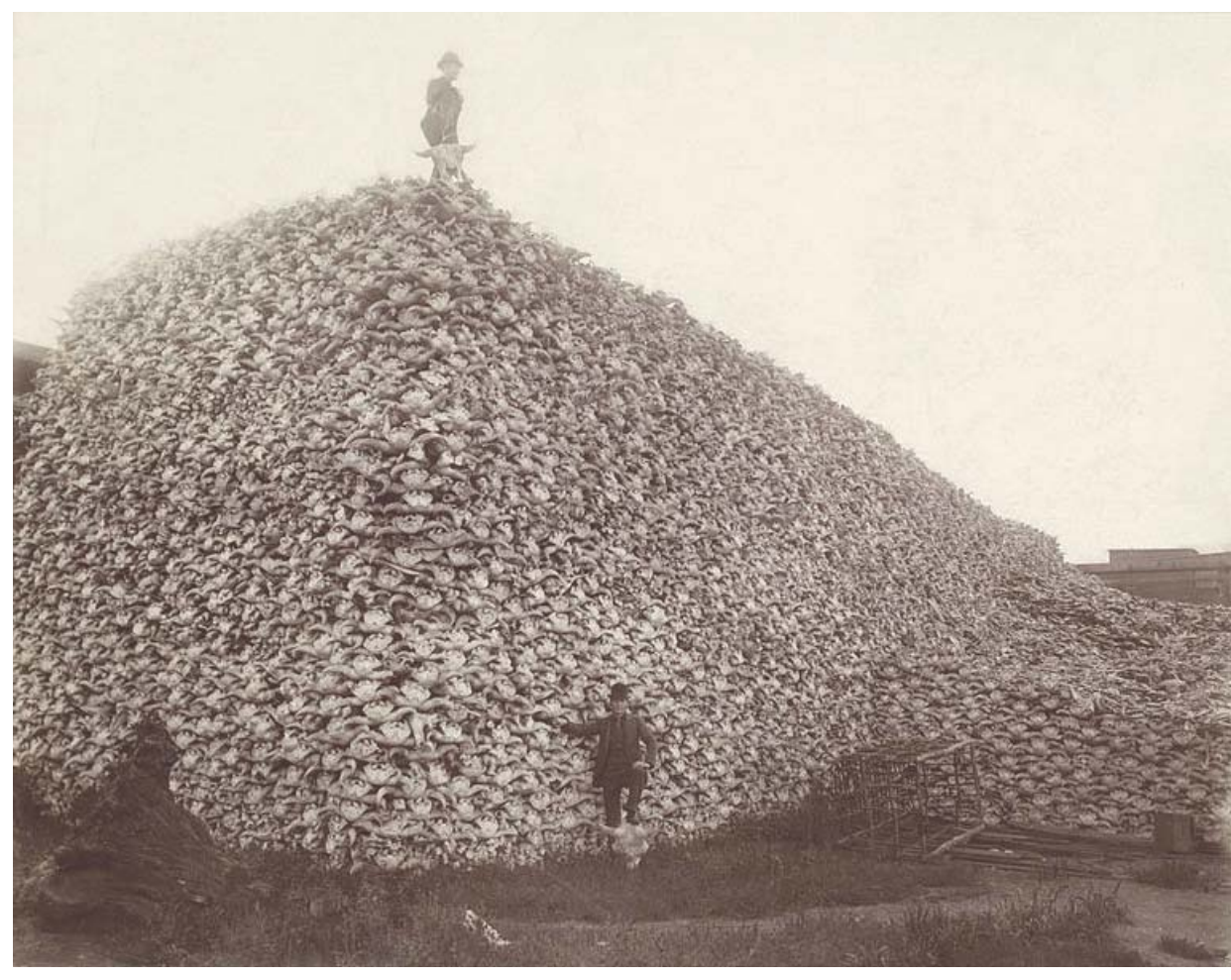
Simultaneous to this, the story of the Plains Bison was unfolding in a rapid and egregious way. In 1870, in a form of indirect genocide, the US government began exterminating Bison with General R.L. Dodge noting "Every buffalo dead is an Indian gone." Likewise, in 1871 Secretary of the Interior Columbus Delano told Congress, "I would not seriously regret the total disappearance of the buffalo from our western prairies, in its effect upon the Indians, I would regard it rather as a means of hastening their sense of dependence."

By 1890, the number of Bison on the American Plains had dropped from a pre-Columbian level of an estimated 10 million down to 750.



"That fall, they say, the last of the bison herds was slaughtered by the Wichitas. I can remember when the bison were so many that they could not be counted, but more and more the Wichitas came and they killed them until there were only heaps of bones scattered where they used to be. The Wichitas did not kill them to eat; they killed them for the meat that makes them crazy, and the need of the hides to sell. And when there was nothing left but heaps of bones, the Wichitas came and gathered up even the bones and sold them."
- Black Elk

"Every buffalo dead is an Indian gone."
- United States General R. L. Dodge



photograph showing "buffalo slayers" atop a pile of bison skulls

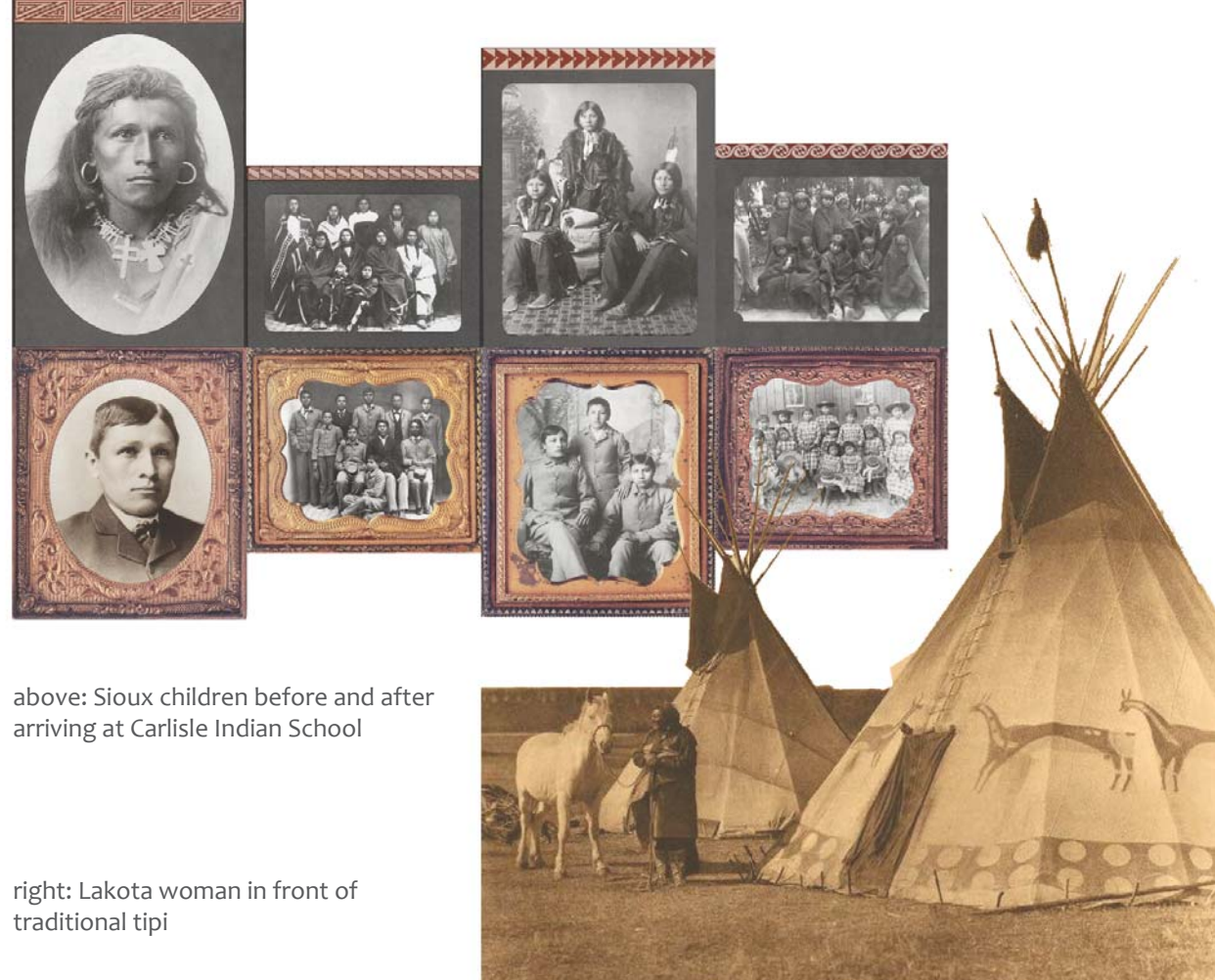
LAKOTA SIOUX

There is no culture in which these two stories are more closely intertwined than with that of the Lakota Sioux. For centuries these peoples lived nomadically on the plains, managing the landscape. The Plains Bison was an integral part of Sioux life, acting as their primary means of food and clothing.

CULTURAL NARRATIVE

Farkas Architects describe the act of building as "a critical cultural act that engages our most fundamental desires and aspirations." The expression of built form can convey many things about those who build it and the time and place in which it is built. In his book Integral Sustainable Design, Mark Delany points out the inherent difficulty that arises when architects think about a building from many perspectives. He argues that many buildings do well in terms of energy performance, but lack the cultural meaning that ties it to a specific people and place. Done with care, design has the potential to be ecologically responsible while also putting forth a culture's significant myths and values. No greater example of this synthesis exists than the tipi.

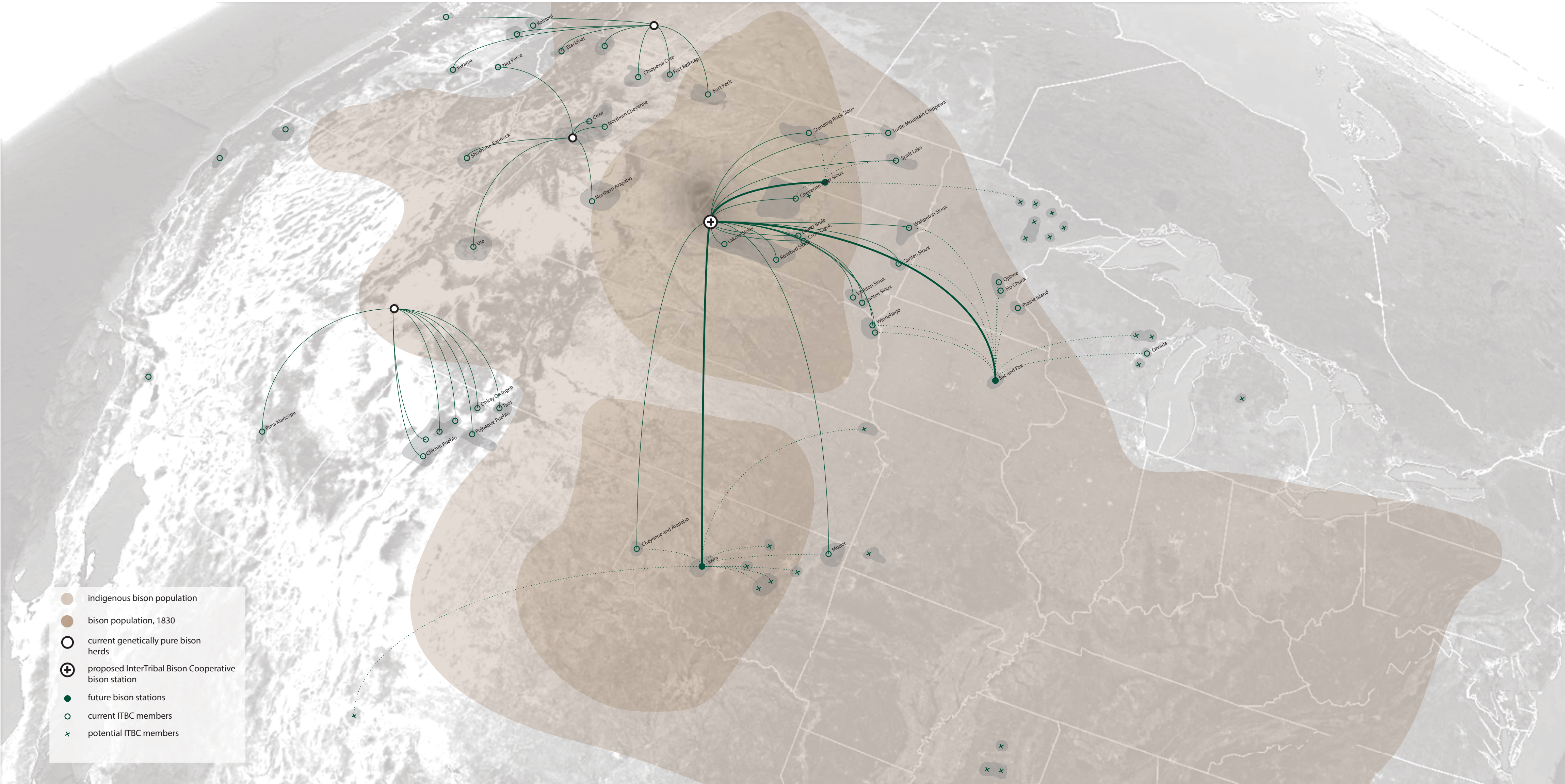
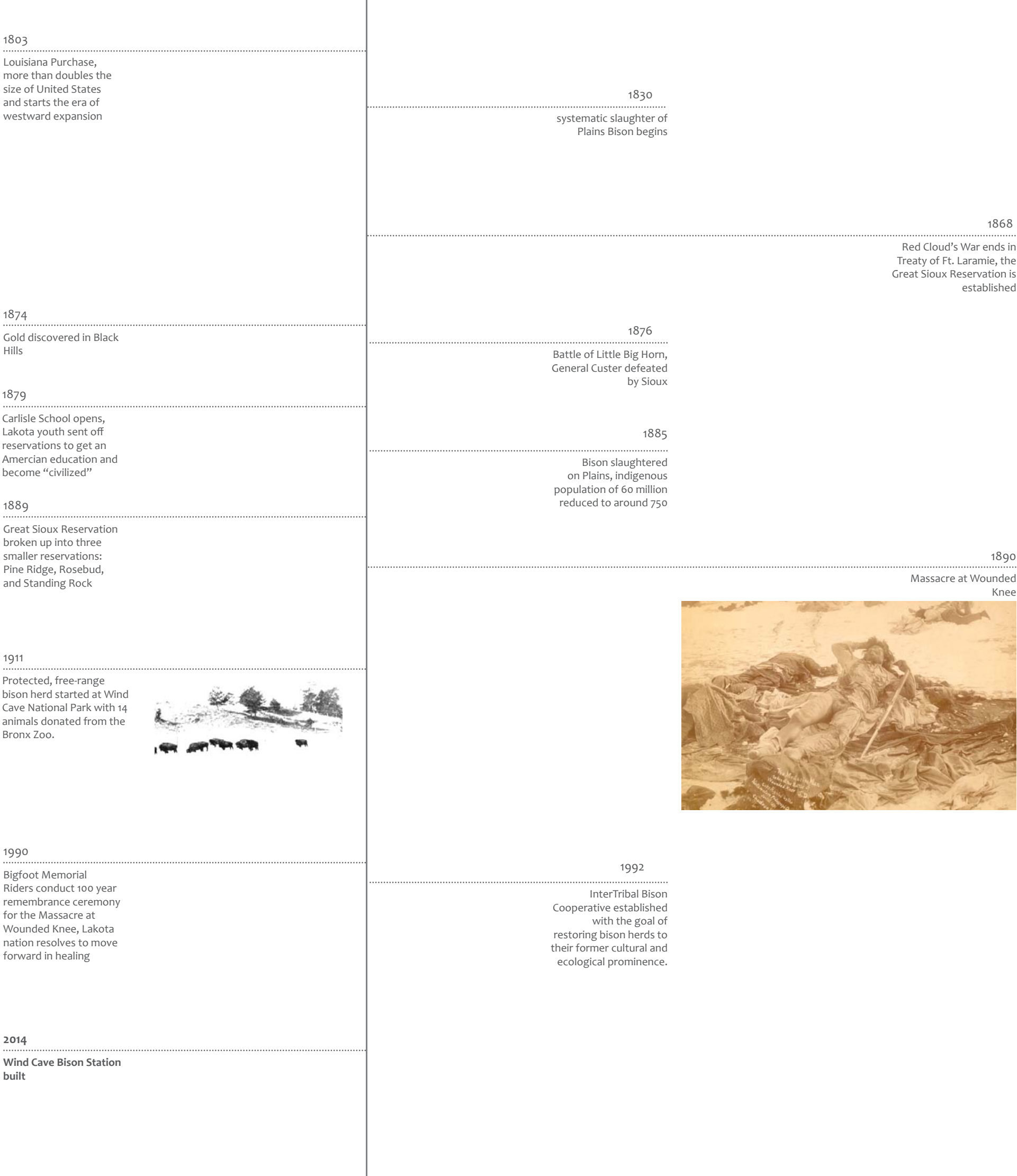
"The American Indian was strictly a practical man. But he was also a born artist."
- Stanley Vestal



above: Sioux children before and after arriving at Carlisle Indian School

right: Lakota woman in front of traditional tipi

TIMELINE



HISTORY

In 1914, as a response to the dwindling population of the bison on the plains, the American Bison Society searched for places to start free-ranging bison herds. Wind Cave National Park was chosen as one of the first places for the bison to return to the wild. The New York Zoological Society donated bison to start the herd at Wind Cave. Currently, the Wind Cave herd is one of only four genetically pure bison herds in North America. Today, there are about 450 free-ranging bison in the park.

SITE

The project is located in Wind Cave National Park, near Hot Springs, South Dakota. The park is in the southeastern portion of the Black Hills. This region of low mountains is considered by the Lakota as sacred. The Black Hills carry significance because of their link to game animals and ideas of emergence, their connection to sacred caves and springs, and their ties to ceremonial observances such as the Sun Dance. The project stands as a counter project to the existing visitor center, highlighting the recent history of the Black Hills, and specifically Wind Cave National Park. While the bison have begun a return to their former prominence, there are still no signs of the ethic of stewardship and unity with nature that allowed the Lakota to exist in the Black Hills for centuries without harming it.

ITBC

Bison from the Wind Cave herd are regularly supplied as stock to other areas of the country looking to start or maintain a herd. In addition to this, some bison are given to local tribes for cultural and religious purposes via the Intertribal Bison Cooperative. The map above proposes how the project could act as a hub for the ITBC. It capitalizes on existing efforts and imagines a way in which the network of bison ranges could grow and aid in the continuing resurgence of this endangered species. Several smaller herds could continue to receive bison from Wind Cave National Park until their own herds are at a stable size. They could in turn begin giving bison to smaller tribes around them. In this way, the bison could once again find its place amongst the indigenous cultures of North America.

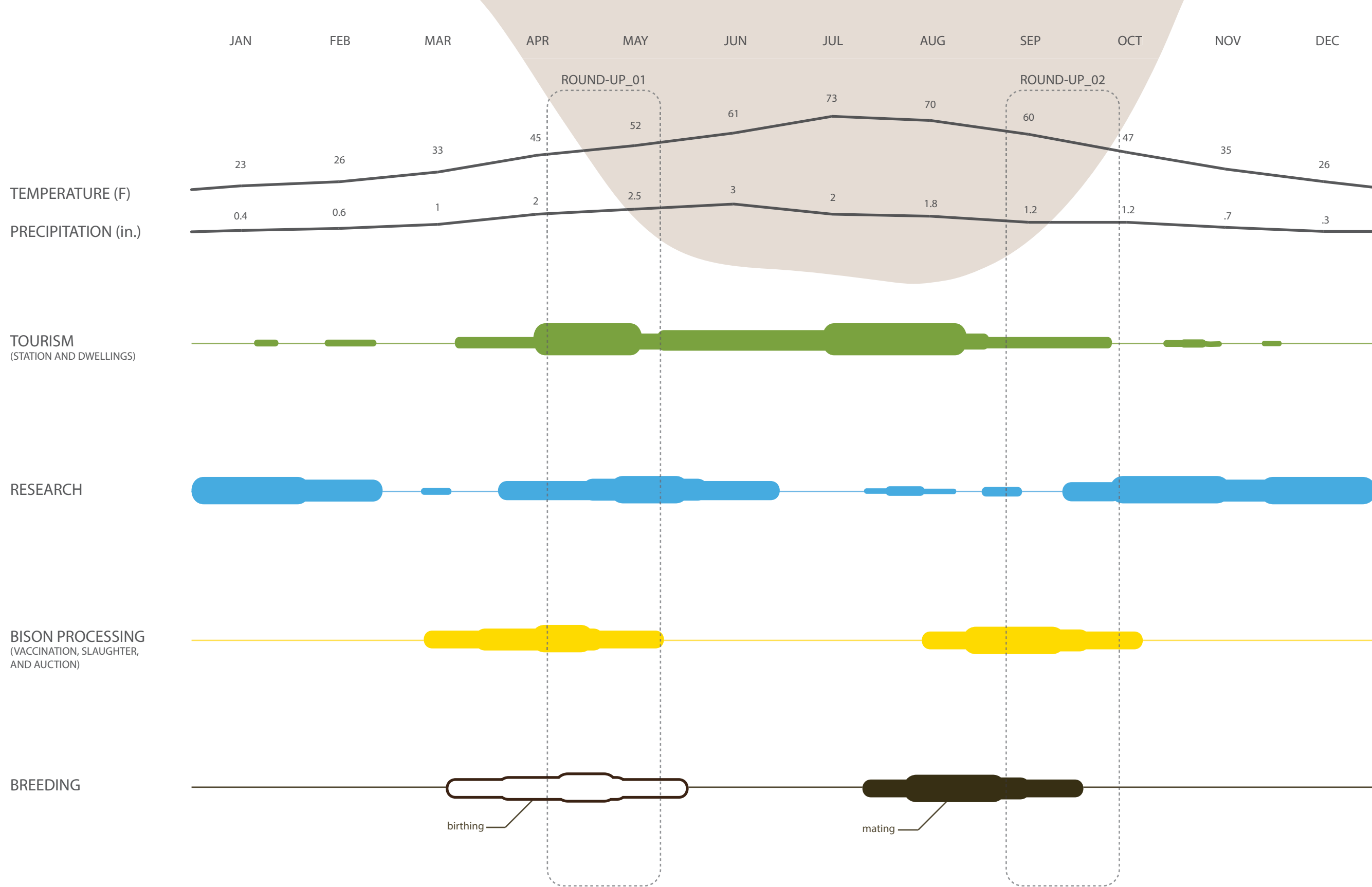
PROGRAM

As part of its program, the project will introduce a bison station to serve in the roundup and distribution of these animals in the Wind Cave herd. The station deals with things like research and vaccination that are necessary to allow the herd to continue to grow in a healthy way. There is also an element of slaughter that is necessary to grow the herd in a sustainable way. Weak and injured bison are culled and the meat and other products are processed at the station. They are then used by visitors and natives alike for food, ritual, etc. Through this, visitors will be provided an interactive cultural experience as they are able to participate in and witness various parts of this process on a bi-annual basis.

The dwellings spread around the landscape are meant to be a place where visitors can come and stay a few nights with their families. The dwellings are designed to respond to time, season, and climate in hopes of creating an immersive experience. In this way, one can understand the Lakota ethic of living with the earth.

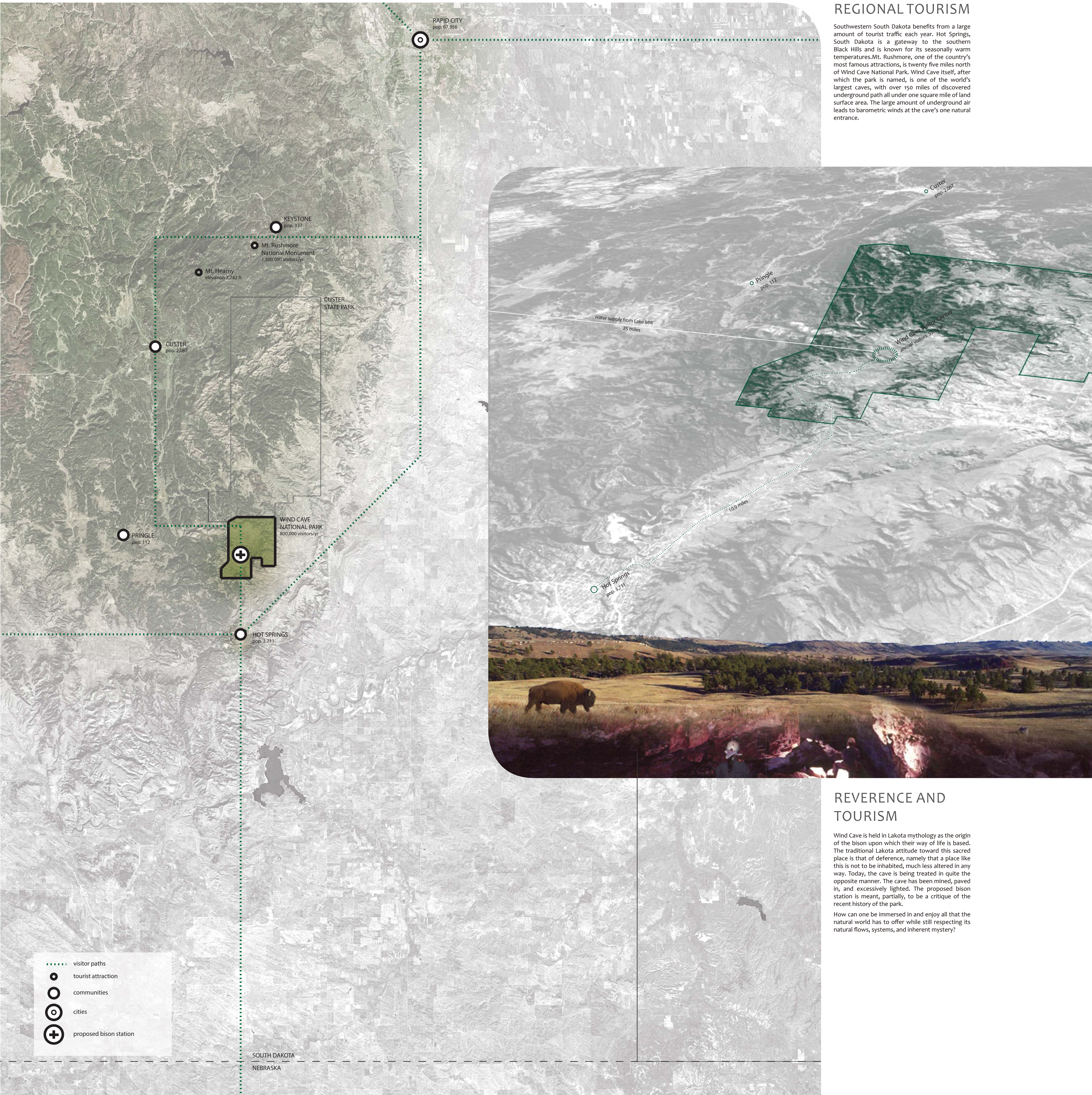
PROJECT CALENDAR

The project calendar to the right highlights the point in the year at which the major pieces of the program take place. This analysis reveals the optimal times for the bi-annual roundup to take place.



REGIONAL TOURISM

Southwestern South Dakota benefits from a large amount of tourist traffic each year. Hot Springs, South Dakota is a gateway to the southern Black Hills and is known for its seasonally warm temperatures. Mt. Rushmore, one of the country's most famous attractions, is twenty-five miles north of Wind Cave National Park. Wind Cave itself, after which the park is named, is one of the world's largest caves, with over 150 miles of discovered underground path all under one square mile of land surface area. The large amount of underground air leads to barometric winds at the cave's one natural entrance.



REVERENCE AND TOURISM

Wind Cave is held in Lakota mythology as the origin of the bison upon which their way of life is based. The traditional Lakota attitude toward this sacred place is that of deference, namely that a place like this is not to be inhabited, much less altered in any way. Today, the cave is being treated in quite the opposite manner. The cave has been mined, paved in, and excessively lighted. The proposed bison station is meant, partially, to be a critique of the recent history of the park.
How can one be immersed in and enjoy all that the natural world has to offer while still respecting its natural flows, systems, and inherent mystery?

