**Collaborative Restoration Workshop:** *Working Toward Resilient Landscapes and Communities*

**Poster Abstract**

Submitted by: Dr. Keith Aune, Bison Program Director and Julie Anton Randall, National Bison Coalition Coordinator (ecomtinternational@verizon.net; (703) 864-7770

**An Emerging Model of Collaborative Landscape Restoration:**

**Opportunities and Obstacles to Wild Bison Recovery on Landscapes Involving National Forests and Grasslands**

The North American bison once ranged the continent, numbering 30-50 million. For 12,000 years as the dominant herbivore, the bison’s grazing patterns influenced the structure of grass species, mosaics of vegetation, fire dynamics and human survival. In large herds, bison are an ecological keystone species and in myriad ways benefit other native species. Bison numbers dropped to <1,000 by 1880; combined with the transformation of grassland habitats by rapid agricultural development, other species declined. America’s grasslands today are the most threatened and least protected ecosystem.

Bison populations regenerated to about 300,000 in production and <30,000 in conservation, with varying genetic integrity. Bison recovery involves multiple partners motivated by a diversity of perspectives and both public and private investments in bison habitat. Utilizing a landscape-scale approach, U.S. Forest Service lands can connect nearby federal, state, tribal and private lands with wild bison (or potential for bison restoration) to recreate a contiguous grasslands ecosystem with a herd size large enough to restore ecological benefits to other species like grassland birds and predators. Outcomes explored include National Forests and Grasslands as repository sites and progeny sources of high-genetic integrity bison, and bison as a climate change-resilient species contributing to food security.