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"Restoration and the Affective Ecologies of Healing: Buffalo and the Fort Peck Tribes"

Hobson Haggerty, Julia, Elizabeth Lynne Rink, Robert McAnally, and Elizabeth Bird

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Intentional acts of restoration are purported to have a multitude of benefits, not only for non-human nature, but for the people who conduct restoration. Yet, there is limited scholarship that considers the nature of these benefits in all of their complexity, including psychological and spiritual dimensions. Using the case study of the restoration of bison/buffalo by the Sioux and Assiniboine tribes to their reservation in Montana, USA, we observe that ecological restoration can promote and facilitate emergent and dynamic processes of reconnection at the scale of individuals, across species and within community. In an indigenous setting marked by historical trauma and other challenges, these re-connections have therapeutic benefits that align with the relationality that mental health frameworks suggest is a key protective factor for many indigenous people. Affective experiences of and with buffalo play an important role in building and articulating that therapeutic relationality in our case study. Our work points out the importance of access to spaces of affective ecologies and personal investment in spiritual traditions as elements of the therapeutic benefits of restoration in this case, raising questions and possibilities for future research that considers patterns and avenues of diffusion of restoration benefits within social groups more broadly. (Text from authors' abstract)

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