American Prairie Reserve is a nonprofit creating the largest nature reserve in the continental United States, a spectacular refuge for people and wildlife preserved forever as part of America’s heritage. In addition to buying land to build this modern day park, the Reserve offers new opportunities for recreation and exploration and is restoring wildlife and important natural processes on Montana’s eastern plains. This progress wouldn’t be possible without the support of members from across the country, who have said “yes!” to things like bison reintroduction, science research, conservation education, and making it easier for the public to enjoy the great outdoors.

But people aren’t the only things hard at work rebuilding the prairie ecosystem! This book features nature’s park builders – plants, animals, and insects that help make our grasslands healthy, vibrant, colorful, and resilient in their own ways. As you give life to each design, we hope that the beautiful intricacies of the prairie will inspire you to get involved. Learn more at americanprairie.org.

**POLLINATORS** like the Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) are critically important to plant life across the prairie, including wildflowers like the Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea angustifolia*). By transferring pollen from plant to plant as they look for nectar, pollinators promote plant genetic diversity. Pollinator insects, like bees, moths, wasps, and butterflies, are also part of the prairie food chain for hungry birds.

**BIRDS OF PREY** such as the Swainson’s Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) are some of the great hunters of the plains. Soaring above the rolling hills, or perched above open fields, the eating habits of birds of prey (look at those talons!) help control populations of small rodents and rabbits.

**NATIVE PLANTS** create the foundation of the prairie. Deep, underground root systems keep the soil intact and also store carbon removed from the atmosphere. Above ground, they are nutritious snacks for bison, elk, pronghorn and grouse. Can you identify each species as you color? Hint: look for Big Sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), Western Wheatgrass (*Pascopyrum smithii*), Blue Grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*), and Rubber Rabbitbrush (*Ericameria nauseosa*).

**PRAIRIE DOGS**, a keystone species, play an important role in the lives of many grassland creatures. Just like a construction site, the towns of Black-tailed Prairie Dogs (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) are works in progress as the animals dig burrows and mow down vegetation, making homes for snakes and birds and encouraging new grass growth. Prairie dogs are also a tasty snack for predators like the endangered Black-footed Ferret (*Mustela nigripes*).

**PLAINS BISON** once roamed North America in great numbers, shaping the ecosystem with unique grazing patterns that benefit plants and birds, making wallows that turn into mini wetlands, and even serving as prey for wolves and grizzly bears. Whether you call them bison or buffalo, this iconic species is crucial to the abundance of the prairie. Their return on American Prairie Reserve has restored both the land and a glimpse of the past.
"I ascended to the top of the cutt bluff this morning, from whence I had a most delightfull view of the country, the whole of which except the vally formed by the Missouri is void of timber or underbrush, exposing to the first glance of the spectator immense herds of Buffaloe, Elk, deer, Antelopes feeding in one common and boundless pasture."

Meriwether Lewis (1805)
Erica Freese has been connected to American Prairie Reserve since its beginning. She grew up in Bozeman, Montana and saw the project develop over the years through the involvement of her father, conservation biologist Curt Freese. In 2005, she was fortunate to be one of the people who opened the corral gate to release the first 16 animals in the Reserve’s bison herd. In 2015, she lived and worked for a season on American Prairie Reserve as a member of our staff.

With regards to the connection between the prairie and her creative process, Erica says,

*“Making art provides the same internal peace that the prairie does. It allows me to slow down, find solitude and focus my mind.”*

Erica earned a B.S. in Health and Exercise Science from Colorado State University and is continuing her studies at the University of Arizona to earn a Master of Public Health.

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When sharing your coloring creations with others on social media, we would appreciate a link back to our website (americanprairie.org) or social media accounts to help spread the word. We'd also love to see your work! Find us on [Twitter](https://twitter.com) and [Instagram](https://instagram.com) (@americanprairie) and [Facebook](https://facebook.com) (fb.com/americanprairie).
The building of American Prairie Reserve means stitching together 3 million acres of existing public lands using approximately 500,000 acres of private land purchased from willing sellers.

When these fragmented public and private lands are connected, the Reserve will provide a continuous land area for wildlife and recreation, the largest of its kind in the Lower 48 states.

For as little at $10, you can become a member of American Prairie Reserve and help build your park for wildlife, the public, and future generations. Don’t let these prairie critters have all the fun!

In addition to member benefits outlined on our website, we’ll show our gratitude for your membership gift by wisely putting it to use for the things you cherish: open land, iconic wildlife, and public access.

Join today:
americanprairie.org/become-a-member