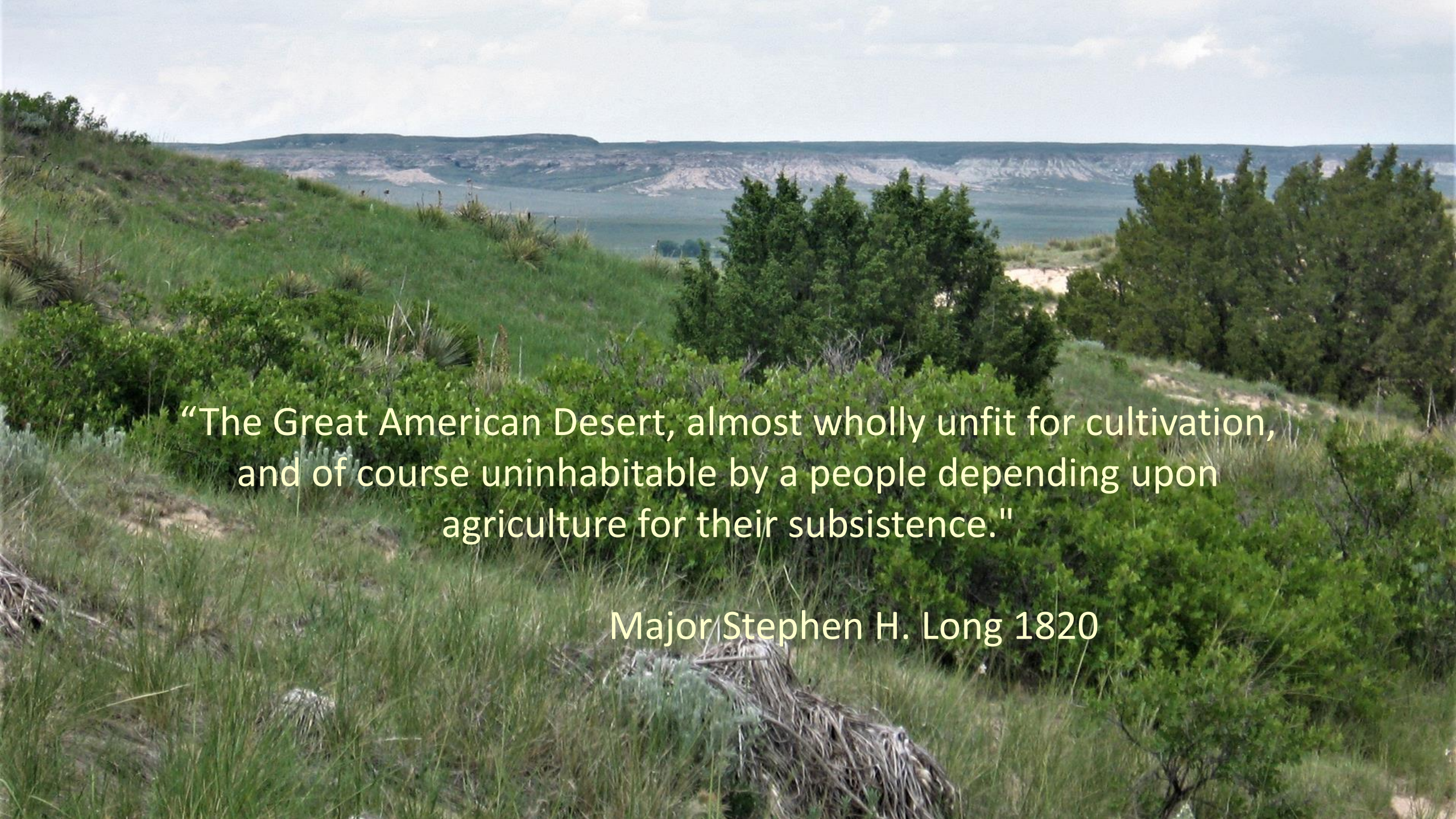




Restoring Our Relationship to the Land

- October 12, 2025
-
- Jim Tolstrup - High Plains
Environmental Center





“The Great American Desert, almost wholly unfit for cultivation,
and of course uninhabitable by a people depending upon
agriculture for their subsistence.”

Major Stephen H. Long 1820

With a spyglass on a clear morning, one could see buffalo, bear, deer, elk, antelope, bighorn sheep, and wolves - all grazing or prowling about in a kind of natural pageant. One traveler in the early 1830s Wrote that the prairie in places was “literally covered with game”

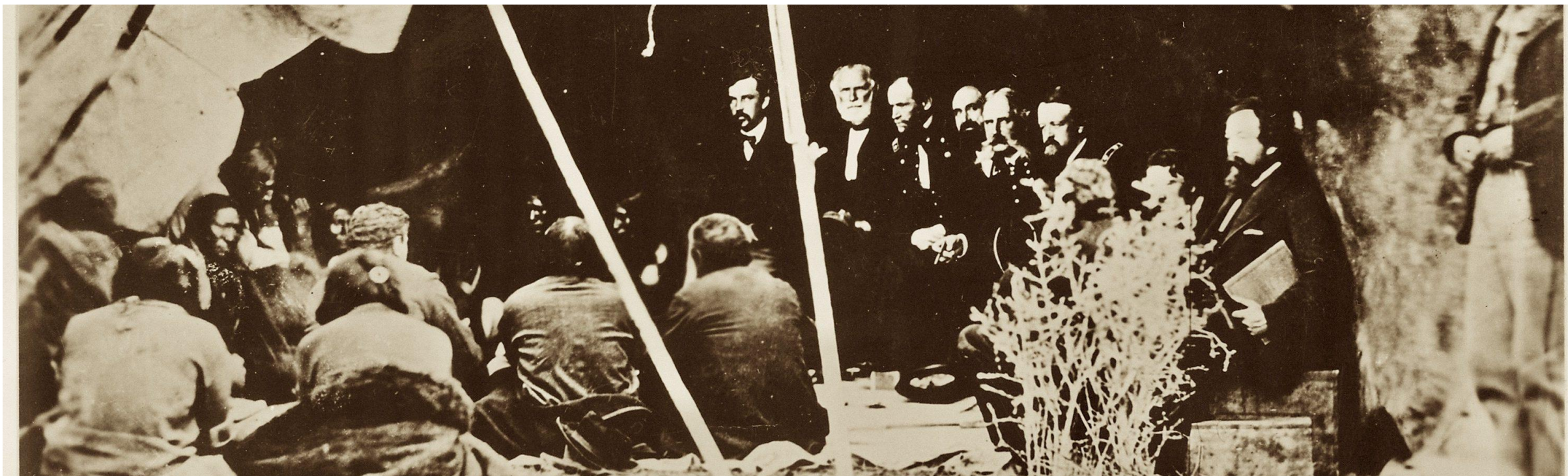
Remi Nadeau – Fort Laramie and the Sioux



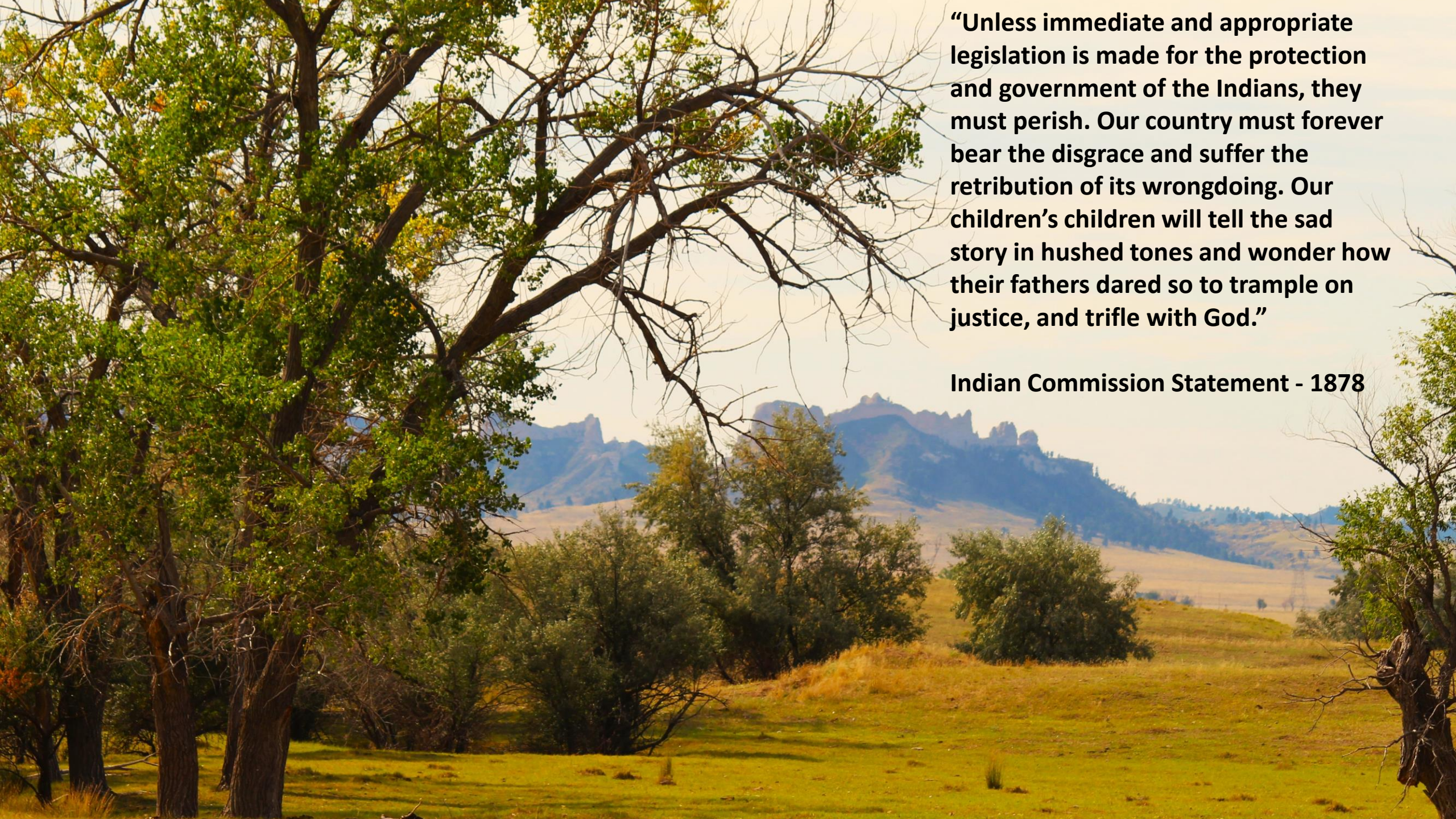
Fort Laramie – Established 1834



Fort Laramie Treaties 1851 & 1868



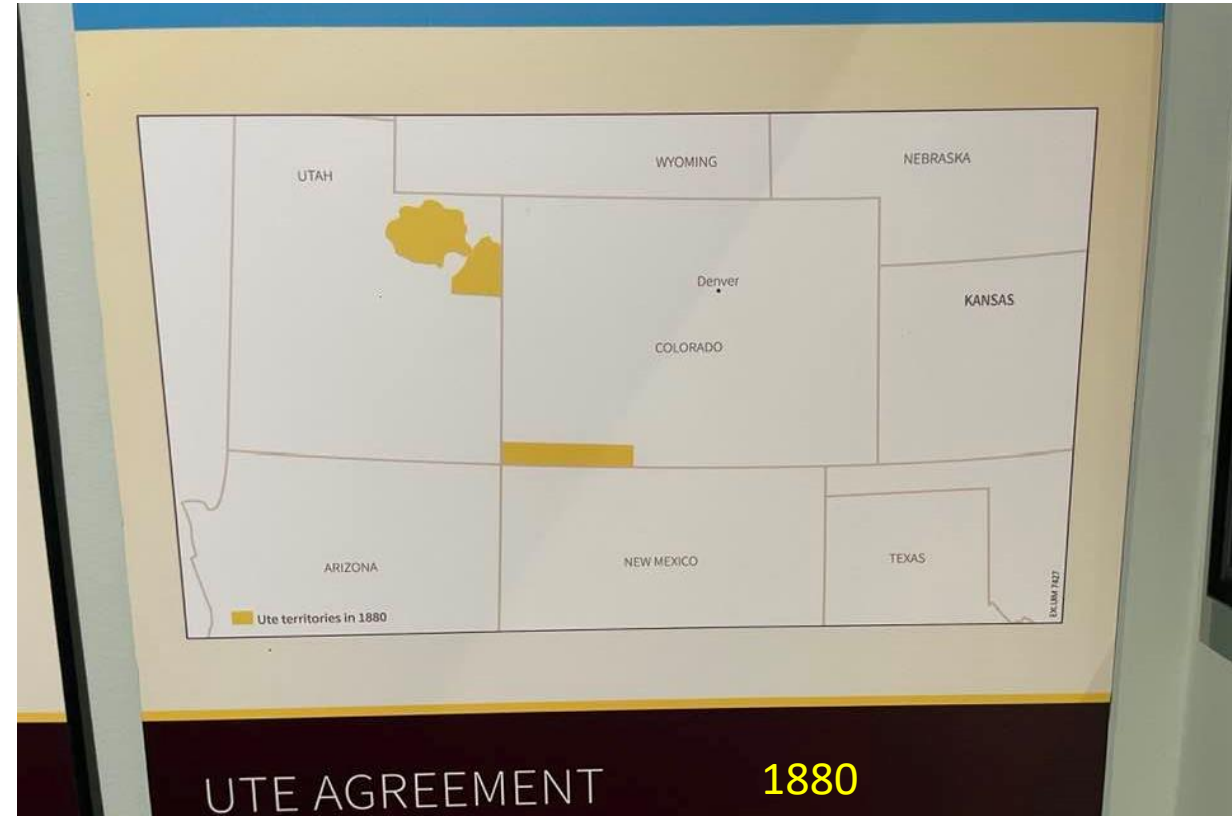
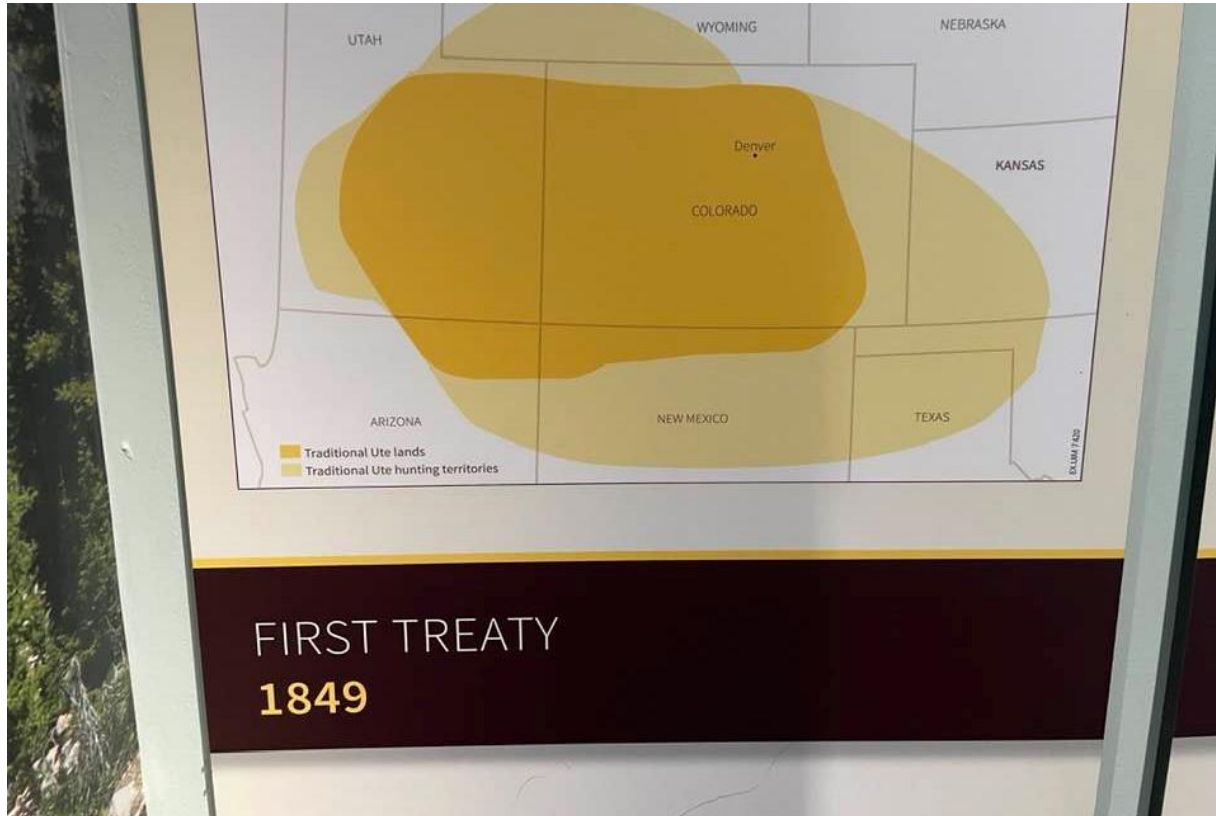


A landscape photograph showing a grassy field in the foreground with several trees. In the background, there are rolling hills and a range of mountains under a clear sky. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

“Unless immediate and appropriate legislation is made for the protection and government of the Indians, they must perish. Our country must forever bear the disgrace and suffer the retribution of its wrongdoing. Our children’s children will tell the sad story in hushed tones and wonder how their fathers dared so to trample on justice, and trifle with God.”

Indian Commission Statement - 1878

“The agreement an Indian makes to a United States treaty is like the agreement a buffalo makes with his hunter when pierced with arrows. All he can do is lie down and give in.” Chief Ouray



The last free roaming bison were slaughtered in 1883. It is believed that less than 300 animals remained out of an estimated 60,000,000

By 1890 the US Census Bureau could no longer identify an American “Frontier”

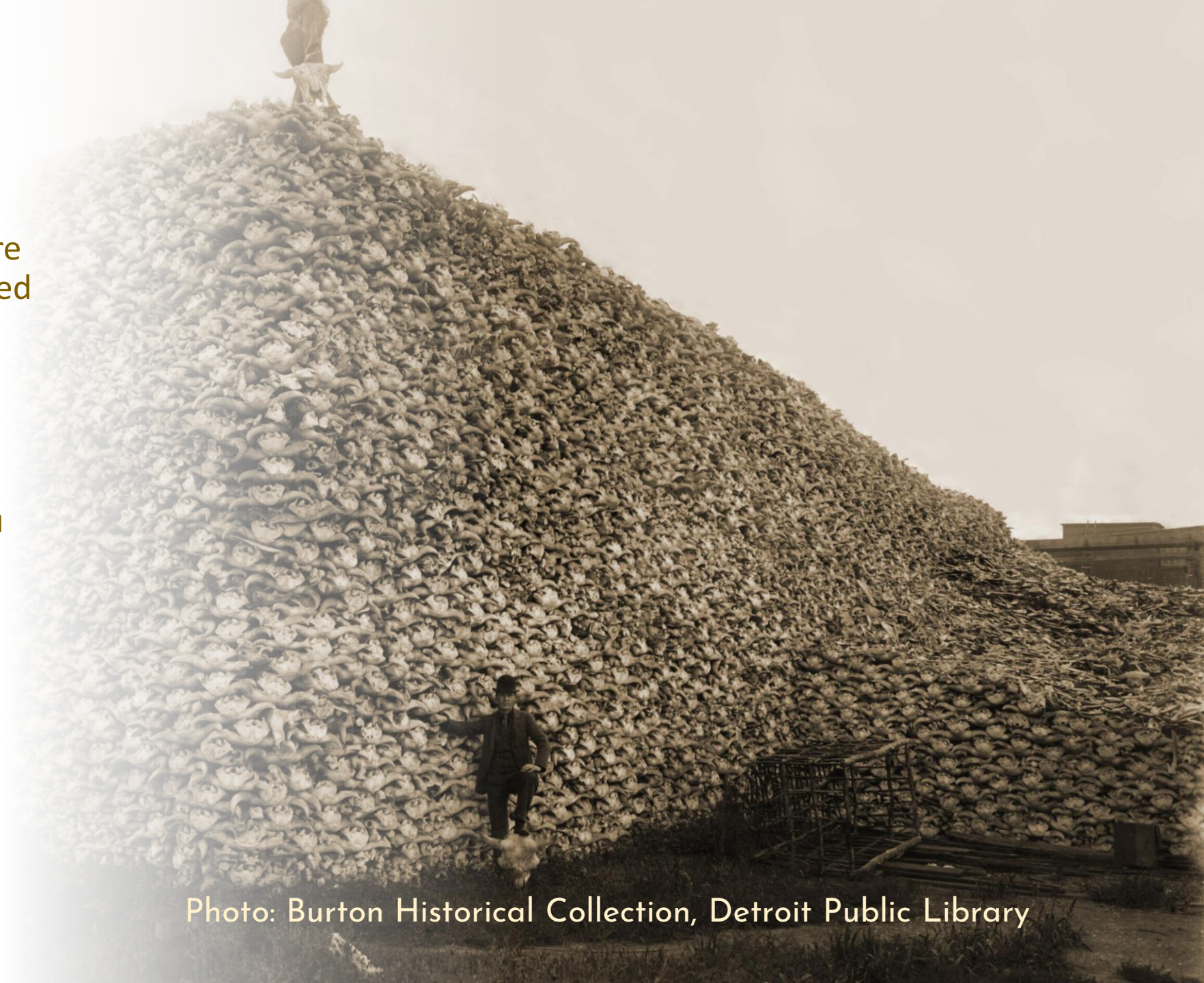



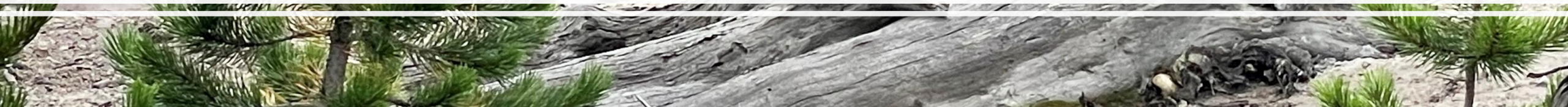
Photo: Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library

A black wolf is shown in profile, standing in a field of dry, yellowish-brown grass. The wolf's fur is dark and appears slightly matted. The background is a dense field of similar grass, with some small, dark, round seed heads visible. The lighting is natural, suggesting an outdoor setting during the day.

Reintroduction, Restoration, and Conservation



Yellowstone National Park – March 1, 1872





Species Recovery

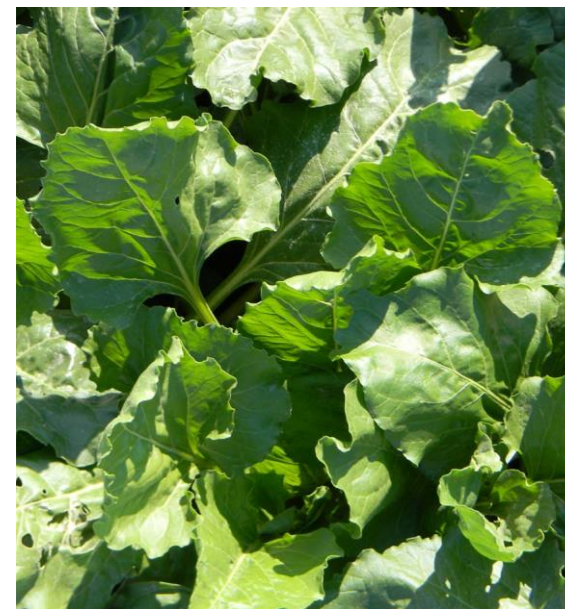




Collaboration With Ranchers - A Prairie Recovery Success Story

(Photo credit Kimberly Fraser, USFWS)

Agriculture & Irrigation



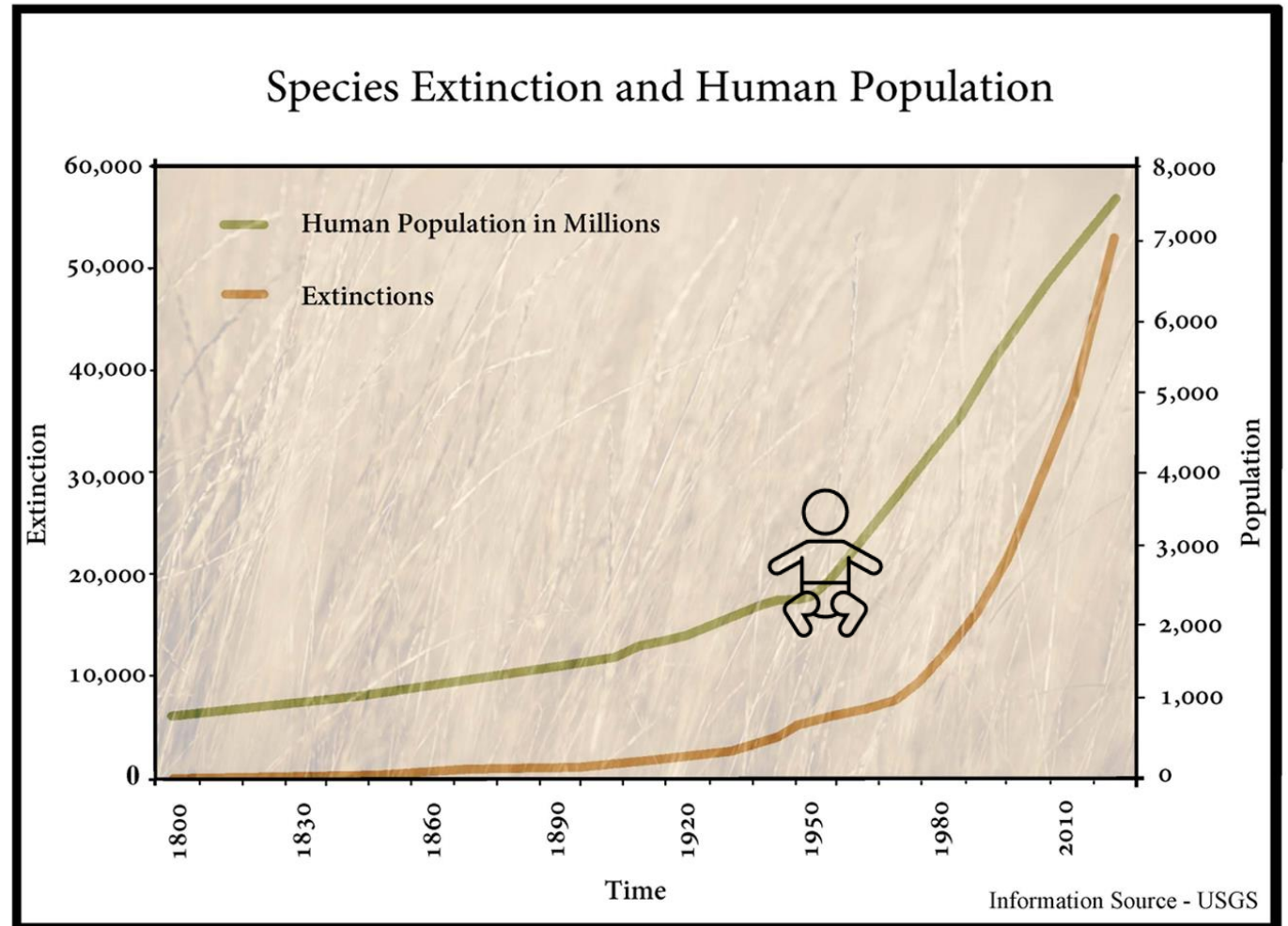






Growth and Decline

- 96% of the weight of mammals on Earth is comprised of human beings, our pets, and livestock. “Wildlife” comprises the remaining 4%
- Wildlife on earth has declined 70% since 1960





Colorado population


- 1900 -543,000.
- 2022 - 5.84 million.
- 2040 - 7.52 million

Wyoming population

- 1900 – 92,531
- 2022 - 581,381

US Population

- 1900 - 76 million
- 2022 – 334 million



The average person in the West uses 150 gallons of water per day. Sixty percent of residential water consumption (90 gallons of water per person per day) goes to support landscaping



Water Crisis

**The Ogallala Aquifer will be 70% depleted within the next 50 years.
(Source: Myhighplains.com)**

**“Salt lake as we know it is on track to disappear within five years,”
(Source: USA Today)**

The Colorado River is drying up, but basin states have “no plan” on how to cut water use - Colorado Public Radio September 17, 2022

A small green seedling with two leaves is growing out of a crack in dry, cracked earth. The background is a blurred, sunlit landscape of cracked soil.

Climate Impacts

- Rising temperatures threaten subalpine forests
-
- Fewer more intense precipitation events
- Increased transpiration pulls water from the soil

A close-up photograph of a small bird, likely a sparrow, perched on a person's hand. The bird has a distinctive black and white striped pattern on its head and a grey body. The background is a soft-focus field of dry, golden-brown plants. The overall lighting is warm and natural.

Climate Crisis

64% (389 out of 604) of North American bird species are at risk of extinction due loss of habitable range, resulting from climate change

Source: Audubon Society, 2019

What can we do?

- Create bipartisan alliances
- Reduce carbon output
- Support conservation efforts
- Answer the age-old question of “what is enough?”



“We scientists don’t know how to do that”

“I used to think the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change.

I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address those problems.

But I was wrong.
The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy...

...and to deal with those we need a spiritual and cultural transformation

- and we scientists don’t know how to do that.”

Gus Speth





Alternatives?

High Plains Environmental Center, in Loveland, CO has experimented extensively with native landscapes, many of which are completely unirrigated.





Native Plant
Nursery

180 Species
Prairie and Rocky
Mountain Plants



RECONCILIATION



RESTORATION



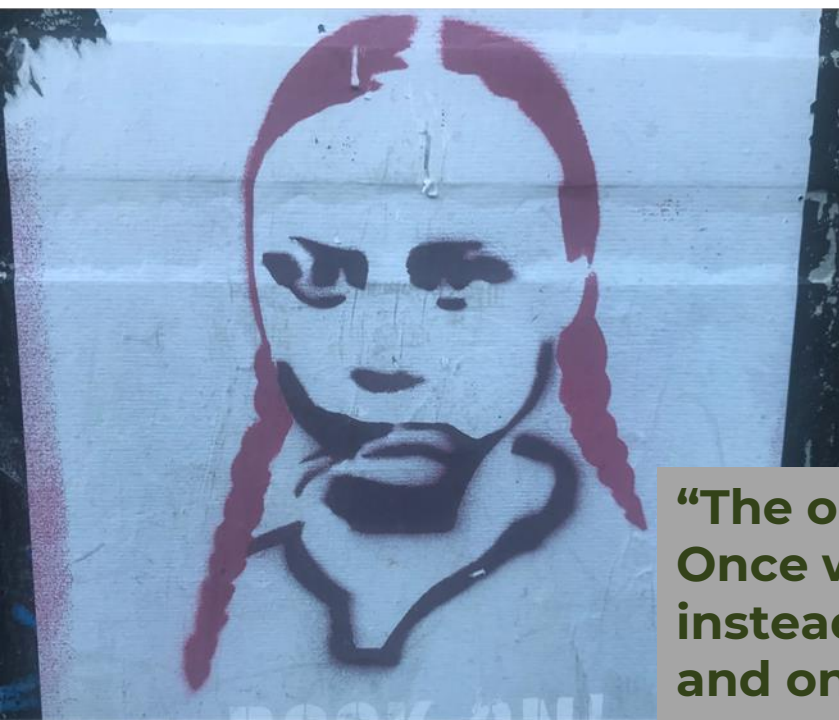






RECONNECTION





“The one thing we need more than hope is action. Once we start to act, hope is everywhere. So instead of looking for hope, look for action. Then, and only then, hope will come.” – Greta Thunberg



A wide, flat field of green grass with scattered white and purple flowers. The sky is dark and stormy, with a bright rainbow visible on the horizon. The text is overlaid on the bottom half of the image.

"Our ability to survive on this land will be largely dependent on our ability to love it for what it is."

SUBURBITAT