

## House Natural Resource Committee

### Pending Legislation

May 21, 2026

**Highlights:** H.R. 7954 was presented as a widely supported, largely bipartisan effort that ties together conservation, cultural preservation, and economic development, while reinforcing Tribal sovereignty by allowing Tribes to lead how buffalo restoration is implemented on their lands.

#### **Key points:**

#### H.R. 7954 (Rep. Hurd), “Don Young Doug LaMalfa Indian Buffalo Management Act”

- This bill is intended to formalize and strengthen federal–Tribal collaboration to restore and manage buffalo (bison) on Tribal lands, recognizing the animal’s central role in Tribal culture, food systems, and land stewardship.
- At its core, the bill directs the Department of the Interior to work directly with Tribes and Tribal organizations to support buffalo restoration efforts, rather than creating a new standalone program. This reflects a deliberate policy approach that emphasizes partnership and flexibility, allowing Tribes to determine how buffalo restoration aligns with their own priorities—whether for cultural revitalization, subsistence, education, or economic development.
- A major theme throughout the hearing was the deep cultural and historical significance of buffalo. Witnesses emphasized that buffalo were once foundational to Tribal life, providing food, materials, and spiritual connection, and that their near extinction—driven in part by federal-era policies—had devastating effects on Tribal economies and ways of life. Restoring buffalo herds is therefore framed not just as conservation, but as part of broader efforts to repair historical harm and support Tribal self-determination.
- Members and witnesses also highlighted the bill’s role in advancing food sovereignty and community health. Tribal leaders noted that buffalo can provide a local, culturally appropriate food source, especially in rural or remote areas where access to fresh and affordable food is limited.
- At the same time, some Tribes are interested in expanding buffalo herds to support economic activities, such as small-scale production or job creation, while others prioritize smaller herds for cultural and educational purposes
- The discussion also underscored several practical challenges the bill is meant to help address. Tribes face ongoing barriers such as limited funding, insufficient infrastructure (like fencing and water systems), and restricted land bases for herd expansion. The legislation is seen as an important step toward improving

coordination and signaling federal support, although witnesses noted that long-term success will still depend on sustained investment and resources.