

A family of 28 Yellowstone National Park bison will be transferred to the Modoc Nation in Ottawa County as part of a relocation program. Montana-based Fort Peck Tribes, the InterTribal Buffalo Council and Defenders of Wildlife are facilitating the transfer of Yellowstone bison to lands of the Modoc Nation in Oklahoma and Yakama Nation in Washington, according to a recent news release. The announcement marks the first time two large intact families of bison will be transferred under the Bison Conservation Transfer Program that began in 2019. Each tribe will receive a family of 28 bison. The Modoc Nation, headquartered in Miami, Okla., is one of the smallest federally recognized tribes in the state, with about 250 members. "These buffalo will go to tribes that are beginning their cultural herds," said Robbie Magnan, director of Fort Peck's Fish and Game Department. "Like Fort Peck and many other tribes, the Yakama and Modoc will once again have buffalo for their Indian communities and traditions." The Bison Conservation Transfer Program is intended to divert disease-free Yellowstone bison from slaughter to tribes across the West. "Bison are incredibly social animals, so one of the key goals of this program is to maintain these social structures once they arrive at their new home," said Chamois Andersen, senior Rockies and Plains representative at Defenders of Wildlife. "We are honored to partner with the Fort Peck Tribes and ITBC in this important work to bring bison back to the tribes." Each year, dozens to hundreds of Yellowstone bison that roam out of the park are shipped to slaughter to keep the population near a maximum population of 3,500. The "quarantine-to-restoration" program is intended to save some of these bison through translocation to tribal bison programs. Despite the demand for cultural herds, the threat of brucellosis "a bacterial infection that can affect cattle, elk and bison" and limited capacity to quarantine bison meant slaughter was the only option, per the Interagency Bison Management Plan. With the opening of a Fort Peck quarantine facility, these excess bison are finding new homes on their historic range and tribal lands. The program is the result of a partnership between Yellowstone National Park,

the State of Montana, U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Fort Peck Assiniboiné and Sioux Tribes, InterTribal Buffalo Council and non-government partners such as Defenders. More than 150 healthy bison have been quarantined at Fort Peck before being sent to tribes across the U.S., and as far as Alaska.