DECIDUOUS FOREST MAN AND THE GRASSLAND FAUNA

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I. Introduction

The droughts and dust storms of recent years have called attention to the grasslands of central United States and Canada. Much has been written regarding the Great Plains on the subjects of (a) too extensive use of the plow, (b) overgrazing, (c) erosion. Remedies have been suggested, such as seeding with foreign and domestic grasses, special agricultural methods and the planting of shelter belts. There remains one factor in the disasters of the great plains that has not been evaluated or even adequately brought to attention, that is the sum total of original native animals of the grassland biotic community.

The grassland originally presented a fine array of grasses tall and luxuriant at the eastern edge and relatively short and hardy at the western. It originally presented an excellent group of animals living in a state of dynamic balance. But to the new human arrivals, the immense herds of bison merely meant free meat and free hides. As to the use of grassland animals by fur and hide seekers, noteworthy records are in the journals of Lewis and Clark (1804–05, Thwaites)\(^2\) and of John C. Luttig (1812–13).\(^3\) Lewis and Clark crossed the entire grassland area. The first grassland animals, notably the bison, were seen in southeastern South Dakota. The bison fitted the climate and grassland so well that its population (total, 75,000,000; Great Plains, 50,000,000) exceeded the

\(^1\) Invitation paper read by title before the eighth American Scientific Congress, Section of History and Geography.


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