American Buffalo Wiped Out to Serve European Market of the 1880s
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**American Buffalo Wiped Out to Serve European Market of the 1880s**

**CALGARY, Alberta, Canada,** July 31, 2007 (ENS) - European demand for bison leather was the driving force behind the near-extinction on the Great Plains buffalo, suggests new historical and economic research conducted for the U.S. National Bureau of Economic Research.

In the paper, University of Calgary environmental economist Dr. M. Scott Taylor argues that the buffalo slaughter on the Great Plains began in 1871 after Europeans developed a way to tan the tough buffalo hides.

Once the tanning innovation was in use, Taylor says the slaughter of some 30 million buffalo took only a decade and was driven by European demand for buffalo hides to use for leather shoe and boot soles and for industrial machine belting.

In the 16th century, North America contained 25 to 30 million buffalo; by the late 19th century fewer than 100 remained.

Removing the buffalo east of the Mississippi took settlers over 100 years, but "the remaining 10 to 15 million buffalo on the Great Plains were killed in a punctuated slaughter in a little more than 10 years," Taylor writes.

While Native Americans had always been able to tan the thick haired buffalo hides taken in winter months into buffalo robes, Taylor explains, their process was laborious and required ingredients from buffalo themselves - the brain, liver, and fat or tallow.

A cheap simple commercial process was unknown before 1871, so the hides were worthless. "It appears the innovation was made in England and Germany at roughly the same time in 1871," writes Taylor. "Importantly, U.S. tanners were unable to tan buffalo hides at this time."

He argues that three conditions are jointly necessary and sufficient to explain the time pattern of buffalo destruction witnessed in the 19th century.

"These are: (1) a price for buffalo products that was largely invariant to changes in supply; (2) open access conditions with no regulation of the buffalo kill; and (3), a newly invented tanning process that made buffalo hides into valuable commercial leather."

He uses theory, data from international trade statistics, and first
person accounts to show that the buffalo slaughter on the plains was initiated by a European tanning innovation and fueled by a foreign demand for industrial leather.

Taylor writes, "Ironically, the ultimate cause of this sad chapter in American environmental history was of European, and not American origin."

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