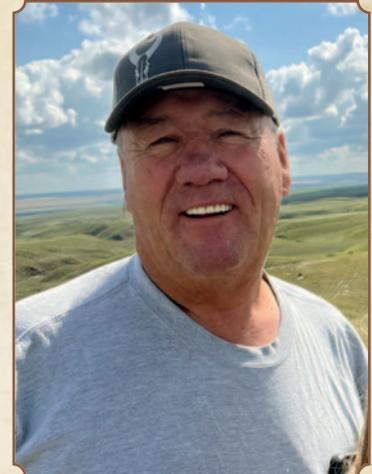


2025 INDUCTEE

## ROBERT “ROBBIE” MAGNAN

1955–



**R**obert “Robbie” Magnan’s efforts to restore Fort Peck bison have preserved a species and helped his people and other tribes restore their connection to bison. But in his youth, buffalo were rarely seen.

“The first buffalo I had ever really seen was in a zoo, and that was in the early ‘70s. I never knew the significance that the buffalo really played in the Native American culture,” Magnan said in a 2022 interview.

In the mid-‘80s, Fort Peck elders pushed for programs to reconnect the tribes to their cultural roots. So, Fort Peck got its first bison from Yellowstone National Park in 1990. Seven years later, Magnan took over as director of the Fort Peck Fish and Game Department and pushed to expand the bison program.

It wasn’t easy. Ranchers fear Yellowstone Park bison because they can carry the disease brucellosis, which can affect cattle. So the livestock industry opposed bringing more Yellowstone bison to Fort Peck and passed laws to hinder translocation. But tribes value Yellowstone bison because they are directly related to the wild herds that once thundered over the prairie.

Yellowstone National Park developed a quarantine program that could verify which bison were free of disease. The Fort Peck Reservation received its first shipment of disease-free bison in 2012. In 2014, Fort Peck was selected to receive the first 150 disease-free bison that had spent a few

years on Ted Turner’s ranch. After that, Magnan built a quarantine facility on the Fort Peck Reservation to enable the transfer of more Yellowstone bison, and since 2019, more than 400 Yellowstone bison have been transferred to the Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux tribes that would have otherwise been shipped to slaughter.

The Fort Peck Turtle Mound Buffalo Ranch now maintains two herds of almost 700 bison on 33,000 acres of healthy grassland. One is a business herd used to sustain the tribes economically, and the second is a cultural herd used for ceremonies and education to reconnect the tribes to traditional ways.

The successful program has allowed Magnan to work with the InterTribal Buffalo Council to ship bison to 26 other tribes in 12 states, where their people can benefit from the spiritual connection and healthy protein.

“A lot of people didn’t think we could do this. A lot of people get misinformation and think the tribes are getting a bunch of money to do this. They’re not. They’re donating their own money to help other tribes. And that’s the way we should be: A good, strong organization helps the less fortunate and makes everybody strong. That’s our law,” Magnan said.

Robbie Magnan has put Montana on the map as a center for tribal bison restoration efforts impacting the continent in a way that is unprecedented.

