

# Available Food Sources 20 Years After

Here's a premise and a theory, of sorts...

It's been 20 years since a major event. The nation has lost almost 80% of the population in that time. By all accounts and estimates I've seen in my research over the years, this number most likely isn't all that far off or unlikely. Think about it, in those 20 years, many diseases and medical issues that were previously kept at bay via medication, antibiotics, machines, etc. will run rampant through the population. Things like small pox and scarlet fever and polio will eventually make a comeback within the population born after said event, because immunizations don't exist. I could go on and on with all of the doom and gloom, suffice it to say, I've covered it ad nauseam in Parts II and III of my series.

Now given all that, the drastic reduction in population being the key contributing factor in this theory, it is my belief that the various food sources, e.g. wildlife populations, will make a relatively rapid and drastic rebound. For example, where I live, we have rabbits aplenty. The population here in suburbia is more or less kept in check by the domesticated animals the freely roam their fenced in backyards.

Here's a question...

What happens to the rabbit populations when the human disturbance/presence is reduced, or is null and void, and the domesticated animals, e.g. the predators, are used as a food source for the surviving 'ultimate predator' (that would be humans maybe two hundred years ago) that don't know how to catch the rabbits?

Uh, I'm not even stretching my imagination when I say the rabbit population would explode!

Now, my position is, and it is fully supported by my biology teacher wife, that it wouldn't take long, a few years at a minimum, a decade at most, for their natural predators to fully envelope what once was suburbia and reduce the rabbit population back to its climax community number. She's even suggested a video via YouTube to help us understand the phenomenon. It's called: [How Wolves Change Rivers](#). It's pretty cool and lends credence to my position so I fully support its premise! Yeah me!

What the video presents is a basic synopsis of what I'm talking about.

Now, sticking with my rabbits in suburbia premise, the rabbit population will skyrocket, for a time, due to a series of contributing factors. For starters, I'm talking about things like the increase of food sources. This increase is due in no small part to the lack of lawns being mowed, fertilized, weeded, etc. As a result, the grass is longer, which will result in more places for hidden activities. These include mating, the placement of burrows, and navigation to and from the home and their now readily available food sources. But as the video points out, and it is my position, that this is only temporary.

The next suburb over, on the other side of the river, currently doesn't have rabbits, it has coyotes... and coyotes like rabbits.

How many months or years would it take, without vast amounts of human interference, for the coyotes to start utilizing the existing bridges, which are now only being used for foot traffic, because there's no electricity, to cross the river in search of a greater abundance?

Once they cross the river, that's a game changer. The rabbit population will run head long into a series of limiting factors. This is due to the fact that when one population increases, so does the population of anything above it in the food chain. More rabbits will undoubtedly equate to more coyotes. The long grasses will also add to the hawk population because they not only like rabbits, but also other small rodents like field mice and rats. This doesn't account for the skunk, opossum, and raccoon populations that will increase as well.

The populations of all these suburban dwelling creatures will rise dramatically until the coyote and hawk populations increase as well. Once they increase, an equilibrium, or balance, is maintained.

Now, this is just one localized, or regionalized, example. For me, and the research I've been doing as part of writing Part IV of the series, takes this premise and expands it to a national or continental scale. Now, I'm not as blatant as this white paper... it's fiction after all. As a result you'll only see passing references to a character harvesting one of the five varieties of deer or some other herbivore beneath us in the food chain.

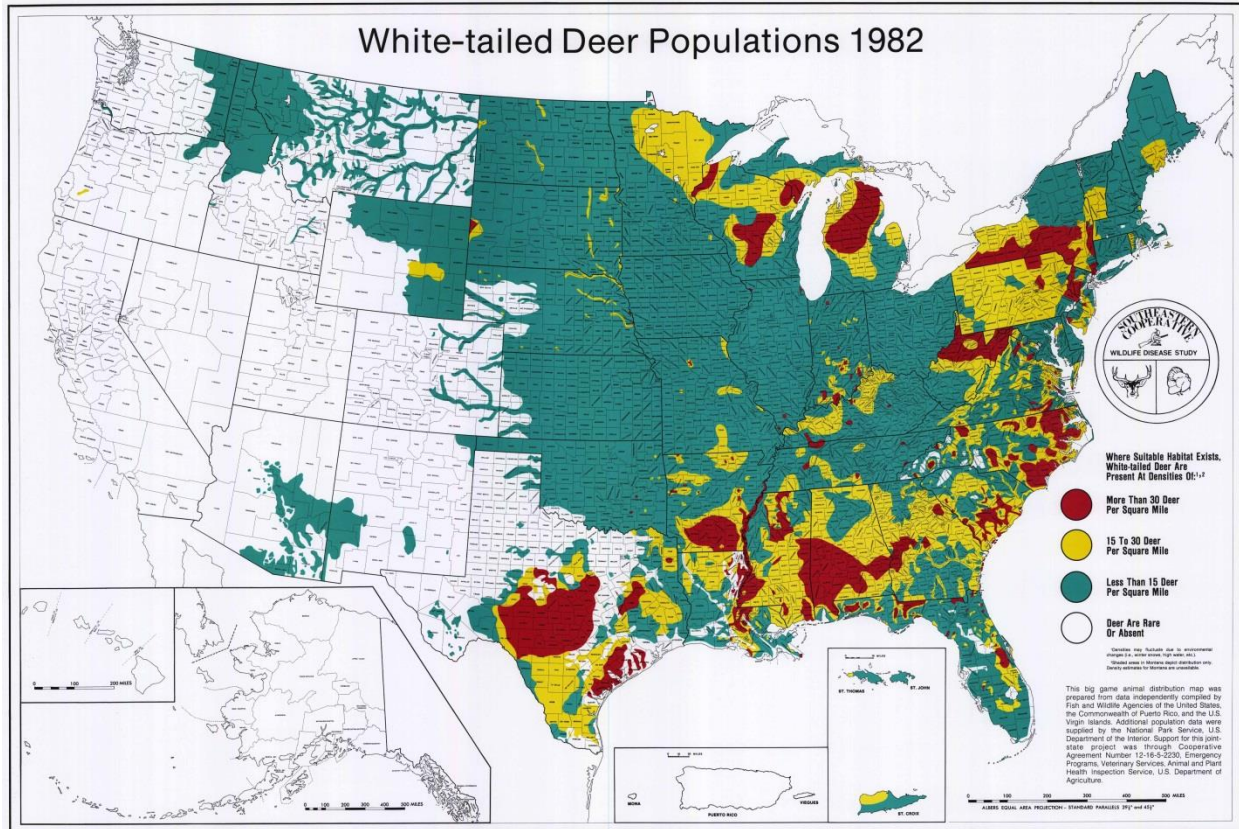
Did you know that the North American (NA) continent is home to five types of deer? They are White Tail, Black Tale (mule), Elk, Caribou, and Moose. If you reduce the human population of the United States (315M) by 80%, that is still 63M people. With a land mass of about 2.3B acres, that equates to 1 person every 36 acres... roughly.

I don't know about you, but I think the large mammal populations would bounce back. At a minimum they'd return to a balance somewhere around the early to mid-1800's.

And there you have it; the entire purpose of this paper is to point out that, with minimal human intervention, a wide number of animal species will increase not only in population, but also in their natural ranges. This makes finding food a lot easier if you know what you're doing.

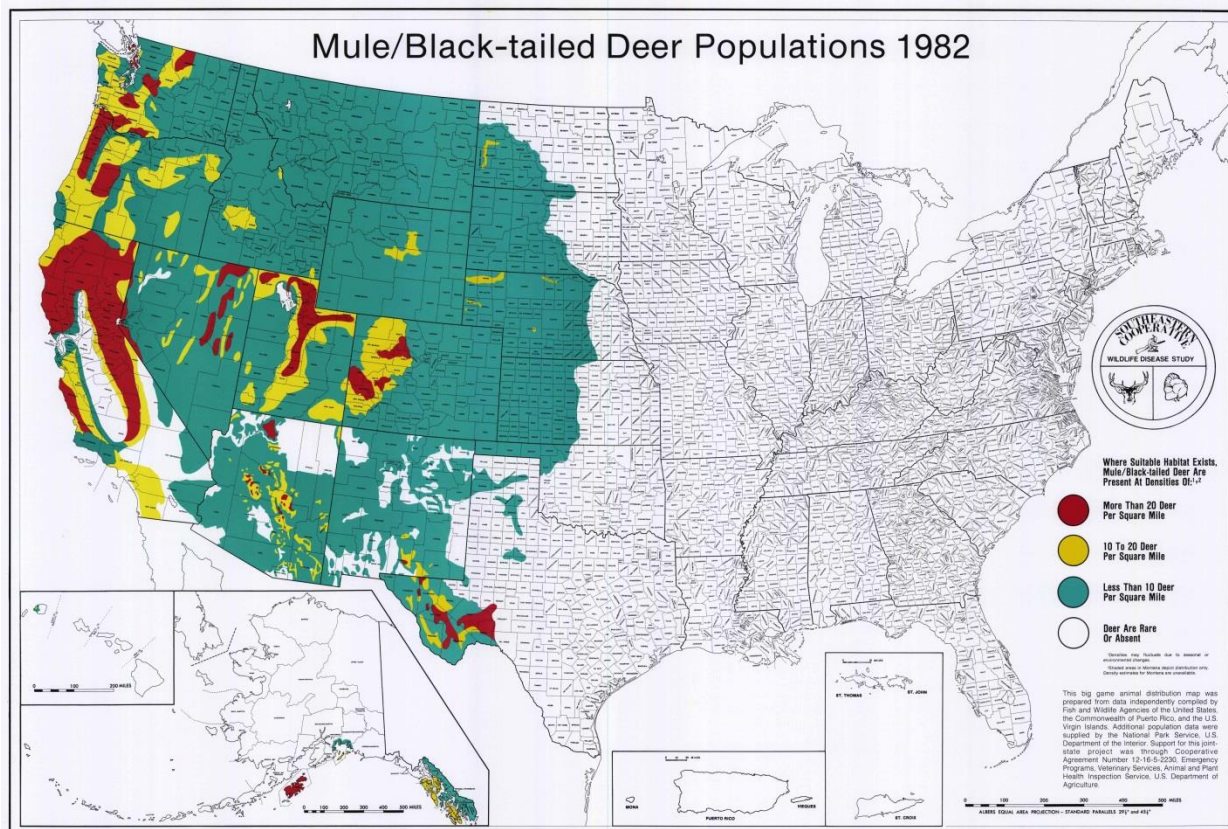
So let's dive on in.

Here's the typical range of the NA white tailed deer population as of 1982.



Did I say that this was in 1982! Imagine what it would look like if we only hunted them as part of a subsistence living and not for population control. Maybe the range is expanded, maybe the population increases or decreases... there are a lot of factors to consider. These factors include natural predators like wolves, coyotes, mountain lions, bobcats, etc. That's in addition to what's left of the human population... given the premise of this paper.

And here's the range of the black tailed (mule) deer population in NA... again in 1982.

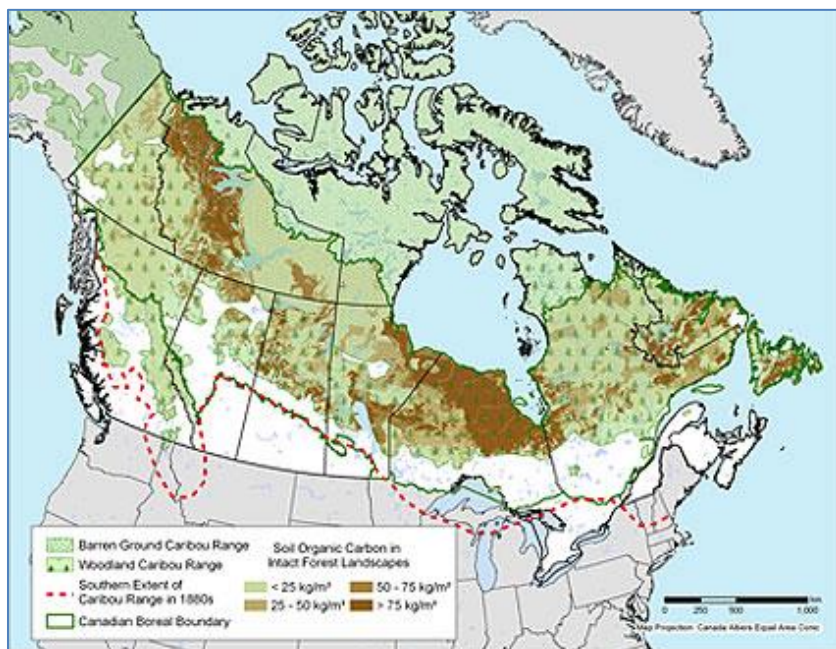


Pretty stark images, no? The mule deer roam the west while the white tail takes the plains and the east.

But wait! There's more... I said there were 5 species of deer in NA, right? Let's look at the caribou, elk, and moose too!

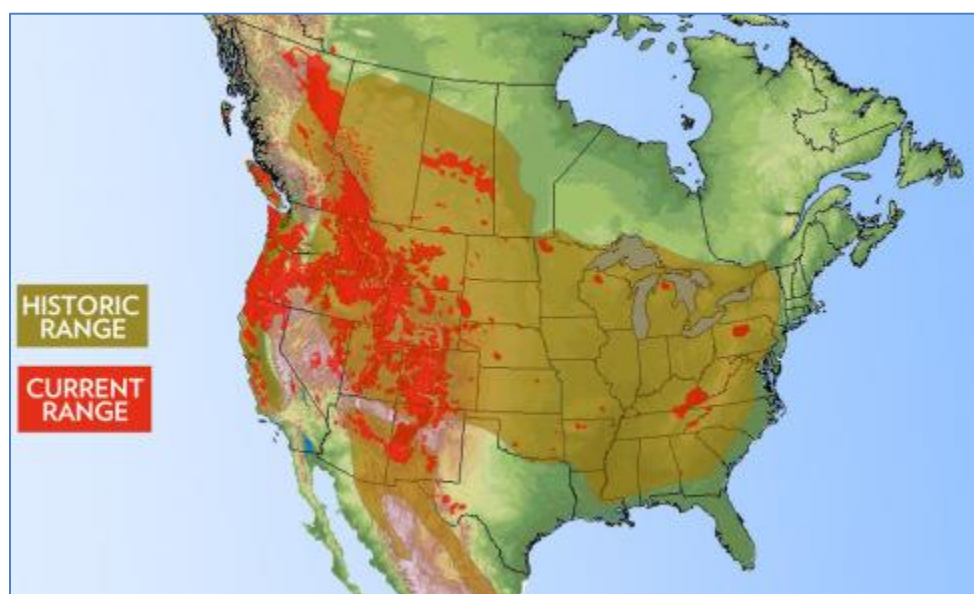


Here's the range of caribou:



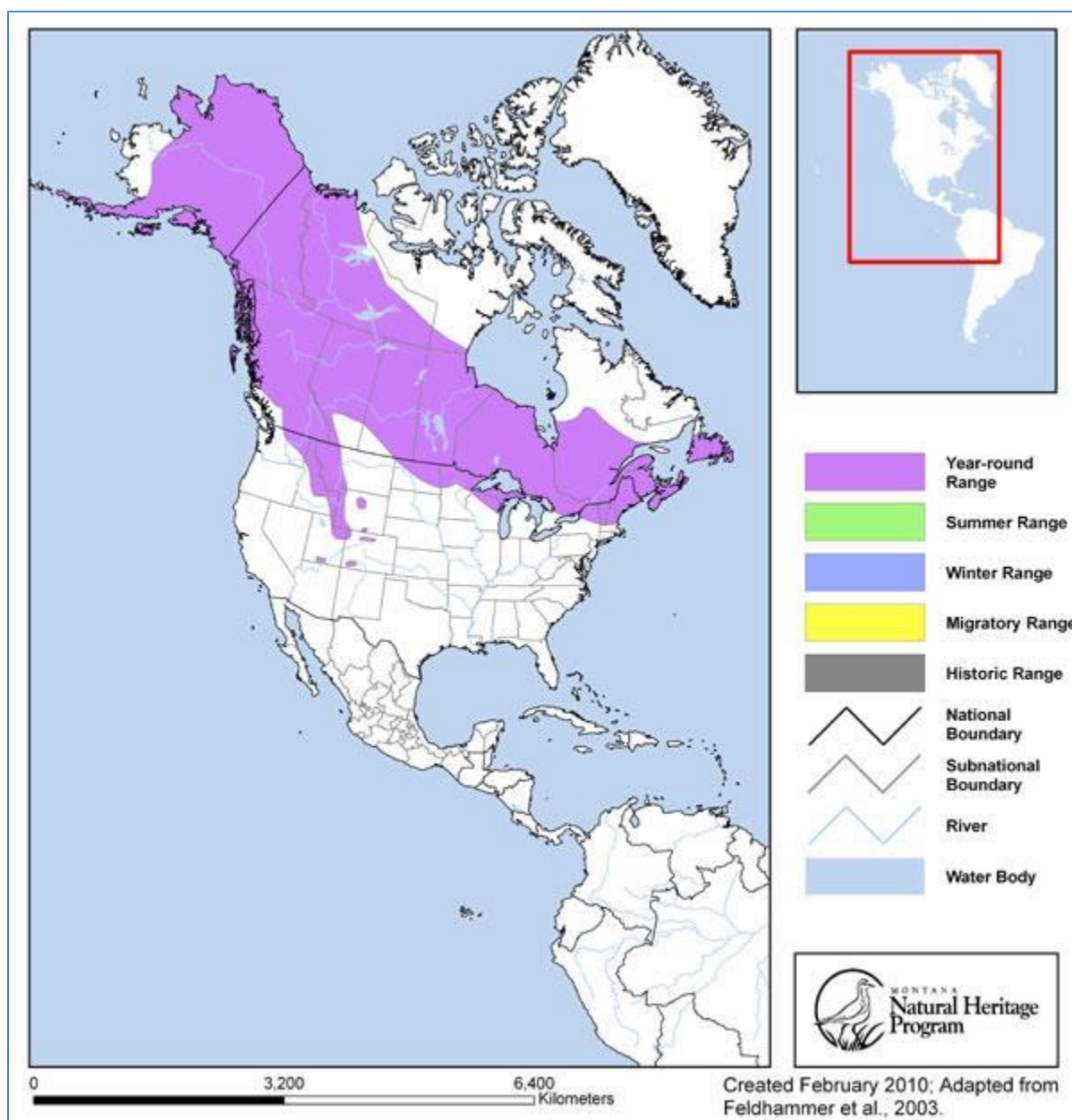
Caribou barely made it into the lower 48 back in the 1800's. I find little reason to believe they'd expand their range much further south if the human population were reduced to its 1800's levels

And elk:



Whoopsie! Elk are primed for a major comeback! Look at that historical range... it's damn near coast to coast! Well, from the Pacific all the way to the eastern edge of the Appalachian foothills. They might make it from sea to shining sea!

And last, but not least, we have the moose:

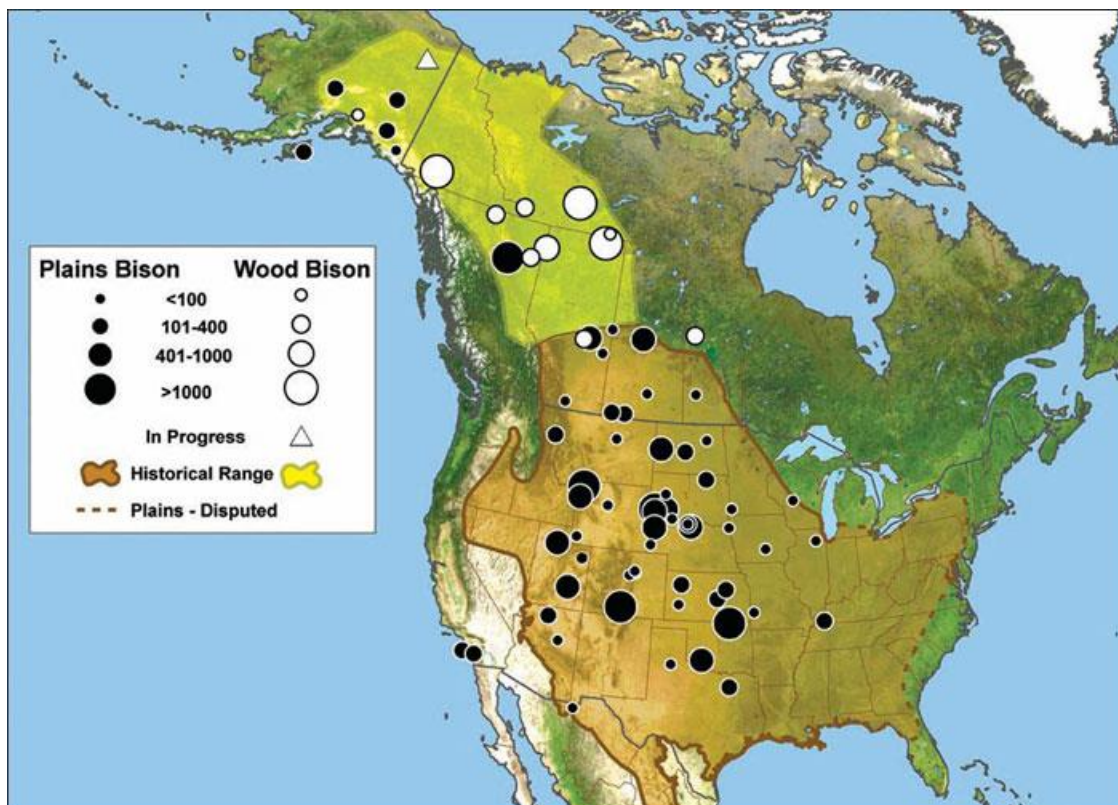


So the extreme NE and northern Rockies get moose meat... C'est la vie. Granted, this image is created from a mapping in 2003. I couldn't find anything for the 1800's, but the range might make it a state or two further south.

I don't really like venison... how about some bison burgers?



Well, now we're cooking! The Bison of NA had a fairly large and substantial range... ya know... until we nearly killed them all.





Interesting tid bit... well two pieces of side information.

First, the bison were nearly hunted to extinction under a program initiated by President Grant after the Civil War. This was done in an attempt to starve the Native Americans out and make them more amicable to moving off of their lands and onto reservations. Here's the current bison population and range:



And here's what an extinction level event looks like when man plays with nature:



The above image is from Wright's buffalo hide yard in Dodge City, Kansas in 1878.



And this is a giant pile of bison skulls that are set to be crushed for fertilizer.



And second, there are actually no buffalo in NA. Settlers and those participating in westward expansion and exploration mis-identified the beasts. Their given species name is *bison bison*. However, there are two species of buffalo.

The first is the Africa Cape Buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*):



Just look at how well that buffalo and lioness are playing together!



And the Asian Water Buffalo, *Bubalus arnee*, which is wild, but there is a domesticated version called, *bubalus bubalis*:



But as I, and the video, pointed out, you won't see a rise in deer populations without a converse rise in predators like wolf, coyote, and bear populations. So let's take a look at those species.

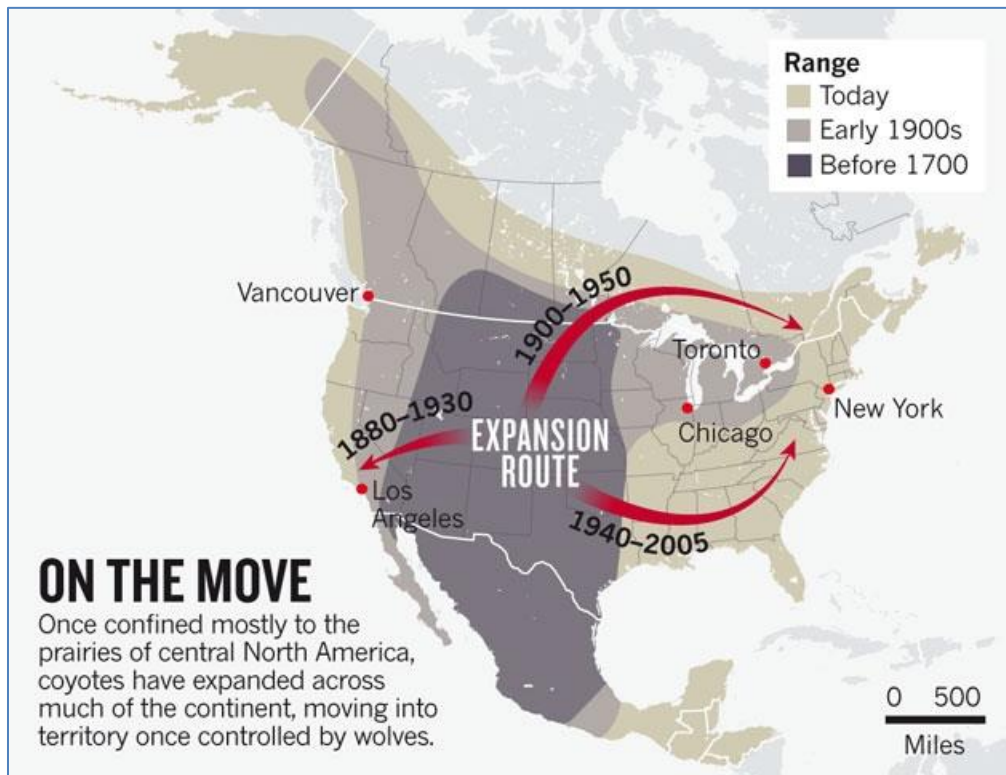
I give you the historical range of the wolf:



The Gray Wolf is a frickin' Canuck right now... but that's likely to change. The Red Wolf and Gray Wolf are similar to White Tail and Mule deer with regard to their east coast west coast separation as of right now. However, historically speaking, the Gray's held sway over the bulk of the NA continent while their cousins in the Red Wolf stuck to the mid-Atlantic, southeast, and Mississippi Delta locales.



And the Coyote:

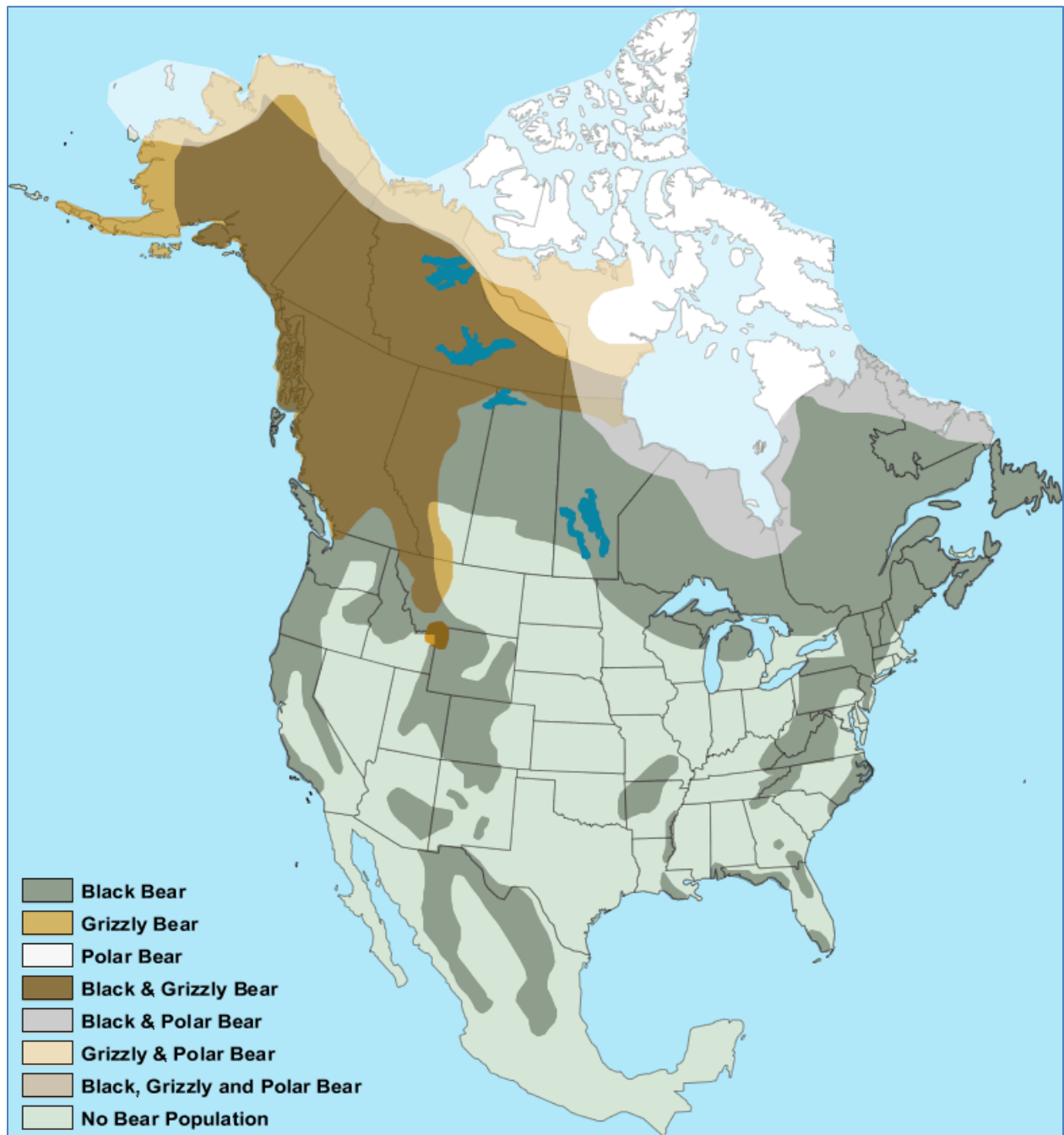


The interesting thing about the coyote map above is that after the westward expansion, the wolf population drastically decreased. Conversely, the coyote population increased because there was more food available to them.

It's cyclical man...

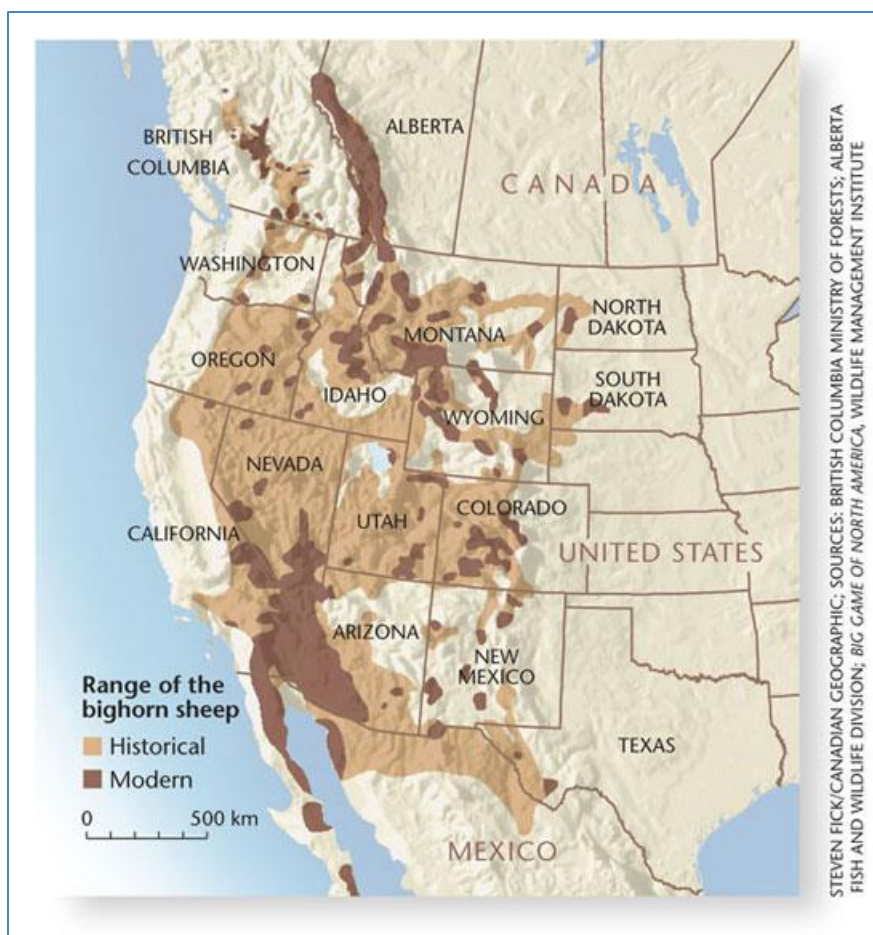
What else do I have left.... Oh yeah, BEAR!

Here's a fun little map of all of the bear species in NA:



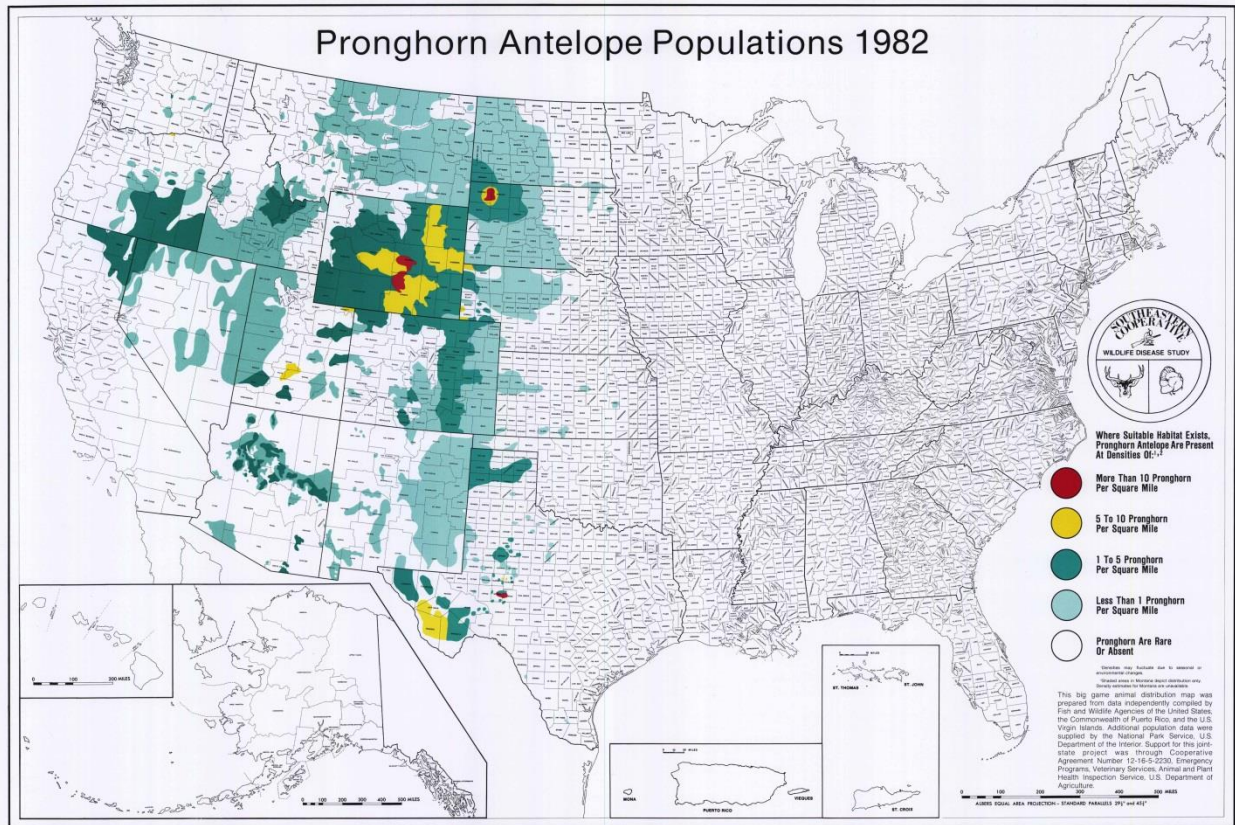
Bear tend to like wooded and brushy areas; hence there aren't many bear in the plains states. When there are bear in certain plain states it's usually confined to areas where there are places to take refuge.

Who likes sheep? Hope you like altitude sickness because, historically, and 20 years after an event, that's most likely where you're gonna find them.



Pretty much the entirety of the Rocky Mountain range is home to these sheep, historically speaking. 20 years after an event, when the US lower 48 population has decreased by 80% or so, expect these guys to be roaming freely from the southwest to the northwest.

I did find one little surprise in my research... Pronghorn Antelope! Who knew, right? I guess I should have known given the lyrics, 'where the deer and the antelope play...'



This covers a bunch of the larger mammals, but you can expect increases in range and population for a wide variety of other tasty vittles as well.

There is one more thing I'd like to leave you with... say an event does happen, what becomes of all the zoo animals? Do sympathetic docents and care takers release the animals? Do they put down the more dangerous species like lions, tigers, cheetahs, and the African Painted Dog (vicious pack hunters)? Do they escape on their own?

With such spotty population numbers and the distances inherent between zoos (mostly confined to major cities), successfully breeding any of these dangerous species in the 'wilds' of NA would:

- Take a long time, and
- Wouldn't have much chance of success due to the familial nature of the animals in captivity.

That's my theory anyway...