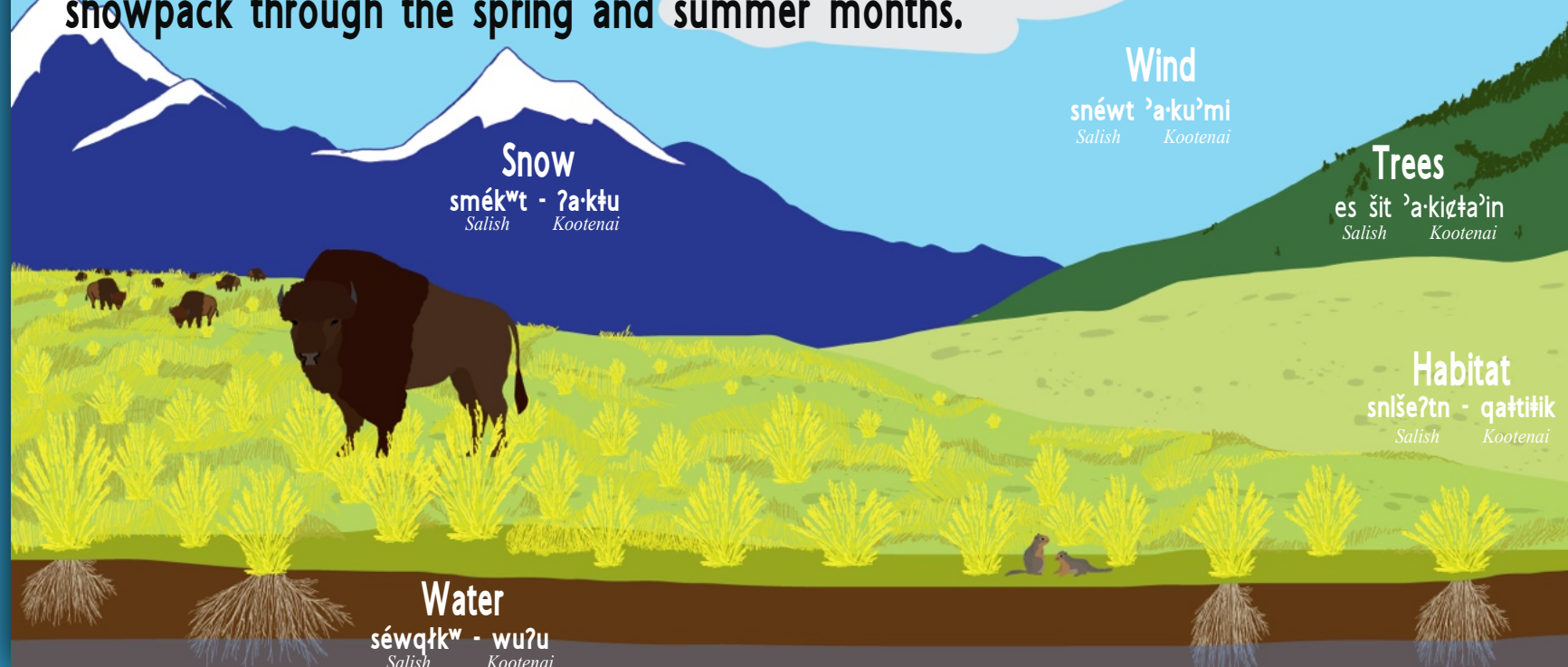


CHANGES ON THE RANGE

The Past and Present of the CSKT Bison Range

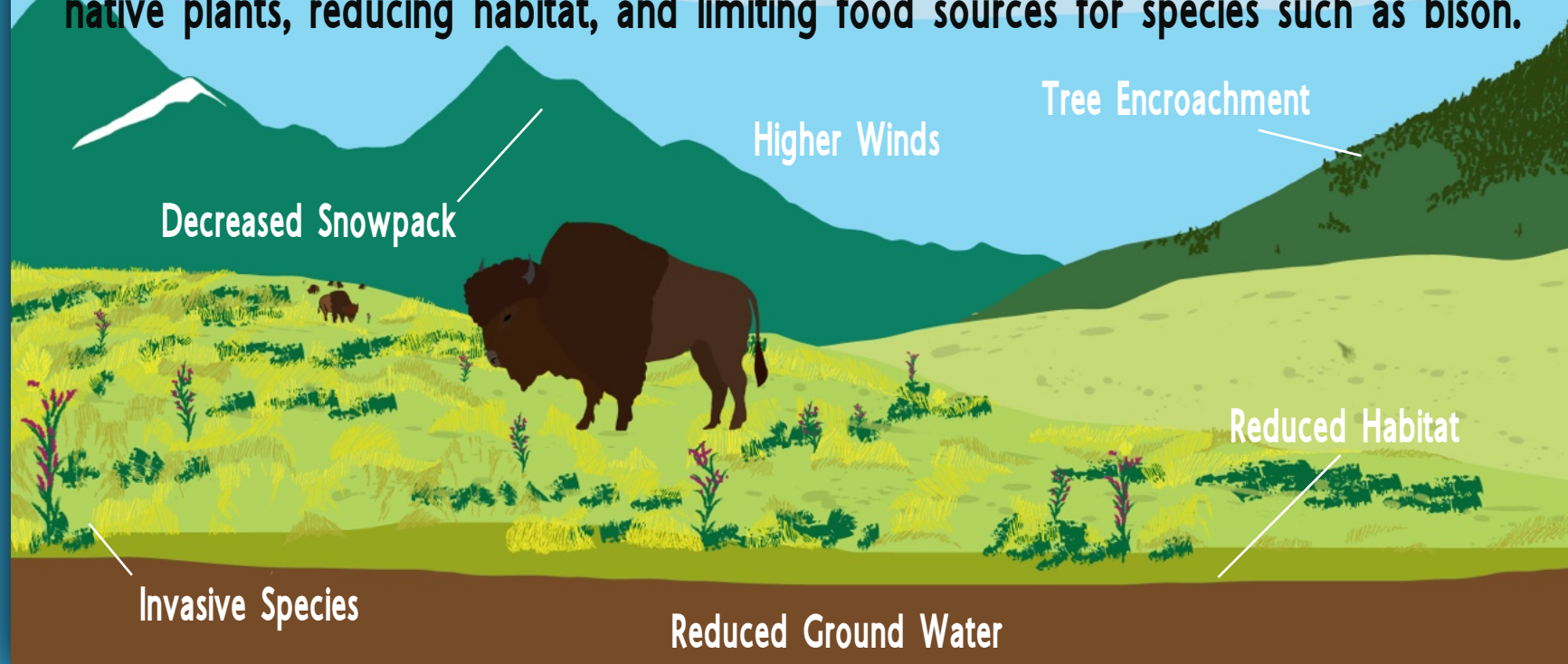
Past...

Perennial native bunch grasses and forbs were once found throughout Montana. Their deep roots were adapted to limited precipitation and depended on melting snowpack through the spring and summer months.



...and Present

Increased variability of snowfall and frequent droughts have had major impacts on grassland biodiversity. Invasive species have taken over many areas, pushing out native plants, reducing habitat, and limiting food sources for species such as bison.



Water Availability

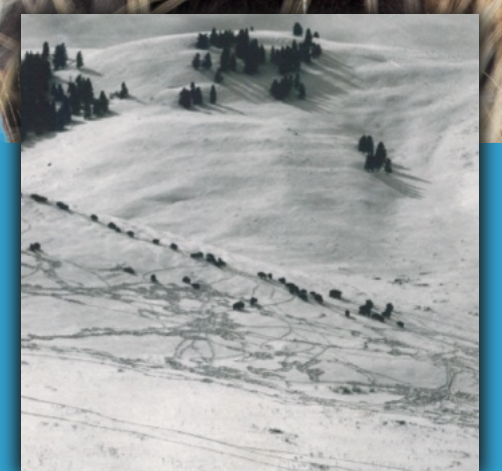
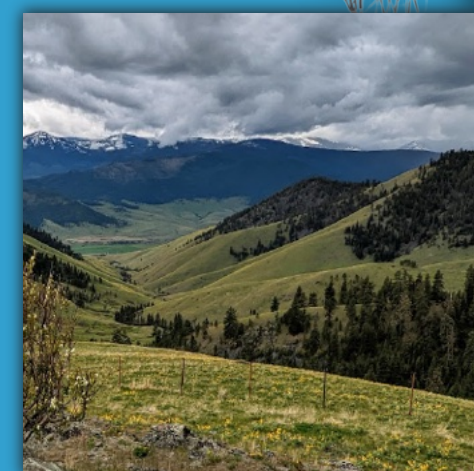
Mountain snowpack is a key source of water availability in western Montana. Rising temperatures are causing winter snowpack to melt earlier in the spring, resulting in increased runoff. The lack of reliable water has become a stressor for many native species. While some may be more resilient, others like rough fescue will struggle to adapt.

Rough Fescue (C) Matt Lavin



Habitat Impact

Between the rising temperatures and tree encroachment by junipers and Douglas firs, the risk of wild-fires continues to rise in the Flathead Valley. This has been compounded by climate-driven storms, high-wind events, and dry lightning strikes.



Bison & Carbon

Bison play a crucial role in maintaining healthy grasslands and aid in carbon sequestration. Unlike domestic cattle, bison graze in a way that leaves some of the plant behind, allowing grasses to recover and store more carbon in their roots. Their large size also helps compact soil, preventing carbon from being released. While research is ongoing, scientists believe that bison may offer a natural solution for reducing carbon emissions and promoting sustainable, healthy ecosystems.