

# HOME ON THE RANGE

Forget about traveling to Africa to go on a safari. If some scientists have their way, people might be able to spot lions and elephants roaming the Great Plains of North America. The Great Plains lie in the center of North America, extending from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains and from Canada to Texas.

A team of scientists recently proposed the bold plan to save endangered animals from extinction in Africa. Many animal habitats there are disappearing. A habitat is the place where a plant or an animal lives.

## Just “Plain” Smart

Supporters of the plan say that relocating the animals to the Great Plains would help restore the region’s biodiversity (the variety of different organisms found within a geographic region) closer to what it was before humans came along.

Most modern African animals never lived on the Great Plains. However, some other large animals, such as camels, saber-toothed cats, and mastodons, lived there thousands of years ago.

A mastodon was a furry, elephant-like creature with long tusks. Mastodons and other animals lived on the Great Plains until the last ice age ended, about



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10,000 years ago. An ice age is a period of time when sheets of ice covered Earth.

Supporters of the project also say that relocating large animals to vast parks in the Great Plains could save hundreds of species in Africa and Asia that now face extinction. They say the animals could be introduced gradually on private land. Eventually, fenced animal reserves could be opened to tourists.

## Bad Idea

Those against the plan argue that releasing different species into new environments can cause destruction. Cane toads, for example, brought to

Australia from Hawaii to control beetles in sugarcane fields, ate everything in sight. Cattle and sheep ranchers are also concerned that the wild animals might devour their herds.

Critics of the plan say that there are

already a lot of endangered animals that need protection in North America. Scientist Donald Grayson says, “Why introduce . . . camels and lions when there are North American species that could benefit from the same kind of effort?”

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**Some people say the addition of elephants, lions, and other big game animals would make the Great Plains even greater.**