

# COLORING BOOK

*Artwork by Erica Freese*



**AMERICAN  
PRAIRIE**

AGES 12 +

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American Prairie is a nonprofit with the vision of restoring and sharing with the public a fully functioning shortgrass prairie ecosystem in north central Montana. This book features plants, animals, and insects that help make our grasslands healthy, vibrant, colorful, and resilient. As you color life into these pages, we hope the beautiful intricacies of the prairie will inspire you to get involved. Every dollar donated to American Prairie makes a tangible impact on the flora and fauna that thrive on the landscape, and is an investment in the incredible possibilities in the near and distant future. Learn more at [americanprairie.org](http://americanprairie.org).



**POLLINATORS** like the Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) are critically important to plant life across the prairie, including wildflowers like the Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea angustifolia*). By transferring pollen from plant to plant as they look for nectar, pollinators promote plant genetic diversity. Pollinator insects, like bees, moths, wasps, and butterflies, are also part of the prairie food chain for hungry birds.



**BIRDS OF PREY** such as the Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) are some of the great hunters of the plains. Soaring above the rolling hills, or perched above open fields, the eating habits of birds of prey (look at those talons!) help control populations of small rodents and rabbits.



**NATIVE PLANTS** create the foundation of the prairie. Deep, underground root systems keep the soil intact and also store carbon removed from the atmosphere. Above ground, they are nutritious snacks for bison, elk, pronghorn and grouse. Can you identify each species as you color? Hint: look for Big Sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), Western Wheatgrass (*Pascopyrum smithii*), Blue Grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*), and Rubber Rabbitbrush (*Ericameria nauseosa*).

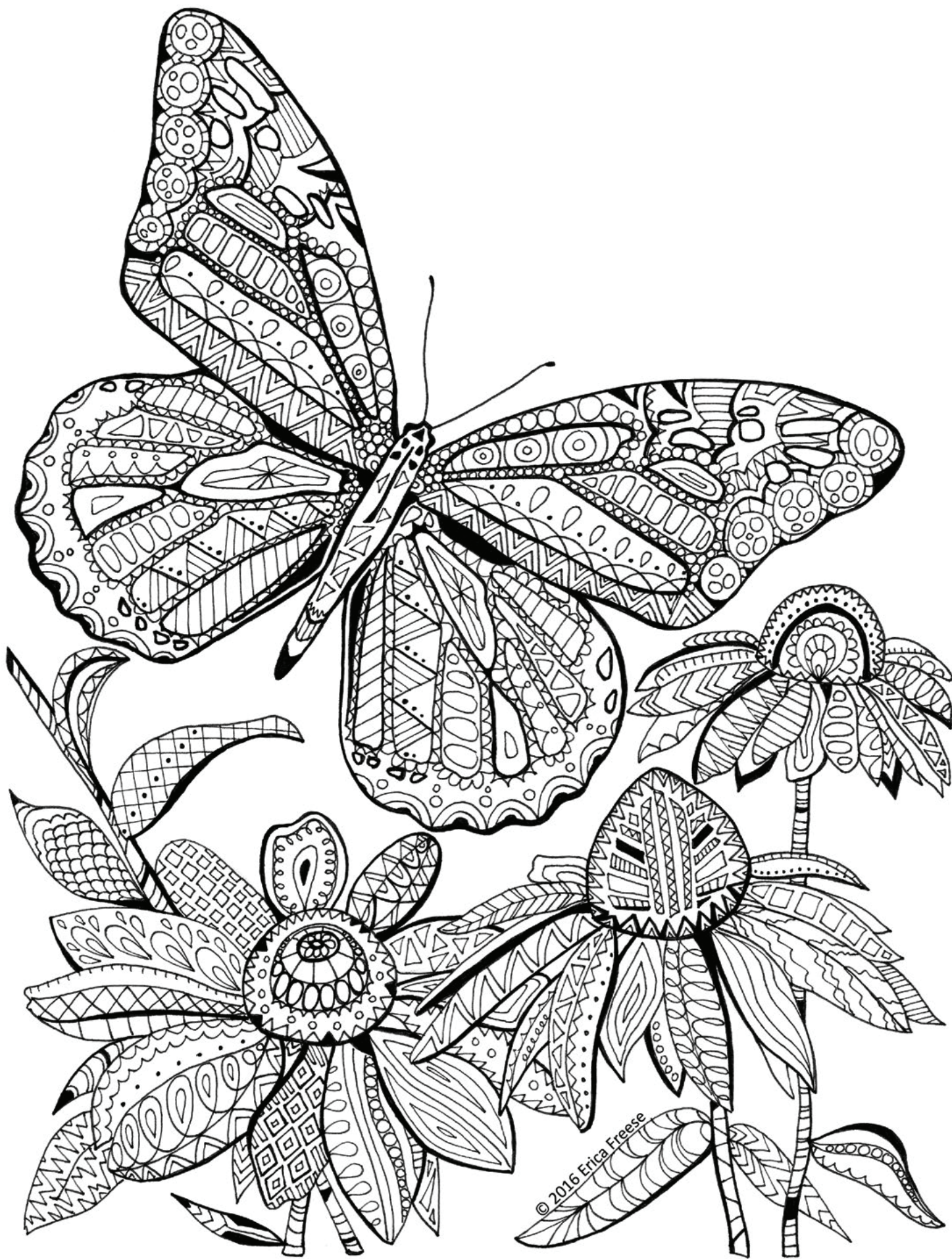


**PRAIRIE DOGS**, a keystone species, play an important role in the lives of many grassland creatures. Just like a construction site, the towns of Black-tailed Prairie Dogs (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) are works in progress as the animals dig burrows and mow down vegetation, making homes for snakes and birds and encouraging new grass growth. Prairie dogs are also a tasty snack for predators like the endangered Black-footed Ferret (*Mustela nigripes*).



**PLAINS BISON** once roamed North America in great numbers, shaping the ecosystem with unique grazing patterns that benefit plants and birds, making wallows that turn into mini wetlands, and even serving as prey for wolves and grizzly bears. Whether you call them bison or buffalo, this iconic species is crucial to the abundance of the prairie. Their return on American Prairie has restored both the land and a glimpse of the past.





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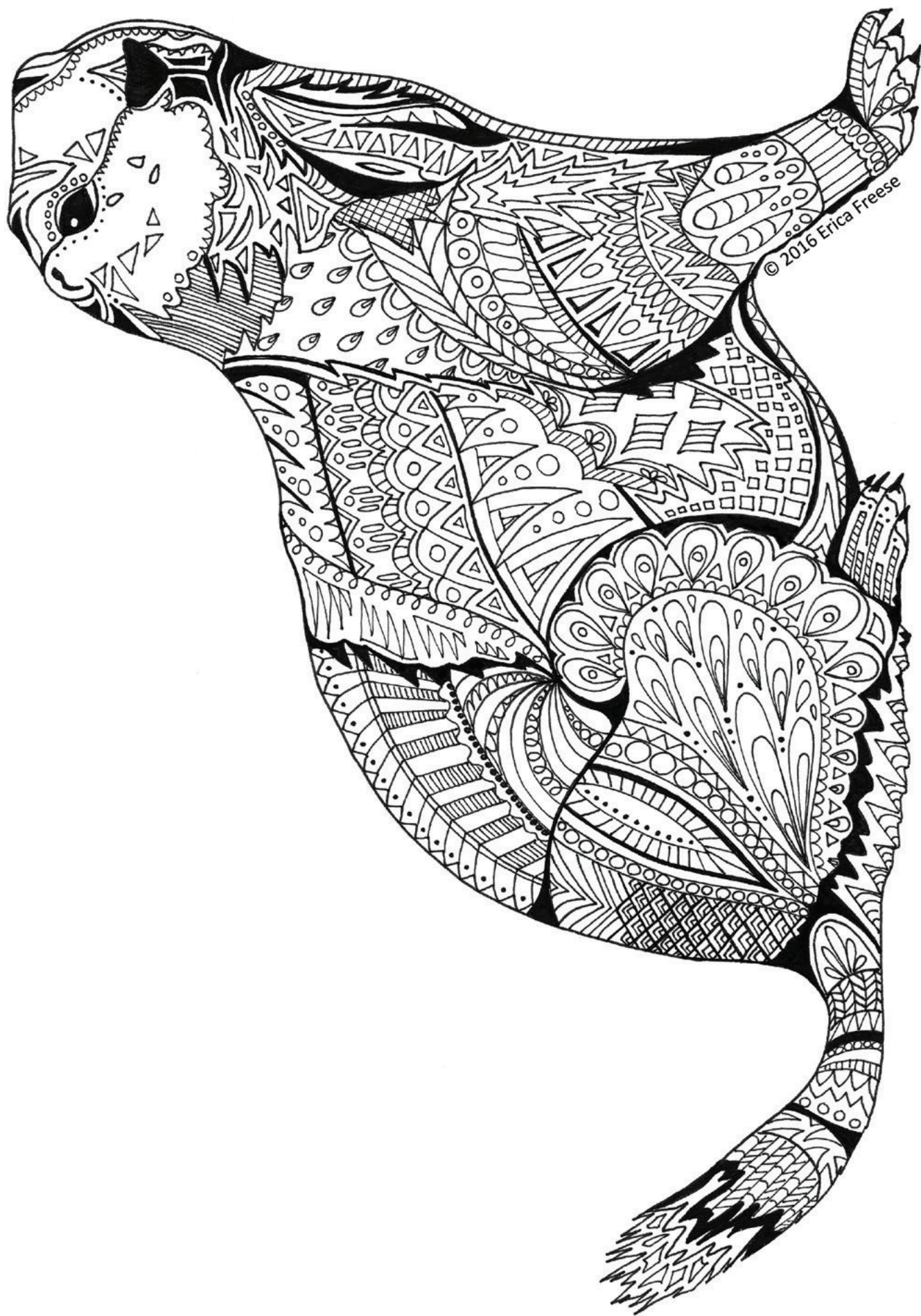
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"I ascended to the top of the cutt bluff this morning, from whence I had a most delightfull view of the country, the whole of which except the vally formed by the Missouri is void of timber or underbrush, exposing to the first glance of the spectator immense herds of Buffaloe, Elk, deer, Antelopes feeding in one common and boundless pasture."

*Meriwether Lewis, 1805*



# ABOUT THE ARTIST



*Erica holds a burrowing owl as part of a migration study taking place on American Prairie's Sun Prairie region in 2015.*

**Erica Freese** has been connected to American Prairie since its beginning. She grew up in Bozeman, Montana and saw the project develop over the years through the involvement of her father, conservation biologist Curt Freese. In 2005, she was fortunate to be one of the people who opened the corral gate to release the first 16 animals in the American Prairie's bison herd. In 2015, she lived and worked for a season on American Prairie as a member of our staff.

Erica earned a B.S. in Health and Exercise Science from Colorado State University and is continuing her studies at the University of Arizona to earn a Master of Public Health.

With regards to the connection between the prairie and her creative process, Erica says, "Making art provides the same internal peace that the prairie does. It allows me to slow down, find solitude and focus my mind."

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