

# FACT SHEET on WILD HORSES

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## WILD HORSE LAWS

- 1897 - The Nevada legislature passed a law allowing any citizen to shoot a wild horse on sight.
- 1971 - Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act passed by Congress.

§ "Congress finds and declares that wild free-roaming horses and burros are living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West; that they contribute to the diversity of life forms within the Nation and enrich the lives of the American people; and that these horses and burros are fast disappearing from the American scene. It is the policy of Congress that wild free-roaming horses and burros shall be protected from capture, branding, harassment, or death; and to accomplish this they are to be considered in the area where presently found, as an integral part of the natural system of the public lands."

- 2004 - Sen. Conrad Burns (R-MT) slipped a provision into a 3,000-page omnibus spending bill in December 2004 that effectively guts federal protections afforded to wild horses.

§ Division E, Section 142, of the Consolidated Appropriations Bill - H.R. 4818 (aka "Omnibus Spending bill.")

§ The language specifies that the horses "SHALL" be sold, rather than the more flexible "MAY."

§ Wild horses over the age of ten will be sold without limitations.

§ Wild horses aged ten and under will be sold without limitations if they are not adopted in three adoption attempts.

§ Selling wild horses for slaughter will no longer be considered a crime.

## SUMMARY - WILD HORSE POPULATION NUMBERS

- Turn of the Century - At the turn of the century, there were approximately 2 million wild horses on public lands.
- 1974 - There were approximately 60,000 wild horses and burros on public lands.
- 1985 - BLM tried to gain sale authority and failed because of the outcry of the American public. At that time BLM had warehoused about 40,000 wild horses
- Today - There are likely fewer than 36,000 wild horses and burros on public lands. BLM plans to bring the population down to 20,000 wild horses and burros. At BLM's target population levels, 70% of the herd areas will have less than 100 animals. Such populations will not be genetically viable over the long term. Wild horse and rescue groups estimate that Approximately 6000 to 14,000 wild horses will go to slaughter in the next twelve months.

## **FACTS IN SUPPORT OF H.R. 297- RAHALL/WHITFIELD BILL- INTRODUCED 1/25/05 INTO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES**

- In the 1800's when grass was knee high in all the western states, over 2 million wild horses roamed the West along with 60 million bison.
- By 1900, the bison were nearly exterminated and the wild horse population drastically reduced.
- From 1950 on, a campaign to save the last remaining wild horses and burros was begun by a Nevada rancher's wife - Velma [Bonn] Johnston known as "Wild Horse Annie."
- As a result of a massive letter writing campaign in 1971, PL 92-195 "The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act" was passed unanimously and protected wild horses and burros from slaughter, harassment, and capture on public lands.
- The Act acknowledged, "Wild horses and burros were fast disappearing from the American scene." In 1974, the first wild horse and burros census counted 60,000 animals.
- Today, the numbers have been cut in half - 32,000 animals - in spite of the law clearly stating that wild horses and burros ranges (HMAs) should be "devoted principally but not necessarily exclusively to their welfare"
- Since 1971 wild horses and burros have been removed from 102 ranges (Herd Areas) representing a loss of approximately 13 million acres of land. (There were 303 Herd Areas - now only 201 Herd Management Areas [HMAs] remain.
- Wild horses and burros now reside on 34,549,570 acres of the 261,950,378 BLM acres.
- Today, the wild horses have the greatest genetic diversity [little to no inbreeding] compared to any particular breed of domestic horse in our country (Dr. E. Gus Cothran - University of Kentucky).
- Fiscal year 2005, BLM will reduce populations by 9,300 wild horses & burros, bringing numbers far below the levels suggested for maintaining healthy populations by the University of Kentucky - (E. Gus Cothran-Equine Geneticist )
- Although nearly 70% of the HMAs have less than 100 animals, the absolute minimum number of wild horses and burros in each HMA should be 150 animals to prevent loss of the genetic diversity (Dr. E. Gus Cothran-University of Kentucky). This figure is based on optimal conditions and does not take into account Acts of God such as drought, deep snow, fire, etc.
- With the above minimum number - the absolute minimum number of animals should be no less than 30,150 horses and burros under optimum conditions. BLM plans to reduce animals to 23,000.
- In the 2005 Federal Omnibus Appropriation Bill, Senator Conrad Burns (R-MT) attached a rider that gave BLM authority to sell - without limitation [slaughter]- wild horses over the age of ten [the prime of life of horses]. 8,300 wild horses fit this criterion. The rider also specified that any animal not adopted in three adoptions attempts would also be sold without limitations - 100 animals fit this criterion.
- The 8,300 wild horses now earmarked under the Burn's rider for slaughter were never given an opportunity to be adopted but were sent immediately to long-term holding pasture sanctuaries, not holding corrals.

- The cost of holding the 8,300 wild horses in the long-term holding sanctuaries for 2004 was \$6,800,236.00 in BLM's overall budget of \$839,848,000.00 - (Wild Horse and Burro program represents only 4.6% of their entire budget- \$39,062,000.) Opposition states that the majority of BLM's wild horse budget was used for the long-term holding, which is inaccurate.
- Because of the lack of a quality-marketing program, BLM has been ineffective in promoting adoptions, especially of older animals. Although BLM has adopted out more than 200,000 animals since 1976. This success is due to more than 65% of adopters returning to adopt more animals. (The product sells itself.)
- The majority of Herd Areas contain more livestock than wild horses and burros.
- Wild horses and burros receive 458,508 AUMs while livestock receive 7,101,592 AUMs (2002) [An AUM is the amount of forage required to feed a cow and calf per month or 1 horse or 5 sheep.]
- Due to droughts in some parts of the West, BLM has conducted emergency removals instead of implementing CFR 4710.5 "closure to livestock."
- CFR 4710.5 was designed to protect wild horses and burros during anticipated droughts and other Acts of God by closing the HMAs to livestock grazing. This CFR is rarely implemented. In the few cases it was implemented, wild horses and burros were permanently removed while livestock returned a few months later.
- Cattle on public lands represent only 2% of the beef eaten in the U.S. The rest of the beef comes from private ranchers who pay \$20 to \$50/AUM to lease private land.
- The cost to graze cattle on public lands is \$1.79/AUM. Half of this money is returned to the BLM/ Forest Service "Range Betterment Program." These monies go back to the rancher for range improvements. The Public Lands Grazing program costs taxpayers one-half billion dollars yearly. Based on the annual economic income growth from 1990-1997, the loss of all federal grazing in 1997 would have caused income growth in eleven western states (ten of which wild horses and burros are located) to pause for eight days. This means that direct income and job losses could be made up in a matter of a few days by the normal expansion of the economy. (University of Montana - Missoula)