

## EDITORIAL OPINION

### Why Ken Salazar Has to Go

**Issue:** Secretary of Interior's proposal to remove wild horses from Western lands and relocate them in midwestern states.

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Last November, the new administration and the party currently in control of both the US Senate and House of Representatives ran on a platform of relevance and change. The presumption among many voters was that our government would move toward becoming more honest with and responsive to the American citizenry. We were expected to see a better balance between special interests and public interests. In some limited regards we are seeing some change, however with respect to the US Department of Interior and the Bureau of Land Management, it appears that "business as usual" is still the direction being taken.

"Business as usual" in this instance, is deflecting blame, instead of accepting it and correcting it, for agency mistakes. It also includes manipulating facts and figures for agency convenience and literally claiming that less is more. Ken Salazar is the Secretary of Interior. The buck stops at his desk. Yet he is guilty of the very same deceptions that his agency is historically known for.

In a recent letter to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Secretary Salazar tried to deflect responsibility for his agency's failings by falsifying wild horse and burro population figures, falsely claiming that a reduction in free-roaming horses and burros on public lands was actually an increase, falsely claiming that the range cannot sustain the current populations of horses and burros, falsely claiming that the range was devoid of predators, and making other assertions that completely overlooked gross flaws with the agency's management of America's wild horses and burros - flaws that have produced a financial nightmare.

Wild horse and burro populations do need to be managed. One necessary component of this management strategy involves removals of animals where populations exceed (or are about to exceed) range resources. A necessary component of any "management by removal" strategy involves a robust placement (adoption) system whereby both private and public agency adopters can absorb these animals, and in turn stimulate the agricultural economy through the care and maintenance of the animals so placed. While Secretary Salazar's acknowledgment that the current mess will likely involve some outside the box thinking (e.g., public-private sanctuary projects,) there is no magic pill that will make the mistakes of the past go away.

An apparently forgotten but necessary component of any effective management strategy is to objectively look at all the demands on public lands resources (e.g., subsidized public lands ranching) and make decisions based on the most cost effective way to preserve viable resources on our public lands. In some instances it may be far less expensive and better serve the overall public interest to remove subsidized cattle rather than remove more horses than BLM's adoption system can place in private hands and suffer the expenses that those decisions produce. However many of the agency's decisions still appear to be in response to traditional special interests rather than the public's interests.

While we are not suggesting that there aren't legitimate uses for our public lands other than providing habitat for horses, we need to remember that in 1971 the American public didn't overwhelm Congress with cries to protect privately owned cows on our public lands. Perhaps it's time that Secretary Salazar reflect on real history and manage our public lands according to the will of the people. If he can't get on board with that concept, Salazar needs to go and make room for someone who has some awareness that ultimately he or she works for "We the People."