

In Support of H.R. 297

Questions and Answers – Wild Horses

The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971- PL 92-195 as Amended

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.

Q: Is there really an over population of wild horses on public lands?

- We have *fewer* wild horses and burros now than when the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act passed in 1971 stating, “wild horses and burros were fast disappearing from the American scene.”
- There were 60,000 wild horses and burros counted during 1974 ground census.
- BLM’s target goal is approximately 23,000. This number is far below the recommended minimum number to sustain healthy populations. [30,150 animals] ((Dr. E. Gus Cothran – University of Kentucky)
- BLM has eliminated wild horses and burros from 102 Herd Areas (home ranges) of the 303 areas that Congress had designated for sustaining wild horses and burros.
- Per the Act, these ranges are to be used “PRINCIPALLY” for wild horses and burros. Yet wild horse populations have been **cut in half** while livestock numbers have not been significantly reduced in more than twenty years.
- Wild horses and burros have been zeroed out from more than 13 million acres originally designated for them by the 1971 Act and are now found on only 34.5 million acres of the 261 million public lands acres managed by the BLM.
- CFR 9710.5 – rarely implemented by the BLM- is to be used in times of drought and other inclement conditions to keep wild horses and burros on public lands.
- “Despite lacking data on the number of wild horses the land can support, BLM **has proceeded** with removing wild horses.” (GAO – 1990-RCED-90/110)

Q: Are wild horses the cause of over-grazing of the public rangelands?

- “BLM frequently used the lack of detailed carrying capacity and range monitoring data to explain why it **has not taken action** to reduce widely recognized overgrazing by domestic livestock.” (GAO –1990-RCED-90/110)
- “The primary cause of degradation in rangeland resources is poorly managed domestic livestock (primarily cattle and sheep) grazing.” “Although recognizing that overgrazing was occurring, BLM range managers reported that no adjustments in the authorized livestock grazing levels were scheduled in 75% of the allotments threatened with further damage.” (GAO- 1990 RCED –90-110)
- BLM refused to make proportionate reductions of *private* livestock and wild horses recommended by 1990 GAO. Instead the *public’s* wild horses continue to be reduced drastically.

Q: Why are there 8,300 wild horses in long-term holding pastures?

- These horses should never have been removed from their rangelands. Removals of wild horses are not based on the Act, “achieving a thriving ecological balance.” BLM bases AML (appropriate management level) on perceived historic population levels and recommendations from Advisory Boards comprised mainly of livestock permittees. (GAO –1990 RCED- 90-110)
- BLM has historically favored management based on capture and removal, rather than in-the-wild management.
- These older horses in holding facilities were **never given** an opportunity to be adopted based on a myth that older horses are “unadoptable.” They were sent directly to long-term holding pastures.

- BLM's poor marketing program and lack of understanding the uniqueness of wild horses has led to the perceived notion that older horses are unadoptable.

Q: Are wild horses really suffering from drought and starvation?

- The majority of wild horses captured are in good condition.
- Instances where wild horses' health and well being are in jeopardy within HMAs often reflects the animals' inability to ingress and egress due to locked gates and barrier fences. In some areas water sources are shut off to the animals by permittees.
- BLM has the responsibility to manage for emergencies when forage is limited or other Acts of God such as drought, severe winters, fires, etc. by implementing CFR 7410.5 "closure to livestock" This means in order to protect wild horses and burros, livestock are to be removed first. BLM has rarely used this CFR.

Q: Is the current BLM management removal strategy fiscally responsible?

- "Reducing authorized grazing levels would likely be cheaper than wild horse removals to achieve the same reduction in forage consumption. (GAO 1990)
- The cost to remove a wild horse for adoption is \$3,300.00
- BLM's wild horse and burro budget was increased 50% in 2001 to fund a massive removals
- In 2005, BLM's budget was increased by another third, to continue with the removal campaign and maintain tens of thousands of horses in government holding corrals.
- A 2004 USGS study found that in-the-wild use of contraceptive measures alone would save \$7.7 million annually

Q: Why are wild horses unique and why must viable numbers be preserved on public lands?

- Wild horses are far more genetically diverse compared to any particular breed of horse in the U.S. = little to no inbreeding. (Dr. E. Gus Cothran –University of Kentucky)
- It may be necessary to assist some failing domestic breeds that have been heavily inbred..

Q: Are wild horses native to our continent? (See enclosed statement by Drs. Jay F. Kirkpatrick and Patricia M. Fazio)

- Wild horses have recently been shown to be a "reintroduced" native wildlife species in North America. (Published in modern molecular biology research journals. See enclosed analysis of published papers)
- Horses evolved exclusively in North America over approximately 57 million years.
- Horses vanished from North America approximately 13,000 to 11,000 years ago during the megafaunal extinctions.
- Horses reintroduced by the Spanish are genetically equivalent to those that went extinct.
- Reintroduced Spanish horses (1519) adapted to the same ecological niches as their native relatives had once thrived in.

Q: How do most Americans feel about wild horses?

- In 1971, more than 70 bills were introduced into Congress for the protection of wild horses and burros. The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act then passed *unanimously* in Congress.
- Support for wild horses generated the largest outpouring of mail in the history of Congress – second only to the Vietnam War.
- Support for wild horses crosses all political, cultural, and social lines.
- Horses have been connected to almost all cultures of the world assisting in the development of civilization and creating a lasting special human-animal bond.
- "Whereas the horse is a living link to the history of the United States... whereas horses are a vital part of the collective experience of the United States and deserve protection and compassion... the Senate encourages all people of the United States to be mindful of the contribution of horses to the economy, history and character of the United States." (Congress – November 18th – National Day of the Horse resolution- 2004)