



**OREGON CHAPTER
OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY**

PO Box 2378
Corvallis, OR 97339

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From: John Goodell, Vice President-Elect, Oregon Chapter of The Wildlife Society

To: National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board

The Oregon Chapter of The Wildlife Society (ORTWS) represents nearly 400 professional field and research biologists, educators, students, administrators, and conservation enforcement officers from many areas of public and private enterprise. Our mission is to promote wise conservation and management of wildlife resources in Oregon by serving and representing wildlife professionals. A central purpose of ORTWS is to aid public discussion of natural resource management in our state by communicating sound science to entities engaged in management decisions.

A robust body of peer-reviewed scientific literature reveals that free-roaming horse and burro populations negatively impact rangeland ecosystems. Free-roaming horses and burros compete with native wildlife for food and water resources and disproportionately impact critical habitats such as natural springs, seeps and riparian zones. Furthermore, their grazing strategies are not ecologically equivalent to the influence of managed cattle. Consequently, free-roaming horses consume as much as 65% more forage than a cow of equivalent body mass and clip vegetation closer to the ground, further impeding plant recovery. Appropriate management levels for free-roaming horses and burros are thus calculated based upon our scientific understanding of this unique, exotic herbivore and its impacts to priority native species and their habitats.

Considering best available rangeland science, The Wildlife Society encourages the Advisory Board to support and prioritize science-based management solutions that can quickly and effectively reduce the number of on-range horses and burros to ecologically-sustainable levels.

Failure to do so not only sustains ongoing ecological damage, but presents a significant barrier to collaborative conservation on behalf of the greater sage-grouse and sage-steppe conservation. The success of the Greater Sage-grouse Conservation Plan relies largely upon ongoing collaboration with key stakeholders. While the social values of stakeholders vary, science is the common language used by agencies to negotiate conservation outcomes such as new rest-rotation grazing regimes more compatible with brood-rearing habitat for grouse.

Oregon wildlife managers establish credibility with key stakeholders, based on the mutual acknowledgment of best available peer-reviewed science. In doing so, stakeholders are adjusting their practices in ways that may negatively affect their bottom

line, with the understanding, based on science, that these practices may benefit grouse and the sagebrush-steppe ecosystem.

Collaborative conservation presents exciting new possibilities, but it is a two way street. Ignoring best available science with respect to free-roaming horse and burros undermines the credibility of resource managers and threatens the precarious good will of key stakeholders so essential to conservation collaboration throughout the Interior West.

On behalf of the Oregon Chapter of the Wildlife Society's Board and Officers, Thank you for your time and consideration.