

March 31, 2014

The Honorable Ken Calvert  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment  
and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jim Moran  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment  
and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20515

**Re: Request for Congress to allow the BLM to manage Wild Horse populations as mandated by the *Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971***

Dear Chairman Calvert and Ranking Member Moran:

The undersigned organizations are concerned about the impact wild horses and burros have on our native rangeland ecosystems and the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) ability to effectively manage their populations. The signatories are a combination of wildlife conservation and sportsmen organizations, industry partners, and professional natural resource scientific societies who regularly work together to identify proactive and comprehensive solutions that increase effective management of horse and burro populations and mitigate their adverse impacts on native fish, wildlife, plants and the ecosystems on which they depend.

With very few options remaining to effectively gain control over horse and burro populations, the undersigned organizations urge Congress to provide BLM the full flexibility allowed in the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act by **refraining from adding the following language to the FY15 Appropriations Bill:**

*“Appropriations herein made shall not be available for the destruction of healthy, unadopted, wild horses and burros in the care of the Bureau or its contractors or for the sale of wild horses and burros that results in their destruction for processing into commercial products.”*

Due to a burgeoning wild horse population and limited resources, the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program is currently ineffective and unsustainable. The program is failing in its mission “to ensure that healthy herds thrive on healthy rangelands.”<sup>1</sup> Currently, more than 40,000 horses and burros live on ranges the BLM indicates can sustainably support only 27,000 animals<sup>2</sup>. In addition to this over-population of free-ranging horses and burros, there are nearly 50,000 being cared for by the BLM in holding facilities, costing U.S. taxpayers \$46 million per year.

According to findings within a National Academy of Science report, horse and burro populations on rangelands have the potential to double in size every four to five years. This extremely high rate of growth in already over-abundant and destructive populations threatens our native wildlife, plants, and ecosystems. For example, wild horse and burro populations overlap nearly 10 million acres of Greater

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<sup>1</sup> BLM National Wild Horse and Burro Program Website, <http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/whbprogram.html>, accessed on 3/28/2014

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/whbprogram/history\\_and\\_facts/quick\\_facts.html](http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/whbprogram/history_and_facts/quick_facts.html), accessed on 3/28/2014. A recent report by the National Academy of Science indicates that the BLM may be undercounting horses and burros on the range; this number may actually be significantly higher.

Sage Grouse habitat. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service must decide, by September 2015, whether to propose a rule to list this species or find a listing is not warranted, making any unaddressed adverse impacts to the species extremely critical.

Our native rangeland ecosystems and the health of our wild horse and burro populations are degrading, and due to the above language, the BLM cannot take advantage of all the authorities provided by the *Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971*. We are convinced that the removal of this language is a practical solution that allows the BLM to properly manage herd population and rangeland health, and take the steps necessary to be a leader in wildlife and species conservation.

As evidenced by the following data, the Wild Horse and Burro Program has experienced substantial increased costs due to the overpopulation of horses and burros on rangelands and a lack of authority to appropriately address the situation.

**Horses and burros in short- and long-term holding facilities:**

| <b>Year: 2001<sup>3</sup></b> | <b>Year: 2014<sup>2</sup></b> | <b>% Change</b> |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| 9,807                         | 48,812                        | +498%           |

The BLM’s total holding capacity is 52,083 animals.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the BLM has chosen to no longer conduct roundups to remove horses from rangelands because there is no longer space in facilities that could hold the animals. This effectively leaves fertility control as the only population control method and puts millions of acres of rangeland at risk.

**Total cost to U.S. taxpayers for short- and long-term holding facilities:**

| <b>FY00<sup>3</sup></b> | <b>FY13<sup>2</sup></b> | <b>% Change</b> |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| \$7 million             | \$46.2 million          | +660%           |

This dire situation of increasing costs and horse and burro populations results in negative impacts on range conditions and can lead to inhumane conditions for the horses and burros themselves. It is imperative that BLM continue to remove excess horses from rangelands to protect the native ecosystem and the well-being of the horses. The BLM needs to protect our rangelands while also lessening the burden on taxpayers; removing the language in the appropriations bill will allow them to do so.

We believe removing this language in the appropriations bill is a practical solution that will allow the BLM to more effectively address the issue of horse and burro over-population on our country’s rangelands.

Sincerely,

American Farm Bureau Federation  
 Masters of Fox Hounds Association  
 Mule Deer Foundation  
 National Association of Conservation Districts  
 National Cattlemen’s Beef Association  
 National Wildlife Refuge Association

Public Lands Council  
 Public Lands Foundation  
 Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation  
 Safari Club International  
 Society for Range Management  
 The Wildlife Society

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<sup>3</sup> 2008 GAO report