



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

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National Wild Horse & Burro Advisory Board Meeting
Sacramento, California
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The Wildlife Society would like to thank the Advisory Board for the opportunity to provide comments today. The Wildlife Society was founded in 1937 and is a non-profit scientific and educational organization representing nearly 10,000 professional wildlife biologists and managers, dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education. Our mission is to represent and serve the professional community of scientists, managers, educators, technicians, planners, and others who work actively to study, manage, and conserve wildlife and habitats worldwide.

The Wildlife Society has been involved with feral horse management for several years and is a founding member of the National Horse and Burro Rangeland Management Coalition. As part of this diverse Coalition, we are focused on practical, common-sense, scientific-based solutions to horse and burro management concerns. We strive to find and support options that will enable the BLM horse and burro program to manage for healthy herds on healthy ranges, as stated in the mission of the program¹.

We do not believe the BLM Horse and Burro Management program has achieved or is making adequate progress toward the goal of “healthy horses on healthy ranges”. According to the BLM, current range populations total over 40,000 individuals, well above the BLM’s own management goal of under 27,000²; and populations continue to rise. In spite of this overpopulation, the BLM has recently indicated they may not continue roundups of feral horses on the range³. Roundups are a primary method of controlling feral horse and burro populations; not conducting roundups will result in further degradation of native ranges, harming native wildlife and plants. We strongly encourage the BLM to continue roundups for the protection of native species.

We recognize that the BLM is currently over-burdened with caring for horses in holding pens and other facilities; facilities are nearing their approximately 52,000 animal capacity and costs continue to rise². We, along with several other organizations, have urged Congress to give the BLM the authority to utilize all methods allowed by the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act to appropriately manage herds and ultimately reduce the burden on the BLM and U.S. taxpayers. If the BLM is granted this authority, we urge them to fully utilize the authorized powers to bring horse and burro populations to levels that protect native ranges and the health of the horses and burros.

¹ <http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/whbprogram.html>, accessed on 4/3/2014

² http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/whbprogram/history_and_facts/quick_facts.html, accessed on 4/3/2014

³ Internal Working Document: Information memorandum for the assistant director, renewable resources and planning, August 2013. By Joan Guilfoyle, Wild Horse and Burro Division Chief

Research in the Great Basin has found that rangelands with high densities of feral horses and burros have fewer plants, grasses and shrub species and more invasive plants and weeds. These changes to the natural environment degrade the land, limit water resources and lower the diversity of native species.

Of particular concern is the Greater Sage Grouse, a native bird species currently a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Nearly 10 million acres⁴ of Herd Management Areas overlap with greater sage grouse habitat, placing this species at further risk by an overpopulation of horses and burros. The BLM can play a crucial role in leading conservation efforts for this iconic species by reducing the risks caused by horses and burros in the grouse's native habitat.

Healthy populations of small reptiles, imperiled grassland birds, and migratory mammals like pronghorn and big horn sheep are critical components of our rangeland ecosystems and are fundamental in maintaining a thriving natural ecological balance. We wish to see priority placed on the overall health of the native range ecosystem, to the benefit of native plants and wildlife.

You have heard and will hear many other groups today advocate on behalf of horses – for the horses' well-being, humane-treatment, and sustainment on the landscape. We are not here to argue against those organizations; we also strive for the well-being and humane treatment of horses. However, we recognize what these other groups fail to see through their passion – that the overpopulation of horses and burros on rangelands has dire consequences for the native wildlife, plants, the overall range ecosystem, and for the well-being of the horses themselves.

We ask the Advisory Board to recognize the ecological risks associated with the current overpopulation of feral horses and to encourage the BLM to respond with all appropriate and necessary actions to reduce feral horse and burro populations.

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⁴ BLM presentation given at the April 2012 Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board meeting