NATIONAL HORSE & BURRO RANGELAND MANAGEMENT COALITION

Policy Statement

Managing America's Horses and Burros

America's wild and free-roaming horses (*Equus caballus*) and burros (*E. asinus*) are the descendants of domesticated Eurasian and African horses and burros and are an iconic, yet non-native, species in North America. The 1971 Federal Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act authorizes the BLM and USFS to oversee the management, protection, and control of these animals within limited designated areas on public lands. The federal management of these animals has become a controversial issue.

Skinny Mare, Nevada 2012 (Credit: Savanah Strum)

Land Management Agencies

These federal agencies are responsible for balancing horse and burro populations with natural resource management, biodiversity, and other multiple uses on public lands.

- **Bureau of Land Management (BLM)**
- **Department of Defense (DOD)**
- **National Park Service (NPS)**
- **U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS)**
- **U.S. Forest Service (USFS)**

Current Situation

As of March 2015, the BLM estimated the population of horses and burros on BLM-managed rangelands at 58,150 individuals throughout ten western states. This population level greatly exceeds the appropriate management level (AML) of 26,677, which is the population size the lands can support. Exceeding the AML can result in ecological damage to natural rangeland resources.

In addition to those populations existing on rangelands, more than 47,000 horses and burros are being held in corrals and pastures at taxpayer expense -- removed by BLM in an effort to maintain AMLs. Only 2,631 were placed into adoption during 2015, and only about 5,800 have been sold since 2005.

Populations both on and off the range continue to grow.

Healthy Native Rangeland

Rangelands must be managed to maintain and conserve native rangeland biodiversity. These lands support a multitude of our nation's natural resources. Horse and burro overpopulation on public lands poses a severe threat to all other rangeland resources including the native fish, wildlife, and plants that characterize a healthy rangeland ecosystem.

Healthy Horses

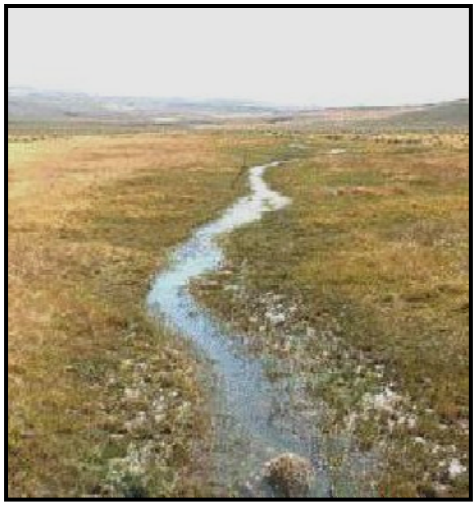
Management of horse and burro populations is beneficial to the health of the animals. When overpopulated, horses and burros are vulnerable to starvation and dehydration due to the degradation of overall rangeland health and limited resource availability. The health and well-being of these and all other animals utilizing rangelands are put in jeopardy when populations exceed AMLs.

Managing for Multiple Use

Our rangeland resource should be managed for multiple use in accordance with the law and the land's scientifically proven capability to accommodate a variety of uses, including the presence of horses and burros and the native biodiversity of the landscape. Although the management of horses and burros was statutorily mandated in the Act as a multiple use where these animals were found in 1971, the law does not grant horse and burro use priority over native wildlife, grazing, recreation, and other approved uses. Federal land management agencies must manage rangelands appropriately for all uses.

Fertility Control & Removal

Horses and burros have no natural predators and under the Act their populations cannot be managed by traditional wildlife management practices. Horses and burros typically double their herd size every four to five years if not actively managed. Effective removal and fertility control programs must be implemented to conserve and protect rangeland resources. Population growth must be managed such that reproduction rates match sale and adoption rates. Additionally, appropriate exclusionary methods should be used on NPS and NWRS lands to protect native species adversely affected by these non-native animals.



Meadow prior to horse removal, Sept. 2004

Meadow after horse removal, Sept. 2006

Evidence of horse and burro degradation to native rangeland ecosystems from the Catnip Meadow in Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge. (Credit: USFWS)

Sound Science

Responsible agencies should adhere to a high standard of scientific integrity through the use of sound scientific principles when developing management plans, review practices, and accurately and precisely identify the impacts (via monitoring) of horses and burros on wildlife populations, habitats, and other natural resources managed for public benefit.

Fiscal Responsibility

During economically difficult times, it is imperative that funding for the Wild Horse and Burro Program be wisely used to manage and improve the rangelands on which these animals roam. While programmatic costs to the taxpayer have increased from $36.7 million in 2004 to $77.2 million in 2015, the percentage of the budget used for on-the-ground management has continued to decrease.

Conclusions

The burgeoning population of horses and burros on public lands threatens natural rangeland ecosystems, native fish, wildlife, and plants, livestock grazing, horse and burro well-being, and taxpayer funds.

The consistent application of sound science and economics in relation to animal and rangeland management should be used throughout all horse and burro programs.

About the Coalition

The National Horse & Burro Rangeland Management Coalition includes a wide range of sportsmen, livestock, wildlife, and conservation organizations and professional societies. Collectively, we represent over eight million Americans and focus on commonsense, ecologically-sound approaches to managing horses and burros to promote healthy wildlife and rangelands for future generations.

American Farm Bureau Federation • American Sheep Industry Association • Masters of Foxhounds Association • Mule Deer Foundation
National Association of Conservation Districts National Cattlemen's Beef Association • National Rifle 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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