



NATIONAL HORSE & BURRO RANGELAND MANAGEMENT COALITION

Advocating for commonsense, ecologically-sound approaches to managing horses and burros
to promote healthy wildlife and rangelands for future generations

EFFECTS ON NATIVE WILDLIFE

Wild Horse and Burro Facts

- BLM rangelands can support <27,000 horses and burros.
- There are currently >72,000 horses and burros on BLM ranges.
- Horse populations double every 4 years.
- There are >46,000 horses and burros in BLM off-range holding facilities.
- Taxpayers pay about \$50 million per year to care for horses and burros in holding.

Elk, mule deer, pronghorn, and sage-grouse rely on our public rangelands to survive. The well-being of native wildlife, including those of *threatened and endangered species*, is put at risk by the growing population of wild horses and burros.

Dominance Behavior – Horses have been known to exhibit dominance behavior towards native wildlife over common resources. For example, **bighorn sheep**, a native species in the rangelands, avoid watering sites when horses are present. The presence of horses at a resource **reduces bighorn sheep willingness to approach by 76%** (Osterman-Kelm et al. 2008).

Competition for Food & Water – Horses and burros must share resources with native wildlife.

Growing populations of horses and burros lead to increased competition with native wildlife over scarce food and water resources.

Why are horses considered non-native?

Although some horse lineages evolved in North America, they went extinct approximately 11,400 years ago.

Modern feral horses in North America are descendants of a domesticated breed introduced from Europe and are therefore considered a **non-native species**.



(Credit: Masa Verde National Park)

Horse herd chasing off native elk.

Effects to Habitat - Horses exhibit non-selective grazing behavior, trample native vegetation, and cause soil compaction near critical access points to water. These behaviors have severe negative impacts on native wildlife. Areas with an overabundance of horses and burros have fewer plant species, lower occurrence of native grasses, higher presence of invasive species, and less vegetative cover (Beever & Aldridge 2011).



(Credit: Laura Snell)

Greater sage-grouse - Sage-grouse habitats overlap with 30% of BLM horse and burro rangelands, making them susceptible to the changes in vegetation composition associated with horse and burro grazing. **A decrease in grass height is directly correlated with a decrease in nest survival** (Doherty et al. 2014)

Ant Populations - Horse and burro foraging behavior has had a negative effect on ant populations. Ants are a necessary component of the western ecosystem, acting as decomposers and soil aerators.

In the western U.S., ant mounds have been found to have **2.2 - 8.4 times greater abundance in areas where horses have been removed** (Beever & Herrick 2006).



(Credit: USFWS Pacific Region)



Soil compaction by wild horses.

(Credit: BLM)

Beever, E. A., and C. L. Aldridge. 2011. Influences of free-roaming equids on sagebrush ecosystems, with a focus on Greater Sage-Grouse. Pp. 273-290 in S. T. Knick and J. W. Connelly (editors). Greater Sage-Grouse: ecology and conservation of a landscape species and its habitats. Studies in Avian Biology (vol. 38), University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.

Beever, E.A., Herrick, J.E. 2006. Effects of feral horses in Great Basin landscapes on soils and ants: Direct and indirect mechanisms. Journal of Arid Environments. 66:96-112.

Doherty, K.E., D.E. Naugle, J.D. Tack, B.L. Walker, J.M. Graham, and J.L. Beck. 2014. Linking conservation actions to demography: grass height explains variation in greater sage-grouse nest survival. Wildlife Biology 2014 20 (6), 320-325

Osterman-Kelm, S., E.R. Atwill, E.S. Rubin, M.C. Jorgensen, and W.M. Boyce. 2008. Interactions between feral horses and desert bighorn sheep at water. Journal of Mammalogy 89(2): 459-466.

(See generally) United States Department of the Interior. Bureau of Land Management. Wild Horse and Burro Quick Facts. 2016. <http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/whbprogram/history_and_facts/quick_facts.html> Accessed March 2016.

United States Department of the Interior. Bureau of Land Management. Wild Horse and Burro Myths and Facts. 2016. <http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/whbprogram/history_and_facts/myths_and_facts.html> Accessed March 2016.

- American Farm Bureau Federation • American Sheep Industry Association • Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation
- Masters of Foxhounds Association • Mule Deer Foundation • National Association of Conservation Districts
- National Association of Counties • National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
- 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 • Wild Sheep Foundation