



# 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*

---

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Terra Rentz, NHBRMC Chair  
Phone: 301-897-9770 x309 / E-mail: [horseandrange@gmail.com](mailto:horseandrange@gmail.com)

### **Horse and Burro Coalition Statement on NBC's Wild Horse Stories**

Washington, DC (May 15, 2013) – The National Horse & Burro Rangeland Management Coalition issues the following statement in response to two stories released by NBC News today on wild horses:

“Recent stories by NBC News (Today Show: Wild horses: Endangered animals or menace, and Cruel or necessary? and [NBCNews.com](http://NBCNews.com): The true cost of wild horse roundups) portray only select facts and a narrow part of the reality surrounding wild horses and burros on the western range.

While regarded by many as icons of the American West, free-roaming horses and burros are in fact non-native species that threaten rangelands and native plant and animal species. But managed at appropriate population levels, wild horses and burros are not a “menace,” even to those with whom the range is shared. Nor is it accurate in any way to call wild horses and burros “endangered.” In fact, the problem is an overpopulation of horses and burros in and beyond many herd management areas. It is inaccurate for these reports to depict only healthy horses or rangelands. While this exists, so do unhealthy horses and degraded range. Finally, considering the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Federal agency tasked with managing most of the wild horses and burros in the West, has gathered tens of thousands of horses over the past decades, it is an unfair portrayal of those gathers to focus on a few instances of potentially inappropriate gather methods. While not perfect, the BLM works hard to maintain humane gather methods.

The BLM faces a daunting task. Current herd sizes, which greatly exceed manageable levels, stand to jeopardize other multiple uses called for by law; they do so by trampling vegetation, hardpacking the soil, and over-grazing. Current overpopulation of horses and burros on the range results in great suffering for the animals, many of which are dying of thirst or starvation. Other multiple uses that depend on healthy rangelands are suffering as well. Despite protection under the law, for example, BLM reports that since horses and burros became protected in 1971, ranching families have seen livestock grazing decline by 30 percent on BLM lands. Meanwhile, the horse population is 42 percent above the scientifically-determined Appropriate Management Level (AML) – which is the population size that BLM can graze without causing ecological damage to rangeland resources. More than 37,000 wild horses currently reside on the range, over 11,000 more than the west-wide AML of 26,500 individuals. Without management, horse and burro herds can double in size every four to five years.

The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 was enacted to protect “wild, free-roaming” horses and burros, as well as guide their management as part of the natural system on BLM and U.S. Forest Service lands in the western United States. The Act requires those agencies to maintain a “thriving natural ecological balance” and protect existing rights on those lands, based on the principle of multiple-use. The Act, as amended, also authorizes the agencies to use or contract for the use of helicopters and motorized vehicles for the purpose of managing horses and burros. This aids BLM to reach AML. When AML is not reached, the animals and other multiple uses, such as wildlife habitat and livestock grazing, are negatively impacted.

Appropriate, scientifically sound management of wild horses and burros on the range is in the interests of all those who care about the health of the animals, the sustainability of the range and the well-being of the rural communities in the west. The NBC stories unfortunately neglect to address these legitimate issues and provide an incomplete picture of the challenges facing policymakers, ranchers, and the conservation community.

For the sake of animal welfare and multiple-use—and in keeping with the Act—the Coalition supports actions that will bring herd sizes in line with AMLs, and emphasizes the following positions:

- The Coalition appreciates BLM’s efforts to find ways to reduce reproduction rates, increase adoptions and otherwise find solutions to a problem that continues to burden the BLM, taxpayers, and ranchers and create concerns for the welfare of horses and burros and the health of wildlife and the habitats on which they depend. About 70 percent of the total program budget (\$74.9 million) is currently being spent on the over 50,000 horses and burros being held in corrals and pastures. These levels are unsustainable. We support innovative strategies such as adjusting sex-ratios, and we encourage more research into effective fertility control treatments. Aside from population suppression, offering trained animals for adoption is important to increase demand for excess horses and burros. We encourage cost-effective initiatives to partner with entities such as universities, prisons and the Mustang Heritage Foundation.
- The Coalition applauds the BLM’s implementation of humane handling and holding practices. BLM is now supplementing their already-sound practices with a new Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program. As reported by the American Association of Equine Practitioners in 2011, BLM’s “care, handling and management practices” are “appropriate for this population of horses and generally support the safety, health status and welfare of the animals.”
- The Coalition believes horses and burros should continue to be cared for in a humane manner both on and off the range; integral to this goal is managing herd populations at scientifically determined AMLs and removing old and injured animals. Management decisions should be science-based and increase the ability of rangelands to support healthy horse and burro herds along with other multiple uses, including sustaining native plant and wildlife communities and livestock grazing.

The 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 biodiversity of the landscape. The consistent application of sound science and economics in relation to animal and rangeland management should be used throughout the horse and burro program.”

###

*The coalition is a diverse partnership of 13 wildlife, conservation and sportsmen organizations, industry partners, and professional natural-resource scientific societies working together to identify proactive and comprehensive solutions to increase effective management of horse and burro populations and mitigate the adverse impacts to healthy native fish, wildlife, and plants and the ecosystems on which they depend. For more information, visit [www.wildhorserange.org](http://www.wildhorserange.org).*

---

American Farm Bureau Federation • 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

Contact us at [horseandrange@gmail.com](mailto:horseandrange@gmail.com) or visit us on the web at [wildhorserange.org](http://wildhorserange.org)