



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*

DATE: 20 April 2015

TO: Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

RE: BLM Wild Horse & Burro Program Activities in FY 2016 Budget Proposal

FROM: Keith Norris, Chair, National Horse & Burro Rangeland Management Coalition,
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The National Horse & Burro Rangeland Management Coalition appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the FY 2016 appropriations for the **Bureau of Land Management Wild Horse & Burro Program**. The National Horse & Burro Rangeland Management Coalition includes a wide range of sportsmen's, livestock, wildlife, and land conservation organizations and professional societies. Collectively, we represent millions of Americans and focus on commonsense, ecologically-sound approaches to managing horses and burros to promote healthy wildlife and rangelands for future generations.

Our coalition is concerned about the exponentially growing population of wild horses and burros on our nation's rangelands and the lack of effort proposed in the President's FY 2016 budget to reduce the threat this poses to our nation's rangelands.

As of March 1, 2014, wild horse and burro populations surpassed 49,000 animals on BLM-rangelands. This threshold exceeds the BLM estimated ecologically-sustainable level of 26,684 horses and burros by more than 22,500. With the documented potential for 20% annual population increase, there are likely more than 58,000 animals currently on the range – that means horses and burros already exceed 215% of capacity for appropriate range management.

This extreme level of overpopulation by an invasive species negatively impacts the country's rangelands, risking the future of the ecosystem. By continuing to allow horses and burros to exceed sustainable levels, the BLM is placing the future of wildlife, rangelands, livestock operations, and the horses and burros themselves, in jeopardy.

The focus of the BLM Wild Horse & Burro program should revert to its original purpose and stated goal of achieving appropriate management levels (AML). Direct removal of horses and burros from impacted regions will aid in AMLs being achieved while simultaneously reducing their impact on the supporting ecosystem.



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The President's FY 2016 Budget Proposal plans for the removal of only 2,000 horses and burros from the country's rangelands. Unfortunately, this limited number does very little to protect our nation's rangelands from the growing negative impacts of overpopulated horses & burros.

Wild horse populations typically grow by 20% per year and double in size every 4-5 years. At the current rate, the wild horse population will likely grow by 9,000 animals in 2015, even with the planned removal of 2,000 horses. As a result, we could see as many as 67,000 wild horses and burros degrading the country's rangelands by 2016 – exceeding 250% of capacity for appropriate rangeland management. This is an unacceptable rate of increase for a population that already greatly exceeds AMLs. Such population numbers will continue to cause an unacceptable level of damage to a valuable asset for our country.

We appreciate the BLM's increased attention to fertility control methods, as we believe that scientifically-based use of fertility control (*e.g.*, proven to be effective and safe) can be an important component to the solution to this problem. However, fertility control alone does not solve the problem and should not be the primary approach. There are currently Herd Management Areas (HMA) more than 500% over AML. Fertility control methods, if they are effective in reducing pregnancies, will only help maintain population levels in the short term, not reduce them. Direct removal of wild horses and burros from the range is the only way to achieve AMLs in a reasonable amount of time.

Without an increase in the rate of removal of horses and burros, populations will continue to expand and our nation will witness not only growing degradation to its rangeland ecosystem, but also growing costs to its taxpayers.

We urge this committee and other members of Congress to address this increasing problem for our nation's valuable rangelands by directing the BLM to remove horses and burros at a rate substantial enough to produce impactful results and protect our resources.

Thank you for considering the input of our coalition. We invite your questions regarding this issue. Please feel free to contact our current Chair, Keith Norris at keith.norris@wildlife.org or 301-897-9770 x 309.

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

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Contact us at horseandranger@gmail.com or visit us on the web at wildhorserange.org