



## 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: 15 November 2016

TO: The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Paul Ryan  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives

RE: **Support for Humane Transfer of Excess Animals provision as passed in H.R. 5538 and included in S. 3068** – Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2017 – Regarding language to simplify the process for federal agencies, states, and local governments to utilize wild horses and burros as work animals.

FROM: National Horse & Burro Rangeland Management Coalition  
Keith Norris, AWB®, Chair, [keith.norris@wildlife.org](mailto:keith.norris@wildlife.org), 301-897-9770 x309

Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Reid, Speaker Ryan, and Minority Leader Pelosi:

The National Horse and Burro Rangeland Management Coalition strongly supports the Humane Transfer of Excess Animals provision as currently written in both the House and Senate versions of the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2017. This bipartisan-crafted provision would simplify the process for federal agencies, states, and local governments to utilize wild horses and burros as work animals and provide a necessary tool in the sustainable management of wild horses and burros in BLM care.

The population of wild horses and burros on federal lands has now exceeded 67,000 individuals; more than two-and-a-half times greater than the BLM's maximum Appropriate Management Level of 26,715. These *excess animals* result in significant negative impacts to the long-term health of our rangeland ecosystems, thereby damaging the valuable biological and socio-economic processes our rangelands support. Under the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, BLM is required to "preserve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance" between wild horse and burro populations, wildlife, livestock, and vegetation through "removal or destruction of excess animals *or through other options.*"

However, a variety of conflicting congressional appropriation riders and directives dating back to 1988 have severely limited BLM's ability to manage excess animals and therefore comply with the 1971 Act. As a result of these restrictions, BLM has relied heavily on the costly practice of removing excess horses and burros from the range and housing them in off-range holding facilities, where over 45,000 animals now reside at the cost of nearly \$50 million per year. If BLM's limited use of management options continues, on-range horse and burro populations will double in less than 5 years and off-range holding costs will likely exceed \$1 billion over the next 20 years for those animals already gathered.

---

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 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



## 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*

---

In order to address these issues and ensure the long-term sustainability of the Wild Horse and Burro Program, BLM and Congress must find methods for dealing with unadoptable animals and develop ways to control off-range holding costs. The Humane Transfer of Excess Animals provision, while not a comprehensive solution, will provide a small, positive step towards addressing these challenges in a mutualistic manner.

Currently, the 1971 Act does not provide a framework by which wild horses and burros may be transferred to other government agencies or municipalities for use as service animals. The law only allows for the adoption of wild horses and burros by “a qualified individual” who must then demonstrate humane treatment and care for that animal for a period of one year before applying for official ownership of that animal. Furthermore, the 1971 Act limits the number of animals that may be adopted by an individual to “not more than four animals” in a one-year period. So, for other government agencies or municipalities wishing to adopt wild horses and burros as service animals, they must accomplish this through *individual* employees and within the present limitations of the 1971 Act, making this a cumbersome and lengthy process. As a result, the Department of the Interior Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Justification requested “appropriations language to more efficiently facilitate the transfer of animals to other public entities (local, State, and Federal agencies) who have a need for domestic work animals.” The Humane Transfer of Excess Animals provision, as written, fulfills this request in addition to providing necessary flexibility to agencies receiving transferred horses and burros while still protecting them from being processed into commercial products.

Last December, Congress approved an Omnibus bill funding the government for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2016. If this approach is again taken for Fiscal Year 2017, the Coalition strongly supports the inclusion of the Humane Transfer of Excess Animals provision. However, while this provision may ultimately help to support rangeland health, native wildlife, and healthy horse populations as consistent with the Act, it is only a small component of the greater, all-inclusive, and pro-active management approach we need to address wild horse and burro overpopulation. **So, in addition to our support for the Humane Transfer of Excess Animals provision, the Coalition also stresses the dire need for Congress to provide BLM with the proper resources and authority to remove excess horses and burros from the range at a rate substantial enough to produce immediate and impactful results that protect our important natural resources and Western heritage.**

Sincerely,

Keith Norris, AWB®  
Coalition Chair

cc: Members of the 114<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress

---

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 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