



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

RANGELAND ECOSYSTEM

Wild Horse and Burro Facts

- BLM rangelands can support <27,000 horses and burros.
- There are currently >67,000 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.

Overpopulation of horses and burros on rangeland ecosystems can lead to several negative impacts, including *the spread of invasive species, water contamination, and desertification.*

Horses and burros damage landscapes by **trampling vegetation, compacting soil, and over-grazing forage plants.** Areas inhabited by horses and burros tend to have fewer plant species, less vegetative cover, and an increased susceptibility to invasive plant species – which can have **ecosystem-wide implications.**

Species that may be affected by excess wild horses and burros:

Greater Sage-Grouse



(Credit: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

Bighorn Sheep



(Credit: Jon Sullivan)

Reptiles and Mammals



(Credit: Seney Natural History Assoc)



Mouth: Have both upper and lower front incisors and flexible lips, allowing horses to crop vegetation closer to the ground than other ungulates

Nutritional Requirements: Horses consume up to 1.25 times the amount of forage as a cow of equivalent mass

Hooves: Round toes, unlike other ungulates on the range, allow them to paw vegetation out by the roots, killing the entire plant

(Photo Credit: BLM)

Horses have physiological attributes that are unique for rangeland ungulates, leading to greater ecosystem damage (Mernard 2002).

Effects on water quality and riparian areas:

Root systems break up and aerate soil, allowing rain water to penetrate. When horses and burros deplete vegetation and remove roots, erosion and soil temperatures increase. This can lead to a shift in plant and animal communities (Osterman-Kelm 2009).

Appropriate management levels (AML) are based on the amount of forage resource available in an area, with regard to multiple land uses.

What about cattle grazing?

To prevent overgrazing, livestock permits are based on available forage. Authorized livestock grazing on BLM-managed land has declined by nearly 50% since the 1940's, and has **declined on public rangelands by 30% since 1971**. Meanwhile, the horse and burro population on BLM land has **increased by 250% since 1971**.



(Photo Credit: Callie Hendrickson)

In studies where horses and burros were excluded from plots of land, exclusion areas had higher plant density and diversity than horse-grazed areas. The more heavily vegetated area behind the fence is a horse exclusion plot (Beever 2000).

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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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