

The BLM Lays Out Plan for Managing Wild Horses and Burros to Extinction 4/30/18

By Carol Walker, Wild Horse Freedom Federation and Susan Wagner, Equine Advocates

The BLM has submitted a report to Congress "Management Options for a Sustainable Wild Horse and Burro Program" with recommendations on managing the wild horses and burros on our public lands as well as the 46,000 held in short and long term holding facilities.

Some of the suggestions include killing (misidentified as "euthanasia") 10,000 wild horses and burros, massive roundups of 50,000 wild horses and burros currently on our public lands, then sterilizing 80% of the wild horses and burros that remain, and removing limitations on sale of these wild horses and burros, which exposes them to the risk of sale to slaughter. The options offered in this report would not lead to sustainability, but to the extinction of wild horses and burros on public lands, likely within the next generation or two.

The BLM is asking Congress for permission to proceed with these extreme measures, and yet the basis for this plan is rooted in false claims.

"Since receiving federal protection in 1971, wild horse and burro populations on public lands have dramatically increased, far exceeding what is healthy for the land and the animals."

The BLM's population estimates remain wildly inaccurate. Wild Horse Freedom Federation prepared a White Paper in 2017, that provided a review of the BLM's own statistics where, according to the BLM, some herds of horses have increased by as much as 750% to 1,250% in only one year. This is biologically impossible and scientifically indefensible.

The BLM claims "The current overpopulation of wild horses and burros threatens the overall health of the western rangelands, degrading ecosystem function and limiting forage and water available for domestic and wildlife species, including game and nongame species."

Privately owned livestock vastly outnumber wild horses and burros on public lands. Blaming wild horses and burros for all of the range degradation on our public lands and scapegoating them for loss of sage grouse habitat is at very least without any scientific basis. According to Western Watersheds Project, a conservation non-profit: "Public lands ranching is the most widespread commercial use of public lands in the United States. Ranching is one of the primary causes of native species endangerment in the American West; it is also the most significant cause of non-point source water pollution and desertification."

Journalist Vickery Eckhoff points out that "the 2014 BLM and USFS livestock grazing receipts (\$17.1 million) tell a different story: the equivalent of 2.1 million cattle outnumbering 56,656 federally protected wild horses and burros by 37:1." (And, since the BLM counts a cow-calf pair as only one animal, the 2.1 million livestock could be 4.2 million, and livestock could outnumber wild horses and burros by 74:1.)

Eckhoff also states, "These privately owned livestock are allocated 97 percent of western forage on all 251 million acres. This is compared to 3 percent allocated to 56,656 wild horses and burros occupying just 29.4 million acres."

http://dailypitchfork.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/BLM_USFS-grazing-analysis_2014_Daily-Pitchfork.pdf

“In establishing the “Appropriate Management Level” (AML) for wild horses and burros on the public lands, the BLM uses scientific principles of rangeland management to determine the population of wild horses and burros that the habitat can sustain.”

When Congress enacted the Wild Free-Roaming Horses & Burros Act of 1971 (16 U.S.C. §§ 1331- 1340), the wild horses & burros were to be protected in their historic herd areas. In 1971, wild horses & burros occupied 53.8 million acres managed by the BLM, but now wild horses and burros are on only 26.9 million acres. The BLM has not only eliminated half the land where wild horses and burros were to be protected, but on the remaining acres, oil and gas, livestock grazing and other uses are squeezing out the wild horses and burros.

Most BLM Land Use Plans, including Resource Management Plans (in effect for 20 years unless revised) and Environmental Assessments, do not even allow for numbers of wild horses or burros that are high enough to maintain a minimum viable herd number in their "Appropriate Management Level" (AML). BLM allows some herds to have only 15-20 animals. There are over 150 wild horses in only 27 of the 148 wild horse Herd Management Areas, and there are over 150 burros in only three of the 30 documented burro herds. If the BLM is allowed to achieve their stated goal of “achieving AML” of only 26,000 wild horses and burros then many of these herds will not remain viable and wild become extinct or be zeroed out.

Dr. E. Gus Cothran, an equine geneticist used by the BLM for decades, has consistently stated that wild horse and burro herds need a minimum of 150-200 members, with at least 150 breeding age adult animals, to sustain genetic diversity in the herd and maintain a viable population.

The BLM harps on the cost of warehousing the 46,000 wild horses and burros purported to be in holding facilities. However, Wild Horse Freedom Federation investigations revealed that only about 1/3 to 1/2 of the wild horses the BLM and their contractors claimed were on many of these facilities were actually there. Wild Horse Freedom Federation’s White Paper detailed this, and we notified members of Congress. All of these wild horses and burros that the BLM claims are in holding, *aren’t all there*. The missing horses have likely already ended up in the slaughter pipeline. And the wild horses and burros were grazing at no cost on public lands.

Regarding the BLM the BLM’s proposed actions, none of them are in the best interests of wild horses and burros. The BLM wants to reduce the time that it takes for adopters of wild horses and burros to receive title, from 1 year to 6 months. They want to designate any horse over 5, instead of over 10, as a “Sale Authority” horse, subject to sale without limitation, and they want to pay anyone who wants to adopt or purchase a horse or burro \$1000. All of these proposals are geared toward making it easier for people to sell their wild horses and burros to slaughter.

Killing the wild horses and burros that the BLM currently holds in both long and short term holding is not euthanasia. Euthanasia is putting a suffering animal out of its misery. The BLM would be killing healthy wild horses and burros, and it would most likely be in the ugliest way possible. There would be mass shootings and possibly even aerial shootings, and burials in mass graves. Many could be shipped to slaughter plants in Mexico.

The sterilization of 80% of wild horses and burros that are left on public lands would be inhumane, cruel, dangerous and a guarantee of extinction. Methods that were being considered in 2016 for spaying wild mares included methods that were untested and extremely dangerous, in unsterile environments with no or minimal post operative care and would lead to many dying of infection or trauma. Here are respected Veterinarian Don Moore's comments on the proposed methods of spaying wild mares:

<http://www.wildhoofbeats.com/DonMooreCommentsOregonSpayProposal.pdf>

The BLM is proposing "partnerships" with state and local agencies that would allow them to transfer wild horses and burros in large numbers and strip them of any protections from sale or slaughter or other forms of mistreatment. The public needs to be concerned about these, particularly when the wild horses and burros are to be shipped overseas. One proposal that seems to be gaining momentum is to ship thousands of wild horses to Russia to be used as prey (food on hooves) for Siberian tigers. As if this wasn't ridiculous enough, they are asking that U.S. taxpayers to pay for shipping them to Russia.

<http://wildhorsefreedomfederation.org/blog/truth-7-blm-considered-sending-2000-wild-horses-russia-used-prey-siberian-tigers-amur-leopards-pilot-program/>

The BLM's failure to manage wild horses and burros on our public lands and their willingness to continue to round up and remove wild horses and burros and then warehouse them leaving far more in captivity than on public lands where they belong is a direct result of pandering to special interest groups, such as grazing and oil and gas exploration. The "crisis" if there is one, is of the BLM's own making, with decades of mismanagement and lack of responsiveness to wild horses advocates who have many solutions and also volunteers to help keep wild horses wild and free on our public lands, where they belong.

Wild horse Freedom Federation has recommendations on wild horse and burros management which we have sent to Congress, and you can view these recommendations here:

<http://wildhorsefreedomfederation.org/news-alerts/recommendations-wild-horse-burro-management/>

What can you do to help?

Take, Mail, email or fax this document plus the WHFF recommendations above to your Senators and Congressmen. Tell them you oppose all of the BLM's Plan. You can also download Wild Horse Freedom Federation's White Paper here: <http://wildhorsefreedomfederation.org/white-paper/>

To find out more about Wild Horse Freedom Federation and our work to keep wild horses and burros wild and free on our public lands visit: www.WildHorseFreedomFederation.org