

**Ep #52: What Project 2025 Means for Wild Horses:
Interview with Debbie Coffey**



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Carol J. Walker

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If you've wondered what Project 2025 has to do with our wild horses, then this episode is for you. I'm your host, Carol Walker, and let's get started.

Welcome to the *Freedom For Wild Horses* podcast, the place to find out about wild horses in the American West and what you can do to help them stay wild and free. If you love wildlife, wild horses, and the freedom that they stand for, this show is for you. I'm your host, Carol Walker. Let's get started.

Carol J Walker: I am very delighted to have my friend Debbie Coffey here today to talk about what is going to go on with Project 2025 and wild horses. I've known Deb for a long time and she has been a really staunch supporter of our wild horses, working mostly in the background. And she is the premier expert on FOIA, Freedom of Information Acts, and she has been doing a tremendous amount to help with our lawsuits and other activities to help our wild horses. So thanks for being on, Deb.

Debbie Coffey: Sure, Carol. Always happy to come on and talk about something, one of the subjects. You know, Project 2025 was titled The Mandate for Leadership, the Conservative Promise. And in Project 2025, Chapter 16 is regarding the Department of Interior. And within that chapter, it contains a whole section regarding wild horses and burros.

And the thing I want to talk about first, that's most important to me, was the last sentence of this section on wild horses and burros. It states, "Congress must enact laws permitting the BLM to dispose humanely of these animals." For one thing, Carol, there's no way to humanely kill wild horses and burros in holding facilities. And another point before we even get into that, people should know that as of December 2024, there were almost 68,000 wild horses and burros in holding facilities. So this little comment is about killing almost 68,000 animals, if not over that, at this point. So that in itself is, you know, puts my hair on fire.

Carol: It's horrific.

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Debbie: Yeah. And let's talk about, these horses can supposedly be killed in a humane manner. What are your thoughts on that, Carol? I'll tell you mine, but.

Carol: Well, yeah, humane euthanasia is supposed to be of a horse that's suffering, putting it out of its suffering, first of all. So this is definitely not euthanasia, this is just killing.

Debbie: Killing healthy horses.

Carol: Killing healthy horses. And as we were speaking about earlier today, if you think about how killing the horses would be accomplished, you couldn't ship 68,000 horses to Mexico. It would just be prohibitive and take too long, and they probably couldn't even absorb all these horses. The way that it would be done would be to kill them at the facilities that they are at, most of which are private, and then bury them in mass graves. And if they're going to be shooting the horses, the other horses are going to be terrified. I don't know how many sharpshooters they have, but their aim is not going to necessarily be good, so they may have to shoot each horse several times. There's going to be terrified screaming horses, and it's going to be done, you know, probably in dark of night when people don't know about it.

Debbie: Most of these facilities have public roads that run through them. So even if it's private property, a lot of the pastures in Oklahoma, public roads run right through them. But my feelings on it are, even if they're sharpshooters, these horses are going to be frightened and running. So it's going to be hard for them to hit them in the head. And I can't even imagine the terror and distress the wild horses and burros would endure when they see the other horses shot and dying.

And this is not a new idea. I'm not sure if you remember Carol, but about over 15 years ago, the late Dr. Patricia Haight of the Conquistador project filed the Freedom of Information Act request with the BLM. And in the responsive records she received, it included notes, teleconference notes

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between a team of 10 BLM employees. These notes included the following comments: "If large numbers of animals become eligible for euthanasia at one time or one location, euthanasia could be performed on or off site."

Now, this is what they were saying. Under this option, any facility could become a focal point for public media or congressional attention. Increased levels of security would be needed at all locations, or the activity may need to be moved off-site to a more appropriate and secure facility. Increased support from public relations and management staff would also be needed to insulate those doing the actual work from public media and congressional scrutiny or criticism. To top this off, they also discussed the need for funds for psychotherapy for the people who would kill the healthy horses.

Carol: You know, I really can't imagine somebody not being moved by how horrible this situation is unless you're a psychopath. A regular healthy human being is going to become catatonic after doing this.

Debbie: And supposedly, you know, there are thousands. I can't even think of Fallon, Nevada where they've got what, 4,000 horses at that facility?

Carol: Wheatland, Wyoming, 3500 horses. Yeah. And private facilities that bar the public from access. So much easier to do it there than say a facility like Rock Springs, where you can actually drive up to the overlook.

Debbie: And they if they had to do this quickly, it would take all day just shooting horses. I can't even imagine how horrific this whole scenario is.

Carol: And then burying them. And the staff at all of these facilities has been reduced. So I don't know if they would have to bring in a team of people to kill the horses. You know, I don't know what the details would be, but clearly it would be a horrific situation. It would be absolutely unconscionable because these are living, breathing, feeling animals, and they do not deserve to be treated this way. And this is not management of wild horses. This is killing.

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Debbie: Extermination. This is an extermination.

Carol: And people need to know that this is a very real possibility at this point.

Debbie: Yeah. And it could happen quickly. We'll talk later in this show about DOGE, but I just want to let people know that Cindy MacDonald, researcher, keeps up an American Herds Blogspot. And there's a lot of information on there, and there should be at one time, Dr. Patricia Haight's FOIA documents were on her website in her library. But I always encourage also people that are new to look at her blog spot, read Carol's old articles, you know, learn from the experts, people who have really done a lot of research, and that are experts, so that you can learn more.

And also, I'm not so sure that Project 2025's aim to kill wild horses and burros would be limited to only the wild horses and burros in holding facilities. I'm concerned that the BLM will kill healthy wild horses and burros on public lands. And part of my reasoning for this...

Carol: The ones that are still free, right, Deb?

Debbie: Yes, the ones that are still running free on public lands. Researcher Kathleen Greg alerted me that she saw something she has never seen before in EAs.

Carol: And Deb, the EA is an environmental assessment, which is presented, it's a plan by the BLM. It's presented to the public for a comment period.

Debbie: Yeah, yeah. So, anyhow, within this EA, it specifically states remaining excess animals for which no adoption demand by qualified individuals exists shall be destroyed. This means killed on the range. This EA cites the Code of Federal Regulations subpart 4730, which basically states that if an authorized officer gives permission for excess wild horses or burros to be destroyed, the BLM can kill them. Now, Kevin Conkle, the

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BLM Applegate Field manager in Alrus, California, signed off on this EA with a decision record and a finding of no significant impact. So basically, Kevin Conkel, an authorized BLM official has given permission for excess wild horses to be killed. This is a gather and population plan. So this doesn't mean in holding facilities.

I think we ought to, if there still are EAs, who knows what's going to happen.

Carol: Well, there are now, but yeah, and we don't know what's going to happen later.

Debbie: Yeah, while we still can review EAs and there's a comment period, I encourage anyone looking for that paragraph, remaining excess animals for which no adoption demand by qualified individual exists shall be destroyed. Well, this is funny that you have to be qualified to adopt, but they'll sell to anybody for slaughter. Yeah.

Carol: You have to be qualified to adopt, you have to go through all this paperwork and everything. It's a whole deal. And you can only get so many horses at a time, and all these regulations, they have to have shelter, everything. And yet, they can just kill them.

Debbie: Yeah. Also in this section on wild horses and burros, there was another erroneous statement made regarding wild horses and burros. And that was they claimed wild horses and burros cause unmitigated damage to public lands, and the land may never recover. Now, Western Water Sheds project has proven that cattle, not wild horses, are the main problem causing poor range health on public lands of the West. Overgrazing by cattle is causing the damage to the habitats. Do you know, Carol? I actually reviewed the whole Department of the Interior chapter, not just the wild horse. They didn't mention livestock grazing once, not even as one of the programs of the Bureau of Land Management. They mentioned timber, mining, wild horses and burros, not one peep about livestock.

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Carol: Right. And then and then all the studies on the impact to the range land are never on livestock impact. It's always blaming the wild horses for any degradation to the land, even though they're outnumbered by 50:1 by the cattle and sheep.

Debbie: Yeah, yeah. So, for one thing, it's been proven that if the land doesn't recover, it will be because privately owned livestock are overgrazing on it. And journalist Vickory Ekoff did research using BLM grazing receipts to compare the number of privately owned livestock to wild horses on public lands. And they've historically outnumbered wild horses. Back in 2002, they outnumbered wild horses 71:1. In 2007, 92:1. So, you know, they're the ones that have been cattle have been livestock have been causing all the damage to public lands.

Carol: And wild horses don't even roam on all of the land that livestock does. They're restricted to certain areas. So the livestock is in areas where there aren't even any wild horses.

Debbie: Yeah. But meanwhile, livestock are grazing all over the herd management areas.

Carol: Yes, absolutely.

Debbie: And you know, this doesn't the numbers that Vickory was talking about, that doesn't account for trespass grazing when ranchers graze their livestock in areas for longer periods that are allowed or that their grazing permit allows.

Carol: Yes, and I have seen that happen. Yes, that does happen. And especially with the BLM staff being greatly reduced at this point, they're not regulating this.

Debbie: No. And even when they were, they turned a blind eye to it. Even when people complain, they wouldn't do anything about it. They'd be like, la-la-la-la, oh, they didn't tell me anything. Grazing is also self-reported by the ranchers. So it's like the fox guarding the hen house.

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Carol: Right. So yeah, this is the amount of money I owe, and yes. Uh-huh.

Debbie: Oh, I only had two or three grazing. And also, I want to bring up PEER, the public employees for environmental responsibility. They issued a report just in 2024, noticing that wild horses are only cited as a disturbance factor on 77 grazing allotments. That's only 1% of grazing allotments. And this is mostly in conjunction with the livestock. You know, it's not like the horses were even that. And out of the 245 million acres on public lands managed by the BLM, privately owned livestock graze on 155 million acres. So that's way over half.

And the BLM has only assessed land health on 114 million acres of the 155 million acres. And out of those, 57 million acres failed to meet land health standards, and the significant reason for failure for most is because of livestock overgrazing. And you'll be interested in this, Carol. In Wyoming, many grazing allotments, including the Rock Springs allotment, have never been assessed.

Carol: Of course not.

Debbie: Yeah. Another erroneous statement in the wild horse and burro section of Project 2025 is that wild horses have overwhelmed the land's ability to sustain them, and they're starving from lack of forage and water. Have you seen starving horses out there, Carol?

Carol: I have not seen starving horses. The only horses I have ever seen thin have been the really old ones. And that's normal in nature. And the horses tend to be thinner coming out of the winter, then they gain weight when the grass comes up, and yes, it's a normal cycle. And there's plenty of forage and plenty of water, and yes, this is a myth perpetuated by the BLM. They're starving to death, we have to remove them or they're going to die.

Debbie: And that's again what they tried to do in this section on the wild horses and burros. And again, if there was a lack of forage and water, it

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would be caused by livestock overgrazing. And Project 2025 also repeats the lie that there is an overpopulation of wild horses and burros. The BLM is barely allowing numbers high enough for viable herds in many HMAs as it is, and they're using fertility control on those horses. So the truth is, the BLM continues to manage wild horses and burros towards non-viable and non-reproducing herds. This is, non-reproducing herds, was one of their goals 15 years ago when I started getting FOIA records. I actually saw it. Oh, what if we do this? Oh, we'd get sued. Blah, blah, blah. Same with different types of fertility control. They were already strategizing what they would have to do not to get sued or how to get around the law. I mean, instead of protecting the wild horses and burros, they just want to get rid of them.

Carol: And remember I told you in August, they rounded up the White Mountain herd, and they were supposed to leave a low AML, low appropriate management level of 205 horses. And I was there at the roundup, and I knew that they had taken too many horses. And when I asked, were they going to do a count to make sure that they didn't take too many? They said maybe in a year. And the count just came out and sure enough, they left 79 horses, which is a completely unsustainable population of wild horses, and it's it's less than half of the appropriate management level. So this is a way to exterminate this herd without really telling anybody. We'll just do it. We'll just remove all the horses and make it so that the population can't sustain itself.

Debbie: Well, you'll find this, what I want to talk about next very interesting. Each year for at least the past 10 years, researcher Kathleen Greg has compared BLM's own population statistics, comparing the population of each HMA from one year to the next year, seeing how much they say it increases. She's proven using BLM's own data that the BLM has been issuing falsified population numbers. These false numbers have triggered unwarranted roundups, and their faulty data also overestimates the wild horses and burro population on public lands, and the BLM then lies to Congress and the media.

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I'll give you some examples. Kathleen Greg and researcher Michelle Anderson have found using BLM population statistics from March 2023. And I'll start with some of the HMAs you've been going to, Carol. They're in Wyoming. And also, I had an example with the White Mountain, but I didn't include it, but I know it's very similar to what I'm going to be talking about.

In the Little Colorado Herd Management area, BLM showed a 388% increase in one year. This would require a herd of 69 horses to produce 260 foals in one year, meaning every single horse, including the stallions, would have to have more than three foals in one year. This is biologically impossible. In the Salt Wells HMA, BLM showed a 300 increase in one year. This would require the 251 horses produce 752 foals in one year, meaning that every single horse, including the stallions, produce three foals in a year. This is biologically impossible. In the Adobe Town Herd Management area, showed 178% increase in one year. This would require the herd of 610 horses to produce 1,083 foals in one year, meaning every single horse, including the stallions, would have more than one foal in one year. Biologically impossible.

Carol: The new roundup, which the EA, the comment period expires tomorrow. They're saying that there are over 2,000 horses in Adobe Town, and it was the epicenter of the worst winter since 1973, and over half of the horses died. So saying that there is this huge number of horses to justify a roundup is just insane.

Debbie: Yeah. I can't believe they get away with these lies. You know, they're lying to the public, they're lying to Congress. It's basically criminal. As my last example, Choke Cherry Herd Management area in Utah. BLM showed a 388% increase in one year. This would require the herd of 34 horses to produce 132 foals in one year, meaning every single horse, including stallions, would have more than three foals in one year. Biologically impossible. So the BLM continues to lie regarding the overpopulation of wild horses, not only to Congress, but the media. And

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this happens every year. Their statistics going back at least 10 years. Kathleen Greg has a lot of examples of this.

You know, I want to take a moment here, Carol, just to thank like Kathleen Greg and Michelle Anderson and Western Watersheds and Vickory Ekoff, and PEER for the amount of work they do to expose all these lies. You know, especially Kathleen, Michelle, it's volunteer work, they don't get paid. Neither do you. But a lot of people do a lot of hard work.

Carol: Yes, including yourself.

Debbie: I want to thank your listeners and I think it's really important that anytime listeners or anyone reading any articles or any podcasts or anything that they find interesting or important, please share the links with other people, not just advocates, but other people so people know what's going on and can learn. So it's important to share things so that everyone stays at a higher level to know what's going on.

Carol: Absolutely. And this is number 52 of my podcast. So there are 51 others with information on everything about wild horses. So please do go and check it out.

Debbie: Mm-hmm. I wanted to talk a little about William Perry Pendley, who wrote this the chapter in the Project 2025 on the Department of Interior. He wrote this chapter. So it wasn't just perpetuating misinformation about wild horses and burros, it was also the push to kill the wild horses and burros. William Perry Pendley was a former acting director of the BLM who was removed by a federal judge after unlawfully being the acting director for 424 days.

Carol: In Trump's first term.

Debbie: In Trump's first term. Per the Federal Vacancies Reform Act, there's a 210 day maximum for someone filling in the vacancy of a federal

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office. In other words, somebody acting as, like acting director or acting whatever.

Carol: Who hasn't been confirmed.

Debbie: Yeah. Right. Yeah, the director of the BLM must be appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate. He served under the controversial Secretary of Interior James Watt during the President Reagan's administration. Penley calls himself a Sagebrush Rebel and has argued that the federal government shouldn't own most public lands. The Sagebrush Rebels supported Cliven Bundy, you know, who did the armed standoff because they didn't want to pay their grazing fees or whatever. Penley wants to do away with the Endangered Species Act. And of most concern, you brought up to me, Carol, I didn't even know about it, about DOGj in the DOI. So recently, Interior Secretary Doug Burgum basically abdicated his duties by turning over responsibilities and power regarding policy, management, and budget of the Department of Interior to Tyler Hassen of Elon Musk's DOGE.

Carol: And he has not been confirmed by the Senate.

Debbie: No. Hassen doesn't even have to report back to Burgum. This order was signed April 17th, and supposedly Hassen will be doing this until May 31st. Who knows? But that means basically till the end of May, they could be pushing a lot of things, just cutting things out before we even find funding. Hassen will have oversight over of funding, policies and personnel decisions. So he could cut funding, he could cut personnel. Well, what if all of a sudden, that gets cut for holding facilities?

Carol: Or for the entire wild horse and burro program? Yeah. Which, the facilities that are not private are managed by the BLM and okay, who's going to be feeding and watering these horses, and then say, oh gee, maybe we should just get rid of them because we don't have the staff to take care of them.

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Debbie: Or if they're on private property and those people don't get paid, the contractors, the contractors get paid monthly based on how many horses are still alive in their facility, supposedly. As you know, I've been by many of those, and the horses they claim were there, I didn't see them.

Carol: But yes, if their money gets cut off, what are they going to do? Are they going to keep feeding the horses? I don't think so.

Debbie: Yeah. I think there'll be a wink thing and they get shipped, either trucked off to slaughter and the contractors can keep the money.

Carol: Or they'll just kill them right there.

Debbie: Yeah. Well, I think if they can make an extra buck, the contractors will probably just, you know, wink, wink. Okay, we'll say we killed them, but we'll ship them to slaughter in Mexico or whatever, you know, who knows?

Carol: And you know, so many people were so hopeful when Doug Burgum became Secretary of the Interior because he was very helpful with the Theodore Roosevelt National Park wild horses. But clearly, if he's abdicating responsibility and he's not even managing what the BLM is doing with the wild horses, that's not going to matter.

Debbie: Yeah, it's not. You know, this Tyler Hasson has spent his career in the oil industry. He's been president of Basin Energy in Houston. I don't know. I'm very concerned at this point they might do something quickly.

Carol: I think many of us are, Deb.

Debbie: Say, if in one day they decide to cut the budget for the wild horse and burro program. I mean, I guess there is some feed left at the facilities, but who knows if anyone will be there to feed them if they aren't getting paid.

Carol: I don't know if the money's been allocated for 2025 or not. And right now they're considering the budget for 2026.

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Debbie: And Carol, we're talking about over 68,000 horses. This is why I think all of your listeners and the public, and the media needs to start bringing this up now.

Carol: Yes. Bringing it up to their senators and representatives. And we also need whistleblowers. We need former and current BLM staff, if they find out that they're going to start killing the horses, they need to come forward and let us know so we can scream our heads off and do everything we can to keep these horses from being killed.

Debbie: And even if they don't want to do so publicly, you know,

Carol: They can contact me. They can contact American Wild Horse Conservation.

Debbie: Contact PEER. PEER actually protects whistleblowers, the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility. They protect whistleblowers. So you could call Chandra Rosenthal at PEER. She knows about the wild horses and what's happening.

Carol: Yes. Because I know that I know there's plenty of BLM staff that doesn't want to see wild horses killed in the holding facilities. Any decent caring person who doesn't want to see this happen can do this.

Debbie: Yeah. And you know, my issue is not against BLM personnel, it's against BLM policies. I think there are a lot of really good...

Carol: There are a lot of really good people who do care about the horses.

Debbie: ... And care about public lands and care about the horses, and you know, I think there are good people that care about our democracy and you know, our government and government transparency. And I think, you know, if anyone wants to be a whistleblower, they can do it anonymously through PEER or anybody else. Call from a private phone, but just alert us

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if something is going to go down with the wild horses, so we can at least make some calls.

Carol: Absolutely. We are calling for that. Please do let us know. Let somebody know. We need a heads up because we don't want to see these horses suffering and killed.

Debbie: Yeah, because it's not even going to be killed. It's being a torturous death of 68,000 animals. I mean, I wouldn't want that on my conscience.

Carol: No, no, absolutely not. And you know, and obviously, we need to keep an eye on if they start deciding that they're going to be killing the horses on our public lands. That's another issue.

Debbie: You know, in Australia, I know they kill the brumbies, they shoot them from planes.

Carol: Or helicopters. Yeah.

Debbie: Yeah. Even if people are on public lands and notice anything, call us right away. Let us know where it is, try and get your bearings. You know, if you're somewhere, you can do a screen save of where your map on your phone of your location and send it to Carol or PEER and say, hey, they're shooting horses here. They're chasing them by helicopter and shooting them. Just so we have to keep our eyes up. We're the only ones that are the voice for the wild horses and burros.

Carol: Absolutely. And if the wild horse and burro program is dismantled, there won't be anybody in the BLM keeping track of what's going on. And obviously, the push for oil and gas development right now is overwhelming and that seems to be the big priority for our public lands. We also don't want to see our public lands sold off so that we can no longer enjoy it, so the horses can no longer enjoy it, so the other wildlife can no longer enjoy it. I certainly don't want to see our public lands become oil and gas, and livestock only. It's supposed to be multiple-use. It's not supposed to be just

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for one purpose, one division of people to have complete control over our public lands.

Debbie: Yeah, and again, national monuments are on the chopping block, you know, to take away land from them and that's part of what makes America great is the our public lands, our national monuments. No other country is like ours. They're taking away what's beautiful about America.

Carol: And certainly our wild horses are beautiful and for those of you who don't know, you can go into our public lands and go see wildlife and wild horses anytime you want. You know, it's your right as a citizen, you can go and see them. And to take this away is just inconceivable to me.

Debbie: We own the public lands. The people of America own the public lands. This is...

Carol: And we own the horses as well. Yeah. Those horses belong to us. They do not belong to the BLM, they do not belong to the ranchers. They belong to us.

Debbie: Mm-hmm. So this is the heritage of the American people, and we're seeing it being stripped away, but I especially don't want to see over 61,000 of America's wild horses and burros are icons of freedom being stripped away and killed.

Carol: So I would say, you know, the big thing is, please stay in touch with your senators and representatives about this issue because you need to bring it in front of them because they don't know. And keep talking about it and encouraging people to come forward if they need to.

Debbie: Yeah.

Carol: So anything else, Deb?

Debbie: I think that's about everything I was planning on bringing up. Thank you, Carol, for doing this. It's so important and I'm so proud of you and

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impressed with you doing these podcasts on top of everything you do going out, you know, to observe the horses and their HMAs while they're still there and documenting them for us and for all of your articles on your blog post. Thank you.

Carol: Thank you, Deb. I really appreciate all the work that you're doing and supporting the wild horses for so many years so faithfully.

Debbie: And thanks to all the listeners.

Carol: If you'd like to take a look at the two pages in Project 2025 that pertain to wild horses, I have a copy of them on my website under this podcast at www.wildhoofbeats.com.

Thank you for listening to this episode of *Freedom for Wild Horses*. If you want to learn more, follow me at www.wildhoofbeats.com for more information and for ways to help America's wild horses. See you next time.