



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: 23 March 2016

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

RE: BLM Wild Horse & Burro Program Activities in FY 2017 Budget Proposal

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The National Horse & Burro Rangeland Management Coalition appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the FY 2017 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 minimal efforts proposed in the President's FY 2017 budget to reduce their impacts.

As of March 1, 2015, wild horse and burro populations surpassed 58,000 animals on BLM rangelands. This threshold exceeds the BLM estimated ecologically sustainable level of 26,715 horses and burros by more than 31,000. This extreme level of overpopulation 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 and Congress are 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 AML being achieved while simultaneously reducing their impact on the supporting ecosystem.

The President's FY 2017 Budget Proposal plans for the removal of only 2,500 horses and burros from the country's rangelands. Wild horse populations typically grow by 18-20% per year and double in size every 4-5 years. This means that even with FY 2016 removals reaching the proposed amount of 2,500 individuals, **the current on-range population is likely around 66,000.** This is an unacceptable rate of increase for a population that already greatly exceeds

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AML. 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 through research partnerships with universities and the U.S. Geological Survey, as we believe that scientifically-based use of fertility control and implementation of non-reproducing herds can be an important component of the solution to this problem. However, fertility control alone does not solve the problem and should not be the primary approach. **About 85% of Herd Management Areas (HMA) are already over AML, some reaching more than 500% of their 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 AML in a reasonable amount of time. The BLM's efforts to transfer corralled horses and burros to more cost effective eco-sanctuaries and holding facilities as well as the BLM's request for authority to transfer horses and burros to local, state, and federal agencies are steps in the right direction to free up space for further removals. They will not, however, come close to providing the space needed for the removal of 31,000 excess horses and burros currently on the range.

We are hopeful that these small initiatives will highlight the need for drastic legislative changes to the BLM's management of wild horses and burros. 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 at a rate substantial enough to produce significant results and protect our resources.

Thank you for considering the input of our coalition. We invite your questions and welcome the opportunity to discuss this ongoing issue and possible solutions with the Subcommittee. Please feel free to contact our current Chair, Keith Norris at keith.norris@wildlife.org or 301-897-9770 x309.

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