

REDUCING IMPACTS FROM WILD HORSES AND BURROS



Prior to passage of the Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 (the Act), horses and burros that roamed the West were largely managed by ranchers. Years of political campaigning resulted in passage and implementation of the Act, which still governs management of these equines today. Since that time, further activism has limited the tools available to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), causing on-range populations to explode.

Horses and burros are managed in Herd Management Areas (HMAs) identified by the BLM and USFS. These areas are evaluated for how many horses the landscape and natural resources can sustain, which leads the agency to develop the Appropriate Management Level (AML) for that given area.

OVERPOPULATION & RANGE DAMAGE

Appropriate Management Level (AML) for the existing HMAs is 26,700 animals. **As of March 2025, there are more than 73,130 animals on the range—nearly three times the target population.** The vast majority of HMAs are overpopulated, sometimes more than five to seven times AML. These densely-populated herds overgraze native grasses, negatively impact soil health, and drive wildlife away from water resources.

In addition to the threat of starvation and dehydration from depleted natural resources, these overpopulated herds also are subject to inbreeding, birth defects, and a host of other welfare issues that occur as a direct result of poor management.

SOLUTIONS

Ranchers, horse lovers, and government officials all want healthy horses and healthy rangelands, but solutions are far from simple. PLC partnered with ASPCA, Return to Freedom, the National Horse and Burro Rangeland Management Coalition, American Farm Bureau Federation, National Cattlemen's Beef Association, and others to develop a comprehensive solution: The Path Forward.

The Path Forward Coalition focuses on increased funding for emergency removals of horses from critical HMAs, increased use of fertility controls, range restoration, and developing more robust plans for off-range holding facilities. **Together, we have effectively secured additional funding each year since FY21. Funding has been directed to removing more horses from the range and ramping up fertility control.** While progress has been slow, the herd continues to decrease each year. **Continued investment is crucial to long-term success.**



PLC RECOMMENDS:

- ◆ Support PLC's request for \$153 million in FY26 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies bill to continue on-range herd reductions.
- ◆ Oppose subversive efforts to limit horse transportation as a back-door way to prevent gathers and adoptions, like S.775 (Graham) and H.R.1661 (Buchanan), the Save America's Forgotten Equines (SAFE) Act.
- ◆ Oppose efforts to reintroduce the Wild Horse and Burro Protection Act (Titus) which would ban BLM's ability to use aircraft to aid in gathers.
- ◆ Support BLM's ability to use adoption incentives, sale, and long-term fertility control to reduce populations to AML.

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