

Return to Freedom Flyer Facts & Info

The American Wild Horse has long been considered an icon of the American west and a living symbol of freedom. Due to an ongoing and aggressive wild horse removal policy these majestic creatures are rapidly disappearing from the open range. Today, there are more wild horses living in captivity than that which remain in the wild. The wild horse is facing his last stand. Return to Freedom is dedicated to protecting the freedom, diversity and habitat of America's wild horses, and currently provides a safe haven to over 200 wild horses and burros. To learn more about the sanctuary, please visit us online at www.returntofreedom.org.

The American Wild Horse Preservation Campaign (AWHPC) was spearheaded by Return to Freedom in the summer of 2004 after a preliminary investigation into wild horse herd management areas. Conceived as a campaign, it was quickly supported by a broadening coalition of wild horse advocates and public interest groups, representing over 10 million supporters. The purpose of the AWHPC is to create a united front for the horses' sake. For information about the campaign and to get the latest information on the wild horse issue visit the website at www.wildhorsepreservation.com.

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Please help us protect the American wild horse by taking action today.

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Current Numbers

The Bureau of Land Management manages 261 million acres of public lands. After having lost 13 million acres of their native range land, wild horses now range on 34 million acres of those public lands. Though this land was designated "principally" though not exclusively for wild horses and burros, they are vastly outnumbered by private livestock.

Wild horses and burros living in the wild on public lands managed by BLM: 28,500

Wild horses and burros living in Federal holding facilities: 30,391

Wild horses that are subject to sale authority: 9,495

***Private Livestock (cattle, sheep, etc) grazing public lands today: 6,835,458**

(Numbers are from the BLM's February 2007 Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board Meeting report and do not reflect more recent gathers or foal crops. *Livestock numbers are from the BLM's FY 2005 Public Land Statistics Report and only reflect livestock grazing on land managed by the BLM. FY 2006 data was not available at time of printing.)

The Numbers . . .

⌚ In the 19th century, more than 2 million wild horses roamed the West (*source: J. Frank Dobie, "The Mustangs", Southern Methodist University Press, Dallas, 1952*).

- Today, less than 25,000 wild horses likely remain on public lands.
- Over 6 million head of private cattle enjoy grazing on public lands, subsidized by our tax dollars.
- More than 200,000 wild horses and burros have been removed from public lands since 1971. The BLM plans to remove another 7,000 by fall 2007.
- The 1971 Act mandates that wild horses and burros be managed on 47 million acres of public lands on 303 herd areas.
- Since 1971, wild horses have been zeroed out from 111 herd areas representing over 12.5 million acres.
- BLM's private livestock grazing program encompasses 214 million acres of public lands and costs over \$130 million to manage annually.
- Less than 5,000 wild burros remain on public lands, with a BLM population target set at less than 3,000.
- BLM relies on an annual population increase rate of about 20% to evaluate population levels and justify round-ups, while the National Academy of Sciences estimates that rate to be closer to 10%.
- Wild horses account for less than 0.5% of large grazing animals on public lands.
- 6 states have lost their entire wild horse and burro populations.
- In 70% of the remaining herd areas, BLM's population targets are set at levels that will not ensure genetic viability.
- The current removal policy is costing over 39 million tax dollars a year.
- According to a 2004 USGS report, \$7.7 million could be saved annually through the use of contraceptive measures alone.
- The removal and processing of a single horse through the adoption pipeline costs about \$3,300.

- More than 30,000 wild horses are currently held in government holding pens. More than 9000 of them are threatened with slaughter due to a 2004 amendment to the Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act by former Senator Conrad Burns.
- The current fee to graze private cattle on public lands is \$1.35 per animal unit month (AUM), the equivalent of \$0.06 per acre per year, or about 1/10th of market rates to graze cattle on private lands.
- *Private cattle outnumber wild horses and burros at least 200 to 1 on public lands. *Some livestock may not be grazed year round

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Brief Legislative Update

1971: An unprecedented public outcry moves Congress to unanimously pass the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act, granting federal protection to America's wild horses and burros, and declaring that they are "living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West; that they contribute to the diversity of life forms within the Nation and enrich the lives of the American people.

2004: U.S. Senator Conrad Burns (R-Montana) slips into the 3,300-page federal budget a rider that opens the door to the slaughter of thousands of wild horses. The 1971 Act is eviscerated without so much as a hearing or opportunity for public review.

2005: The US Congress passed amendments in the House and Senate that would ban the slaughter of wild or domestic horses for 1 fiscal year. Though these amendments passed with landslide votes in both chambers of Congress, the USDA accepted a petition from the slaughter industry to allow horse slaughter to continue!

2006: The American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act passed the US House of Representatives by a landslide vote on September 7th, 2006. However, the Senate failed to vote on this legislation before Congress adjourned.

2007: In the first weeks of the new Congress, The American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act was re-introduced by Representative Janice Schakowsky in the House and Senators John Ensign & Mary Landrieu in the Senate as HR 503 and S 311 respectively. Also, Representatives Nick Rahall and Ed Whitfield introduced HR 249, which has already passed in Committee, and will reverse the Burns

amendment by reinstating the prohibition on the sale or slaughter of America's wild horses. HR 249 still needs to pass in the House and Senate.

Contact Your Legislators in D.C.

The battle for our wild horses will be won in the court of public opinion: the government needs to face a sustained public outcry over its wild horse management practices. Please call and write your U.S. Representative and Two U.S. senators. Ask them to support legislation that protects America's wild horses, and request a Congressional investigation into the government's wild horse management practices. A sample letter is included on back for your convenience.

Specifically:

- **Members of the House should be asked to support HR 503 and HR 249. Senators should be urged to support S 311.**
- **Inform them that the Burns Amendment to the 1971 Act has already lead to the slaughter of this beloved part of our national heritage to supply horsemeat for human consumption abroad.**
- **Tell them that your tax-dollars would be better spent on an in-the-wild management program not based on removal.**
- **Ask for a moratorium on round-ups until actual numbers of wild horses on public lands have been independently assessed, and current management policies have been reviewed.**

Sample Letter:

Dear Representative/Senator _____:

I am writing to urge you to co-sponsor legislation that has been introduced to protect America's wild and domestic horses from slaughter.

In 1971, Congress passed the Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act without a single dissenting vote. This act was designed to protect our nation's remaining wild horses. In 2004, former Senator Conrad Burns amended the 1971 Act making it legal to sell and slaughter America's wild horses. This amendment, which called for the sale of all "excess" wild horses and burros "without limitation" leaves more than 8000 of our nation's wild horses at immediate risk of slaughter. This senseless legislation has already led to the slaughter of 41 wild horses.

Our wild horses are a vital part of our national heritage and have long been considered an icon of the west. Over the past 100 years, wild horse populations have steadily declined from over two million to less than 30,000. Still, the round-ups continue at great costs to taxpayers.

HR 249, introduced by Representative Nick Rahall, reinstates the language of the 1971 Act that prohibited the commercial sale or processing of wild horses. I urge you to protect America's living history – the wild horse – by supporting this important legislation

The American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act has also been introduced as HR 503 in the House and S 311 in the Senate. This bill would prohibit the slaughter of wild or domestic horses in the US. As evidence of both public and Congressional support for this legislation, the US House of Representatives passed HR 503 by a landslide vote of 263 – 146 in September of 2006. Unfortunately, the bill was not voted on in the Senate. This year, we have another opportunity to pass this long overdue legislation.

The horse – whether wild or domestic – is close to the hearts of all Americans. Throughout the years, their ancestors have faithfully served humankind. They pulled our plows, carried our soldiers into battle, and made it possible for pioneers to make their historic journey across the vast plains to settle the West. Our nation was built on their backs.

The practice of slaughtering horses for human consumption goes against everything that we value as a society and a culture. It belittles the role that they played in shaping our nation, inflicts needless suffering, and is the ultimate betrayal to an animal that has given so much.

I respectfully request a prompt response from you stating your position on this matter.

Signature

Printed Name

Address

Make sure to include your full name and address and to ask for a response on how your representative intends to address your concerns. Be firm but courteous. Letters sent via U.S. mail makes a stronger statement than emails but are subject to significant delays due to mail screening processes. Therefore, we suggest sending your letters in both formats (faxes are also a good alternative).

Letters to Representatives can be addressed to:

The Honorable [Name Here]

US House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515

Letters to Senators can be addressed to:

The Honorable [Name Here]

US Senate, Washington, DC 20510

Wild Horse & Burro Issue Sheet

In 1971, the Congress passed the Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act, as a result of the express will of the American people. This legislation was passed as a result of a massive public outcry, in which the US Congress and the White House received more letters than any other issue with the exception of the Vietnam

War. This was the single most emotional non-war issue in American history. The vote passed with no dissenting votes in Congress.

Americans were concerned about the dwindling numbers of wild horses *then*, yet today there are 75% fewer wild horses than there were when the 1971 act was passed. Since 1971, wild horses have been removed from nearly 13 million acres of the lands that were originally designated for them. According to a 1990 Government Accounting Office (GAO) Report, these massive and large scale removals, were not based on sound scientific data, thorough range health studies, or even on accurate censusing of wild horse populations. Rather, the removals are based largely on the recommendations of an advisory board that consists mainly of livestock ranchers and people with hunting interests.

Wild horses continue to be removed, despite these dwindling numbers, because of the MYTH of overpopulation and that wild horses destroy the range. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) claims that there is an overpopulation of wild horses, with no scientific data to back this up. There are nearly 13 million acres of public lands that have had wild horses completely removed from them and yet these areas are not being reevaluated for the possibility of returning wild horses to them, despite the great costs to taxpayers of rounding up and placing wild horses in federal holding facilities.

Private livestock vastly outnumber wild horses on our public lands. The BLM manages wild horses on some 34 million acres of public lands *designated primarily (though not exclusively) for wild horses*. There are currently 28,500 wild horses and burros. . . while more than 6 million privately owned livestock graze that same land at taxpayer expense.

Two Government reports state that wild horses are not the primary cause of over-grazing of the public range and that they are being removed en masse without sound data to support their removal. The General Accounting Office report and the National Academy of Science Report, both from the early 90s, found that domestic livestock are the primary cause of range degradation, not horses.

This is not an issue of wild horses vs cattle. There are solutions that protect the horses, do not threaten the cattle ranchers, and save taxpayers dollars. Real solutions need to take all of these interests into account, but also need to reflect the spirit of the 1971 Act and the intent of the American people. For more information on proposed solutions, visit our campaign website at www.wildhorsepreservation.org.

In November, 2004, Senator Conrad Burns slipped a rider into a 3300 page budget bill, gutting the Wild Free Roaming Horse & Burro Act. This rider mandated that the BLM dispose of all wild horses over the age of 10, or that had been offered for adoption unsuccessfully 3 times. These "excess" horses could now be sold to the highest bidder for as little as \$1 per horse.

Sale Authority, which was the result of the Burns rider, is not a viable solution. Once wild horses are sold they become private property which means that there is no guarantee as to their fate. Moreover, when we remove them from their natural habitat we are losing what has been an ongoing evolutionary journey for the wild horse. This evolutionary process has resulted in many physiological & sociological changes (such as a longer cannon bone and stronger hoof wall) that make the wild horse distinctly different from our domestic horse breeds.

In April of 2005, 41 wild horses were slaughtered under the Burns Sale authority. A man from Oklahoma purchased 6 wild horses, claiming that they were for a church youth program but sold them to slaughter less than 3 days later. A Native American tribe sold another 35 to a horse trader who then sold them to slaughter.

Although the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has added stricter language to their sales contract, the fact is that they have NO LEGAL MEANS TO ENFORCE THIS LANGUAGE. The Burns rider stipulates that wild horses older than 10, or that have been unsuccessfully offered for adoption 3 times, are to be sold "WITHOUT LIMITATION".

The Wild Horse as a Re-introduced Native Wildlife Species

The American wild horse has traditionally been thought of as an "exotic" & "feral" species that first arrived in North America with the Spanish in the 1500s. However, new research and the relatively new field of mitochondrial DNA analysis are painting a very different picture about the origins of the modern horse and the ancestors of today's wild horse. Below are excerpts from a research paper composed by Drs. Jay F. Kirkpatrick & Pat Fazio:

The genus Equus, which includes modern horses, zebras, and asses, is the only surviving genus in a once diverse family of horses that included 27 genera. The precise date of origin for the genus Equus is unknown, but evidence documents the dispersal of Equus from North America to Eurasia approximately 2-3 million years ago and a possible origin at about 3.4-3.9 million years ago. Following this original emigration, several extinctions occurred in North America, with additional migrations to Asia (presumably across the Bering Land Bridge), and return migrations back to North America, over time. The last North American extinction occurred between 13,000 and 11,000 years ago. Had it not been for previous westward migration, over the land bridge, into northwestern Russia (Siberia) and Asia, the horse would have faced complete extinction. However, Equus survived and spread to all continents of the globe, except Australia and Antarctica.

In 1493, on Columbus' second voyage to the Americas, Spanish horses, representing E. caballus, were brought back to North America, first in the Virgin Islands, and, in 1519, they were reintroduced on the continent, in modern-day Mexico, from where they radiated throughout the American Great Plains, after escape from their owners.

Critics of the idea that the North American wild horse is a native animal, using only paleontological data, assert that the species, E. caballus (or the caballoid horse), which was introduced in 1519, was a different species from that which disappeared 13,000 to

11,000 years before. Herein lies the crux of the debate. However, the relatively new (27-year-old) field of molecular biology, using mitochondrial-DNA analysis, has recently found that the modern or caballine horse, *E. caballus*, is genetically equivalent to *E. lambei*, a horse, according to fossil records, that represented the most recent *Equus* species in North America prior to extinction. Not only is *E. caballus* genetically equivalent to *E. lambei*, but no evidence exists for the origin of *E. caballus* anywhere except North America.

The fact that horses were domesticated before they were reintroduced matters little from a biological viewpoint. They are the same species that originated here, and whether or not they were domesticated is quite irrelevant. Domestication altered little biology, and we can see that in the phenomenon called "going wild," where wild horses revert to ancient behavioral patterns. James Dean Feist dubbed this "social conservation" in his paper on behavior patterns and communication in the Pryor Mountain wild horses. The reemergence of primitive behaviors, resembling those of the plains zebra, indicated to him the shallowness of domestication in horses.

The issue of feralization and the use of the word "feral" is a human construct that has little biological meaning except in transitory behavior, usually forced on the animal in some manner. Consider this parallel. *E. Przewalski* (Mongolian wild horse) disappeared from Mongolia a hundred years ago. It has survived since then in zoos. That is not domestication in the classic sense, but it is captivity, with keepers providing food and veterinarians providing health care. Then they were released a few years back and now repopulate their native range in Mongolia. Are they a reintroduced native species or not?

And what is the difference between them and *E. caballus* in North America, except for the time frame and degree of captivity?

The key element in describing an animal as a native species is (1) where it originated; and (2) whether or not it co-evolved with its habitat. Clearly, E. Caballus did both, here in North American. There might be arguments about "breeds," but there are no scientific grounds for arguments about "species."

Jay F. Kirkpatrick, Director, The Science and Conservation Center, Billings, Montana, holds a Ph.D. in reproductive physiology from the College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University. Patricia M. Fazio is currently a freelance environmental writer and editor residing in Cody, Wyoming and holds a B.S. in animal husbandry/biology from Cornell University, an M.S. in environmental history from the University of Wyoming, and a Ph.D. in environmental history from Texas A&M University, College Station.