

**IN SUPPORT OF H.R. 297- RAHALL/WHITFIELD BILL, INTRODUCED 1/25/05
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES**

FACT SHEET ON WILD HORSES

“Whereas the horse is a living link to the history of the United States... whereas horses are a vital part of the collective experience of the United States and deserve protection and compassion... the Senate encourages all people of the United States to be mindful of the contribution of horses to the economy, history and character of the United States.” (U.S. Congress, November 18th, 2004)

- In the 1800s, over 2 million wild horses roamed the West.
- In 1974, BLM’s first wild horse and burro census counted 60,000 animals.
- Today, the numbers have been cut by almost a half, to less than 35,000 animals.
- Livestock outnumber wild horses at least 100 to 1 on public lands. Taking into account seasonal cattle rotation, a National Academy of Sciences study found that the ratio of forage used by private livestock on public lands to that of forage used by wild horses is approximately 23:1.
- Since 1971, wild horses and burros have been zeroed out from approximately 13 million acres of land.
- Wild horses and burros now reside on 34.5 million of the 262 million acres managed by BLM.
- Fiscal year 2005, BLM will reduce populations by an additional 9,800, threatening genetic viability of the herds. (*see* University of Kentucky study on equine genetics)
- The BLM wild horse and burro program’s \$39 million annual budget is used primarily to implement a capture and removal policy.
- The removal and processing of a single horse through the adoption pipeline costs about \$3,300.
- A 2004 USGS study found that 7.7 million tax dollars could be saved annually through the use of contraceptive measures on horses in the wild.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS – WILD HORSES

Q: Is there an overpopulation of wild horses on public lands?

A: Wild horses comprise a minute fraction of grazing animals on public lands. When the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act passed in 1971, Congress stated that “wild horses and burros are fast disappearing from the American scene.” Since then, population levels have been further reduced to less than 35,000 animals.

Q: Are wild horses the cause of over-grazing of the public rangelands?

A: The main cause of degradation of public lands is livestock use, not wild horses. Cows graze within a mile of water, while wild horses are highly mobile, grazing from five to ten miles from water, at higher elevations, on steeper slopes, and in more rugged terrain. A congressionally-mandated study by the National Academy of Sciences found that wild horse forage use remains a small fraction of cattle forage use on public ranges.

Q: Are wild horses suffering from drought and starvation out on the range?

A: The majority of wild horses captured are in good condition. Despite federal protection, wild horses have been relegated to the most inhospitable areas of the range. Still, they have adapted and survived. Public land fencing can prevent horses from accessing scarce natural water sources and disrupt their widespread grazing patterns. In such instances, better in-the-wild management is the answer, rather than costly and traumatic round-ups.

Q: Is BLM’s removal policy fiscally responsible?

A: No. In-the-wild management would save millions of tax-dollars. BLM’s wild horse and burro budget was increased by 50% in 2001, then by another third in 2005, to fund a massive removal campaign. The cost to remove and process a single wild horse for adoption is \$3,300. A 2004 USGS study found that in-the-wild use of contraceptive measures alone would save 7.7 million tax-dollars annually.

Q: Are wild horses native to our continent?

A: Modern molecular biology has shown wild horses to be a “reintroduced” North American native wildlife species. Horses reintroduced by the Spanish were genetically equivalent to those that had gone extinct in North America 12 to 11 thousand years prior. These horses evolved over the past 500 years and adapted to the same ecological niches as their native relatives had once thrived in.