

June 10th, 2022

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
531 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Support for FY2023 Appropriations for Wild Horse Management

Dear Chairman Merkley and Ranking Member Murkowski:

The below-signed national and state organizations concerned for public land health request your support for adequate funding to enable the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to achieve a sustainable program addressing the urgent need to manage wild horses and burros for the protection, restoration and conservation of our lands and the multitude of wildlife species that depend upon them.

The Wild and Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971 mandates that wild horses and burros shall be managed to achieve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance. Compliance with this mandate can only be accomplished by management of wild horses and burros to the number that sustains the carrying capacity of the land. Unfortunately in the 50 years since enactment of the Act, this mandate has rarely been achieved.

The current estimated population of over 86,000 wild horses and burros is more than three times greater than the carrying capacity of BLM-managed public lands, undermining the health of public rangelands, adversely affecting other uses of the lands and the species that depend on them. In turn, this necessitates emergency gathers of horses and burros to prevent them from dying of dehydration and starvation. Direct removal of excess wild horses and burros from the range is the only way to protect and improve the health of the land, wildlife and of the those remaining wild horses and burros themselves before irreversible ecological damage occurs. As importantly, removal programs stop the needless, preventable suffering of the removed animals due to effects of this overpopulation on the landscape. Without a continuing increase in the rate of removal of horses and burros, populations will continue to expand. As a result, our nation will witness not only growing degradation to its rangeland ecosystem, wildlife and these horses and burros, but also exponential growth in restoration costs to its taxpayers.

As a result of the continued growth of wild horse and burro populations in the West, habitat is declining in quality across many areas, which is being further exacerbated by warmer and drier conditions, wildfire, and nonnative invasive plants. Native wildlife species that millions of Americans care about—including bighorn sheep, sage grouse, pollinators, and a multitude of other species large and small—are being negatively impacted across most of their range.

BLM has seen their budget annually boosted over the last few years, enabling them to begin effective and humane proactive management actions to reduce wild horse and burro numbers on the range, thus moving toward the restoration our lands.

We urge this committee and other members of Congress to support the continuation of additional capacity for BLM to address this increasing problem for our nation's valuable public lands. By continuing to provide sufficient annual funding for effective management of wild horse and burro populations we can achieve appropriate management levels to retain the health of our land. Sufficient funding now, saves far more taxpayer monies than allowing horse populations to continue to increase at the current rate of 20% per year.

Thank you for your consideration of this urgent request of our broad coalition of concerned entities. We invite your questions and welcome the opportunity to discuss this ongoing issue and possible solutions.

Sincerely,

Arizona Wildlife Federation

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

California Bowmen Hunters/State Archery Association

California Chapter – Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

California Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation

California Deer Association

California Rifle and Pistol Association

California State Chapter, National Wild Turkey Federation

Coalition for Healthy Nevada Lands

Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

Ducks Unlimited

Friends of Nevada Wilderness

Houston Safari Club

Idaho Wildlife Federation

Inland Northwest Wildlife Council

Izaak Walton League

Lander County Conservation District

Mule Deer Foundation

National Deer Association

National Wildlife Federation

Nevada Association of Conservation Districts

Nevada Association of Counties
Nevada Bighorns Unlimited
Nevada Cattlemen's Association
Nevada Coalition for Wildlife
Nevada State Chapter, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
Nevada State Chapter, National Wild Turkey Federation
Nevada Waterfowl Association
Nevada Wildlife Federation
New Mexico Wildlife Federation
North American Grouse Partnership
Northern Nevada Safari Club International
Oregon Anglers Alliance
Oregon Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
Oregon Chapter of Safari Club International
Oregon Pack Works
Oregon State Chapter, National Wild Turkey Federation
Oregon Wild Sheep Foundation
Orion, the Hunters Institute
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Safari Club International
San Diego County Wildlife Federation
San Francisco Bay Area Chapter of Safari Club International
Sierra Front Chapter- Muley Fanatic Foundation
Sportsmen's Alliance
Southern Nevada Coalition for Wildlife
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Washington Hunters Heritage Council
Wildlife Management Institute
Wyoming Wildlife Federation