

The Honorable Debra Haaland  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW MS 5311  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland:

Congratulations on your new post as Secretary of the Interior. We are a broad coalition from Nevada that cares deeply about the welfare of our public lands, and have considerable long-term experience in working to conserve, protect and enhance these lands. This letter is to alert you to the urgent situation of increasing numbers of wild horses and burros on public lands. We would like to work with you to tackle the difficult task of bringing swift and effective management to the BLM Wild Horse Program. While we recognize this to be an issue of western public lands, Nevada is especially impacted as the driest state in the nation and is currently experiencing a severe drought. Nevada is home to over 50% of the nation's wild horses with approximately 45,000 horses on Bureau of Land Management lands in 2021. This is nearly four times the number of horses and burros that Nevada's lands can support and sustain. We urgently ask for your assistance in lowering their population in Nevada to protect the health of the land, the water, the wildlife and the horses and burros themselves.

Today, the excessive numbers of wild horses and burros on Nevada rangelands are degrading the health of our ecosystems, and putting many species of our native wildlife at risk. The Wild and Free-roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971 stipulates that wild horses and burros shall be managed to achieve and maintain a "thriving natural ecological balance" on public lands, and the Act, with amendments, makes provisions to accomplish this end. In concert with the Act, the Bureau of Land Management has determined that, for the designated BLM wild horse herd management areas in Nevada, the land can support up to 12,811 wild horses and burros without degrading the carrying capacity of the land. Populations at or below 12,811, the "appropriate management level (AML)" would maintain the mandated "thriving natural ecological balance and multiple use relationships."

It is not our intent to be critical of the BLM as we have worked with dedicated employees of the Bureau and we believe that they know what needs to be done to realistically achieve a



sustainable wild and free-roaming horse and burro management program. We recognize that insufficient financial and political support from Congress have substantially hindered BLM's ability to effectuate a truly viable wild horse and burro management program. We have a sincere interest in continuing to work with BLM and others to secure the necessary financial and political support.

As you may know, a bellwether species of the sagebrush ecosystem is the Greater Sage-Grouse. Current estimates show that the species has declined by as much as 78% since 1960. The USGS and BLM along with many others have invested substantial time and effort in planning, research, and conservation of sage-grouse and their habitats. [Recent research \(Coates et al. 2021\) of the USGS](#) serves to confirm the importance of AML and suggests the current AML numbers are on average correct. They found that sage-grouse decline substantially when free-roaming horse populations are above AML. This is a threat that we can do something about by working together to better manage free-roaming horse numbers.

In May 2020 the BLM submitted its report to Congress as required by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2019, titled "An Analysis of Achieving a Sustainable Wild Horse and Burro Program". While we are in support of this plan and "The Path Forward" we feel that they do not rise to the urgency of the situation, especially in Nevada. We feel strongly and have peer reviewed scientific data to show that the 20 years necessary to achieve AML under both of the above plans is untenable and that rangeland damage over the course of 20 years will be catastrophic. Wild horses have demonstrated their habit of doubling their populations every four or five years so that any delay in assertive action will further damage habitats. Without swift action, by 2025 Nevada could host over 100,000 horses. Not only will wildlife suffer drastic declines, but the land resource will be so badly degraded that its ability to sustainably provide water, vegetation and wildlife resources may be altered to the extent that recovery potential will be lost.

We think there is a "Better Path Forward"; the immediate and consistent implementation of an aggressive program to place excess horses on private pastures. Achieving AML within the next six years would save taxpayers millions of dollars. Once AML is reached, fertility control and adoptions could permanently maintain populations at sustainable levels. Cost for such an

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aggressive removal program would be high during the initial several years; however, the long-term cost would be significantly reduced. We believe that action must be taken now to reduce wild horse and burro numbers to sustainable levels or the ecological services of our precious and fragile lands may be significantly diminished for generations to come.

We greatly appreciate your consideration of our concerns and our proposed action to address this urgent situation. Please see the attached resources for considerable scientific information and publications to support our concerns and our proposed remedy including the [Western Governors Association Policy Resolution 2021-05, Wild Horse and Burro Management](#), which addresses their concerns regarding the wild horse and burro issue.

We look forward to working with you and the Bureau of Land Management to ensure a healthy future for our public lands, and the wildlife, wild horses and burros that are dependent upon them.

It would be our honor to meet with you and/or your staff and welcome an opportunity to host a tour of Nevada landscape.

Sincerely,

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