



## TESTIMONY

**House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies**

**Fiscal Year 2013**

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**American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**

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On behalf of our 2 million supporters, The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) appreciates this opportunity to testify before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies. Founded in 1866, the ASPCA is the first humane organization established in the Americas and serves as the nation's leading voice for animal welfare. The ASPCA's mission is to provide effective means for the prevention of cruelty to animals throughout the United States, and for that reason we request the Department of the Interior consider the following concerns regarding BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program when making FY13 appropriations.

### Wild Horses

In the forty years since the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) was first charged with protecting our country's wild horses and burros, Americans have witnessed BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program deteriorate into a continuous cycle of roundups and removals with little regard to the preservation-focused mandate dictated by The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act (the Act). Our wild horses and burros are to be revered as historical icons, treated humanely, and managed fairly and respectfully on our public lands. We appreciate BLM's recognition that there is a great need for reform in the Wild Horse and Burro Program. We applaud its effort to incorporate the use of on-the-range management methods such as immunocontraception and to find alternatives to long-term holding of wild horses. However, further and significant reformations must be swiftly incorporated.

#### *Prohibit BLM funding for euthanasia or sale of wild horses as management methods*

In December 2004, Congress passed the Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2005 which contained a provision that amended the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act to allow for the sale of certain groups of wild horses and burros. This instant transfer of title from the U.S. government to the individual purchaser revokes the animal's status as a protected equine and makes it vulnerable to the still-thriving horse slaughter industry. Additionally, in 2008 BLM publicly announced that it was considering using its statutory authority to destroy old, sick, or unadoptable wild horses and burros for the first time by implementing mass euthanasia as a population control method. The roar of public opposition that followed forced BLM to quickly withdraw the proposal. However, both the sale provision and the language allowing for the destruction of wild horses and burros remain in the law. The ASPCA requests that the committee include the following language in the appropriations bill that specifically prohibits funding programs or projects that subject wild horses and burros to the possibility of slaughter or euthanasia as a means of population control: "Appropriations herein made shall not be available for the destruction of healthy, unadopted, wild horses and burros in the care of the Bureau or its contractors or for the sale of wild horses and burros that results in their destruction for processing into commercial products."

#### *Ensure that removals do not exceed adoption demand*

The majority of BLM's budget is spent caring for wild horses in long-term holding facilities. The budget requested for BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program has necessarily increased each fiscal year, as has the portion of the budget that funds the care of wild horses in long-term holding facilities. Unfortunately, instead of letting these wild horses remain in their natural habitats as part of their established herds, their family structures have been disrupted and they have been removed to fenced facilities where taxpayer dollars go for their care. There are now as many or more wild horses in holding facilities as in the wild. Without substantial change in management techniques, the number in holding facilities will only increase and taxpayer dollars will be further wasted in ever increasing amounts. The ASPCA believes wild horses belong in their natural habitats and should not be subject to the terror of removals nor the confines of holding facilities without hope of return to the range or adoption.

Adoption rates have varied between 3,000 and 4,000 horses since 2008. During that same time period, BLM has rounded up and removed approximately 7,800 annually, several thousand above the adoption demand, thereby guaranteeing most of those wild animals will be kept in taxpayer-funded holding facilities for the remainder of their lives. Warehousing horses in holding facilities does nothing to manage the on-range populations and only delays the inevitable need for more preventative management. This cycle must be broken. The ASPCA encourages BLM to limit the number of horses removed from the range to the number matching current adoption demand.

#### *Prioritize on-the-range management over roundup and removal*

The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act makes clear that on-the-range management should be preferred over roundup and removal as the primary method of wild horse management. There are multiple ways BLM can reform its program to favor on-the-range management methods.

The ASPCA realizes that there are situations where population control is necessary, and we appreciate BLM's public recognition that fertility control methods such as immunocotraception must be a significant part of wild horse population management. Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP), the contraceptive vaccine that has been used in managing horse and deer populations for decades, was recently registered by EPA and is now commercially available. For the past two years, BLM has capped its goal for vaccinating horses at 2,000 horses per year. For PZP to become a serious part of the solution, its use must be increased to levels that will significantly impact population growth. As part of President Obama's proposed FY13 budget for BLM, the Wild Horse and Burro Program requested a \$2 million increase specifically for research and development of population-control methods. The ASPCA recommends that the requested funds go toward prioritizing the use of humane, reversible fertility control when it is necessary to stem the population growth of wild horse or burro herds.

In addition to escalating its use of immunocontraception, BLM must also reconsider Herd Management Areas (HMAs) that have been zeroed out as wild horse and burro habitat and make them available for reintroduction. Over 20 million acres of HMAs originally designated as wild horse and burro habitat have been zeroed out and horses have been removed and placed in holding facilities. This 40-year pattern has resulted in American taxpayers paying more each year for the cost of privatized care when millions of acres of habitat are available. The ASPCA recommends that the committee direct BLM to reestablish zeroed out HMAs as viable wild horse and burro habitat wherever possible.

#### *Require humane and transparent roundup operations*

Finally, the ASPCA requests that, when roundups are necessary, the committee charge BLM with establishing humane and transparent standards and procedures for those operations. Observers have witnessed horses suffering and dying due to brutal roundup practices. Foals have been run over such extreme distances that they literally have lost their hooves, mares have been driven to the point of physical exhaustion, and a burro was physically assaulted with helicopter skids. BLM recognizes a need to reform its roundup protocol. The ASPCA applauds this acknowledgement and asks that the committee encourage BLM to expedite its development of Standard Operating Procedures for roundups that incorporate animal welfare standards. No roundups for removal or any other purposes should occur without procedures in place that will ensure these incidents are never repeated. For the public to continue to invest in this management program and to allow this agency to have any authority over these animals, it is vital that no horses or burros are harmed at the hands of BLM agents or contractors. We also urge the committee to designate funds for researching, and developing protocols that take into consideration the impact of separating family groups of wild horses during removals. To allow for more visibility of roundup operations, and thus more accountability, we urge the committee to designate funds for the installation of video cameras on helicopters and at trap and holding sites.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before the committee. We appreciate the steps BLM has already taken to reform the Wild Horse and Burro Program, and we look forward to working with the agency on this issue in the future. With the help of the committee, the BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program can hopefully achieve sustainability and comply with the mission of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act: to protect and preserve these animals as historic American icons.