



Washington DC 2026

Wild Horse and Burro

Fact Sheet

In the 1800s, more than two million wild horses roamed the American West. By 1971, their numbers had plummeted to just 27,000 due to widespread killing. In response, Congress unanimously passed the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act (WFRHBA), mandating the protection and management of these iconic animals across 53.8 million acres in 308 designated herd areas.

However, over the years, the Act has been systematically weakened through legislative riders slipped into unrelated bills. Since its passage, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has slashed the number of designated herd areas to fewer than 170, stripping away over 22.2 million acres of protected land.

Today, fewer than 70,000 wild horses and burros remain in the wild—only slightly more than the BLM's 1973 count of 63,000. Yet, despite the original mandate to preserve them, the current plan seeks to reduce their numbers to below 16,000—a devastating decline that threatens the very survival of America's wild horse populations.

Wild Horses Are a Native Species Advances in DNA research have confirmed that wild horses evolved in North America and have existed here for over 55 million years. While maybe absent from the landscape for a brief period, wild horses thrived once reintroduced and continue to play an important part of the ecosystem. They help regenerate the land and contribute to fire mitigation through natural grazing.

The document previously used to classify wild horses as invasive has been proven false and has been officially corrected. As a result, all documents and policies based on that misinformation should also be corrected to reflect the truth.

Current Major Concern:

Wild horses and burros that were removed from the range based on false or outdated information should retain their Federally protected status while in holding. Under no circumstances should killing of wild horses and burros be an option.

We have a way forward:

- **Invest in the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program** Finalize and implement enforceable welfare standards. This program has already been initiated. It just needs to be completed. The Abuses and neglect have been and continue to be major issues.
- **Reassess Appropriate Management Levels:** According to the National Academy of Science's 2013 report, "current Appropriate Management Levels (AMLs) lack transparency, scientific backing, and the adaptability to environmental and social changes". Most are too low to be genetically healthy.
- **Develop and Implement Distinct Herd Management Area Plans (HMAPs)** as mandated by 43 CFR 4710, Each Herd Management Area must have a distinct plan. Currently fewer than 7 of the required 300 have been completed. This is the foundation document that would make the program function as intended.
- **Stop All Roundups** until HMAPs are completed to determine accurate Appropriate Management Levels. The roundups being based on false information on AMLs have cost Millions. Many of these horses can be returned to their home ranges.
- **Evaluate Herd Areas (HAs):** Reassess HAs for HMAP integration to repatriate horses from holding facilities. Almost half of protected wild horse and burro lands have been "zeroed out". Horses in holding could be returned to these or their original HMAs.
- **Enforce Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 4700.2** to reduce cattle grazing on public lands before reducing horse populations. BLM's livestock grazing program costs taxpayers over \$130 million annually in management.
- **Replace Helicopters with Humane Bait-Trapping** When and if removals are deemed necessary. Bait-trapping should be used to minimize stress and injury.
- **Ban sterilization,** Instead, use PZP Native contraceptive only and collaborate with nonprofits to establish trained darters and observers on the range. This should only be done when and if necessary, as addressed in HMAPs
- **Restoration Projects.** Partner with Universities, Veterans and nonprofit programs to pursue range restoration and rewilding projects on zeroed-out HMAs and other areas. This restores ecological balance and reduces the number of horses in long-term holding.

*Numbers stated on this fact sheet may vary slightly based on source. They have also been adjusted over time.

