

\*\*\* Archery Trade Association \*\*\* Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies \*\*\* Backcountry Hunters & Anglers \*\*\* Bear Trust International \*\*\* Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation \*\*\* Dallas Safari Club \*\*\* Delta Waterfowl \*\*\* Houston Safari Club \*\*\* Izaak Walton League of America \*\*\* Masters of Foxhounds Association \*\*\* National Shooting Sports Foundation \*\*\* National Wild Turkey Federation \*\*\* North American Grouse Partnership \*\*\* Pheasants Forever \*\*\* Pope & Young Club \*\*\* Quail Forever \*\*\* Public Lands Foundation \*\*\* Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation \*\*\* Safari Club International \*\*\* The Wildlife Society \*\*\* Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership \*\*\* Whitetails Unlimited \*\*\* Wild Sheep Foundation \*\*\* Wildlife Management Institute \*\*\*

Sen. Jeff Merkley, Chair  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related Agencies  
531 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related Agencies  
522 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Mike Simpson, Chair  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related Agencies  
2084 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Chellie Pingree, Ranking Member  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related Agencies  
2354 Rayburn House Office Building,  
Washington, DC 20515

May 2, 2024

Dear Chair Merkley, Ranking Member Murkowski, Chair Simpson, and Ranking Member Pingree:

We write to respectfully request a pause in the restriction on the sale of horses and burros by the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Wild Horse and Burro (WHB) Program. The current overpopulation of horses and burros on the range and in long-term holding facilities is coming at great ecological loss and significant financial expense to the taxpayers. The only way to solve this problem is to achieve appropriate management levels (AML) of horses and burros range-wide through gathering and sale. Then, and only then, may contraceptives sufficiently maintain population goals. All 50 state fish and wildlife agencies unanimously passed a resolution to this effect in 2023, urging BLM and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to use all available means and methods to address this issue.

We support the Administration's request for the WHB program in FY25, but firmly believe a combination of funding and new authority is necessary to address this problem. Given the challenge posed by this issue on USFS lands, we also think it appropriate that the National Forest System receive a new line item to address this issue. Funds are currently reallocated internally to attempt to address the 20% of horses and burros occurring on USFS lands.

Since 2004, Congress has included language in the annual appropriations bills that suspends the authority of BLM for selling these animals under the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act. Respectfully and thoughtfully, it is time for a pause so the BLM may reduce the number of horses and burros being held in long-term captivity to an affordable number, as well as on-range populations where single-dose fertility control treatment may become a viable solution.

The difficulty of this measure is justified by the benefits of overall health in the abundant herd, Western landscapes, native wildlife and fisheries, and the BLM budget. Subsequent appropriation bills can and should revisit this question based on results.

Current funding for the BLM WHB program does not provide enough resources or authority for managing this situation on BLM or USFS lands. On-range population growth is rapidly outpacing management efforts and the costs of holding facilities for these animals has drastically increased due to inflation. As of March 1, 2024 the BLM estimates there are over 73,520 horses and burros across habitats with a total AML of less than 27,000. Further, there are 62,000 horses and burros in off-range holding facilities at a taxpayer expense exceeding \$100 million annually. These expenses have recently exceeded the BLM and USFS budget for range management planning and other core functions of the agency.

The harm inflicted on public lands from excess horses and burros is well documented and compounds yearly as on-range population growth rates and off-range holding costs outstrip the BLM's ability to manage herds. We sincerely appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Archery Trade Association  
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Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation  
Dallas Safari Club  
Delta Waterfowl  
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