

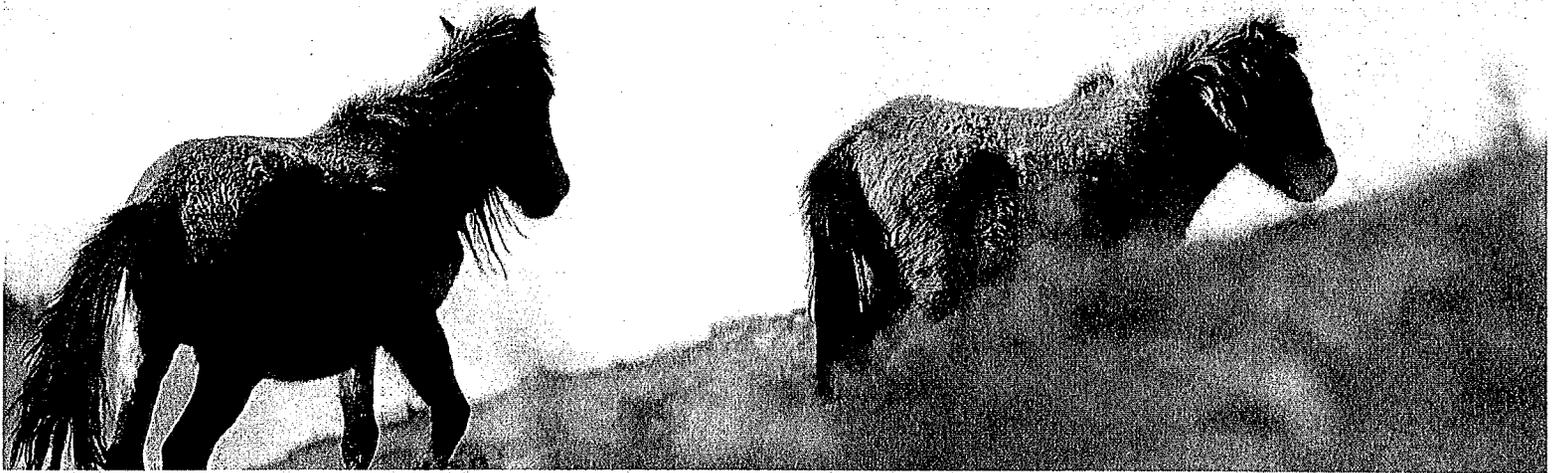
# WILD HORSES AND BURROS



ASSOCIATION of  
FISH & WILDLIFE  
AGENCIES

2023

Fact Sheet



## A HUMAN AND WILDLIFE COST OF WILD HORSES AND BURROS

### BACKGROUND:

Wild horses and burros were introduced to the landscape by the Spanish 500 years ago. Wild horses and burros, unlike wildlife or livestock which are either managed by state and federal agencies or livestock owners, are federally protected under the Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971. Currently, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lack adequate resources to execute the management framework to manage population growth while remaining fiscally sustainable.

### THE COST OF STATUS QUO:

If nothing were done to reduce the annual growth rates of these herds, by 2040, the BLM estimates the on-range population of wild horses and burros would increase to over 2.8 million. This would cause catastrophic harm to the land, people, to other species, and to the wild horses and burros themselves.

## DID YOU KNOW?!

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Native wildlife, such as elk, antelope, deer, and bighorn sheep, are suffering and even dying of thirst because wild horses and burros aggressively hoard the precious and few available water sources.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Wild horse and burro populations have grown to over 308% ABOVE their ideal levels and what range lands can support. This overpopulation has not only decimated these ecosystems and native wildlife but has caused starvation and sickness amongst the horses and burros themselves. A sad sight for all!

### DID YOU KNOW?

More WILDFIRES! OH NO! The number of extreme wildfires is predicted to increase by 14% by 2030. The overpopulation of wild horses and burros negatively impacts the overall health of western rangelands and directly contributes to their susceptibility to catastrophic wildfires.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Wild horses are helping to push some native wildlife to the brink of extinction, such as the Greater Sage Grouse. Too many wild horses on the landscape are contributing to irreversible consequences for native wildlife.

# MANAGEMENT/POINTS OF INTEREST



## MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

Unmanaged herds can double in size every four years. The harm inflicted on public lands from excess wild horses and burros compounds yearly as on-range populations growth rates and off-range holding costs outstrip the BLM and USFS ability to manage herds according to the intent of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971, as amended.

### Management Options:

1. Herd reduction. Wild horses and burros have population growth rates that average 15-20% (up to 39%) per year. Management is most effective when focused on herd reduction primarily regulated through gathers.
2. Fertility control methods. Fertility control methods have the potential to slow wild horse/burro herd growth rates, but do not reduce herd size.
3. The "Path Forward" proposed method. The "Path Forward" proposes four tools for managing horses and sustaining healthy rangelands.
  - a. Conduct targeted gathers and removals in densely populated herd management areas to initially reduce the populations.
  - b. Treat gathered horses with fertility control to keep populations at manageable levels.
  - c. Relocate horses to public-private partnership pasture facilities to endure safe and humane treatment.
  - d. Promote adoptions to help reduce captive populations and the costs they incur.

NOTE: a fragmented approach that only uses fertility control or gathers WILL NOT RESOLVE the overpopulation issue. Management must include both to reach appropriate management levels.



Stabilize



## THREE PHASE MANAGEMENT

The analysis assumes successful management of wild horses and burro herds and healthy landscape in three phases:

1. Stabilize on-range population growth (over 4-5 years);
2. Reach appropriate management levels nationally (over the next decade after the first phase); and
3. Maintain appropriate management levels in perpetuity.



## A HUMAN COST

- Wild Horses/Burros destroy the landscape (scarce food and water sources). Rural economies that co-exist with federally protected lands in the United States, especially in the American West, have traditionally relied on agriculture, especially grazing-related industries. Their livelihoods are being threatened.
- Wild horses/burros contribute to the increasing number of wildfires. Wildfires have many acute and chronic effects on human health. They can cause respiratory and cardiovascular symptoms, burns, trauma, mental health effects, reproductive and immunological disorders, and a wide array of outcomes associated with social and financial disruption.