

December 3, 2023

Sagebrush Ecosystem Council  
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Dear Sagebrush Ecosystem Council:

This is my statement to be read at the meeting of your council on Tuesday, December 5, 2023 and recorded in the proceedings.

I have read the letter dated November 16, 2023 that was sent to Tracy Stone-Manning, Director of the Bureau of Land Management in Washington, DC. This is regarding the "Additional BLM Funding and Actions for Nevada Wild Horse and Burro Gathers in 2024. I am very disappointed by the extreme bias and hysterical tone of this letter, which is not presenting a balanced picture of what is happening on our public lands in Nevada or throughout the West.

As a wildlife ecologist who has extensively monitored, researched and investigated our nation's wild horse and burros and the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act (WFHBA) program for many years, I have sought to have our government honestly uphold the true provisions of this progressive act. But I cannot stand by while people heavily involved in the exploitation of the public lands issue very biased information and hyperbole regarding the wild horses and burros and their place in Nevada and the West.

For example, the statement of November 16, 2023 does not represent a true and objective view of the situation on the public lands because it overlooks the major causes of ecosystem degradation and blames, or "scapegoats", the wild horses and burros, even though they are relatively minor in relation to the major exploiters of natural resources and are often subject to "squeeze plays" by public lands resource exploiters and the government officials who should be curbing the latter in its excesses. These are mainly the public lands cattle and sheep ranchers, the mining and energy companies, the hunting establishment, the Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) recreationalists, and the land developers. All of these are encroaching on a major scale on the public lands ecosystems and need to be curbed to prevent the continued degradation of the public lands' resources and natural life community. And this is a critical issue today, since Global Climate Change is upon us and threatens the integrity of the entire life community, including us humans!

The ranchers, land developers, and mining and energy companies, for example, pump down major aquifers and are causing the aridification of much of Nevada and the West. Large mining operations pump enormous amounts of water causing the drying of springs and streams in this region of our country, and so do the ranchers and land

developers. OHVs are devastating vast areas and damaging the wildlife and the natural ecosystems upon which they depend -- but what is being done to curb these often uneducated and unconcerned people! Also, uncontrolled cattle and sheep, including increasing and alarming trespass and out-of-season livestock, are producing a devastating effect.

It is extremely unjust to blame the relatively minor populations of wild horses and wild burros for what is happening in Nevada and in the West. Doing so overlooks the many major positive contributions that these naturally living equids make as integral parts of many ecosystems. These animals should be allowed to harmoniously adapt to each unique ecosystem present in their legal herd areas and territories.

Their benefits include (a) substantial soil enrichment that also increases water retention and augments regional aquifers; (b) the substantial dispersion of intact seeds that go on to germinate, and which include many native plants, including grasses, and whose increased establishment redounds to the benefit of many other species, including prized wildlife species such as birds, deer, and insects; (c) the wide-ranging habits of these wild equids that naturally rest-rotates their foraging pressure over broad areas, all the while building more organically rich and fertile soils and dispersing many intact seeds of a great variety of valuable plants. And the list goes on.

It should be recognized that the wild horses and burros have deep evolutionary roots in North America as attests the fossil record and genetic studies and that they restore the "equid element" in the North American life community and in so doing they restore balance, particularly in regard to the cloven-hoofed, rumen-fermenting, multi-stomach Artiodactyla herbivores. Professional studies have shown that they benefit the latter, by virtue of their very complementary differences from these herbivores. This greatly substantiates the WFHBA when it states that the wild horses "contribute to the diversity of life forms within the nation and enrich the lives of the American people" and also that they should "be considered ... as an integral part of the natural system of public lands".

In short, it is wrong to single out a minority presence -- the wild horses and wild burros -- in order to further the monopoly of the major occupiers and impactors of the public lands. It is wrong to do this for the above and many other related reasons, including their great appreciation by the General Public as a Quality of Life asset, and especially given the fact that the unanimously passed WFHBA gives them legal rights to establish themselves as thriving populations in each and all of their legal herd areas/herd management areas on BLM-USDI and territories on USFS-USDA lands as well as adjoining lands where cooperative agreements have been set up so that they can have complete and long-term viable populations for generations to come.

In proof of the above and related points, I offer my own study and research reports, including peer-reviewed, as well as those of others who have cared enough to honestly and objectively examine this important issue. Please contact me for these. Also I would like to refer you to a thorough-going professional analysis by the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, or PEER, that is available at <https://peer.org/agency->

[records-paint-bleak-picture-of-western-landscapes](#) This and other professional and objective studies and reports by this and other groups indicate how very biased it is to blame the relatively minor populations of wild horses and burros for the degradations of public lands that are being monopolized by livestock and other resource-exploitive, or simply reckless and nature-disrespectful interests.

We must not fail to implement true "multiple use" on the public lands by favoring powerful, usually corporate interests over the general public and common citizens of our country. In regards to the wild horses and burros, this would be to fail to uphold the role of the returned "equid element" in North America that has been much more long-standing and deeply rooted than any of the cloven-hoofed, ruminants, and, as a consequence, revives a truly amazing number of positive mutualistic symbioses, or ways of living together with countless species of plants, animals, soil organisms, etc. And the wild horses and burros coming to fill their age-old niches and roles in Nevada and elsewhere in the West and North America would greatly help combat Global Climate Change, mitigate and even prevent catastrophic wildfires, etc. Here I refer you to my peer reviewed publication at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274006946\\_The\\_Horse\\_and\\_Burro\\_as\\_Positively\\_Contributing\\_Returned\\_Natives\\_in\\_North\\_America](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274006946_The_Horse_and_Burro_as_Positively_Contributing_Returned_Natives_in_North_America)

as well as to my publication concerning the equids and their order in their role as Carbon sequesters at <https://www.horsetalk.co.nz/2021/07/17/horses-carbon-sequesters/>

I look forward to your thoughtful response and to collaborating with you to achieve true justice for Nevada's wild horses and burros and to getting people to learn to share the land and freedom with such deeply justified, beneficial and magnificent presences.

Merry Christmas and holiday greetings to all of you!

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