



In Response to “The Hard Truth About the West’s Wild Horse Problem”

Having dedicated years and more than my fair share of blood, sweat and tears to fighting for the safety and protection of the wild horses scattered across America, it is truly debilitating to see an article lacking credence and foundation in facts published by the New York Times. “The Hard Truth About the West’s Wild Horse Problem,” published as an op-ed on 12/25/17 not only misrepresents the truth of the situation wild horses face, as well as the conditions of their territories. It also fails to point out that the author, Chris Stewart (Republican congressman from Utah), is incredibly biased and far from an impartial authority on the subject. While Stewart claims to have a farming background that he asserts makes him a credible source, he is also the self-acknowledged author of the proposal that the House Appropriations Committee approved that will remove restrictions preventing euthanasia and the sale of horses managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to slaughterhouses. Stewart misrepresents the status of the wild horse populations in America, clearly to bolster support for his own gain in the hopes of getting these inhumane practices relegalized through approval of the House version of the Interior Department’s budget.

Beyond the fact that the article is derived from a biased source, the so-called “wild horse problem” is drastically misrepresented and distorted. The Wild Horse and Burro Program was established under the protection of the BLM with the intention to preserve the wild horses that are not only native to American lands, but are the very way we were able to colonize this country in the first place. The original parcel of land allocated to the wild horses by the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 was 50 million acres, and to date the horses have been robbed with at least 20 million acres having been taken away from these populations to graze cattle or other livestock. Not one of these stolen acres has been mitigated, which would be the norm for any other takeover of land in cases of construction for shopping centers, railroads, highways, pipelines and so on. Government agencies and politicians are correct when they state that the existing herds need more room – because it is their actions that took the legally appropriated lands from these horses in the first place with no replacement or thought for the impact on their survival. The remaining lands they roam, however, are far from decimated by the wild horses themselves. Analysis of the impact wild horses have on lands they graze shows they actually redeposit seeds and nutrients into the soil because of their simple digestive system. In contrast, livestock animals have multi-stomached digestion and leave behind no trace of seeds on the areas they graze, making regrowth impossible.

Despite this evidence that mustangs have a positive environmental impact on the lands they inhabit, the recent government ruling on herds inhabiting the Antelope Valley region of Nevada points directly to the flaws in the management of these horses by the BLM. For those not familiar with the case, the BLM issued a decision dated December 21, 2017, to gather, remove, and use fertility controls upon 9,525 wild horses in northeastern Nevada within what is



known as the Antelope and Triple B Complexes. The objective of the decision is to maintain a level of wild horses down to 427-798 head in the Antelope Complex and to maintain a level of wild horses down to 472-889 in the Triple B Complex – which the BLM has determined to the appropriate management levels (AML) in these complexes. This decision is personally disappointing to me; not because of the need to maintain such AMLs to protect, maintain, and enhance the public land resources within such complexes, but because I offered an alternative solution in 2011 which the BLM rejected. This solution would have provided protection for many of these wild horses in the Antelope Complex now proposed to be gathered, removed, or subject to fertility controls via the decision. This solution would have also maintained my grazing rights and water rights on the Spruce Allotment (which is inclusive of most of the Antelope Complex) – while also sustaining a viable livestock operation that would have helped pay for the intended protection. While I appreciate my solution is not the panacea to the challenges facing wild horses, it certainly is and was a creative, out-of-the box, alternative to simply gathering and removing wild horses. It is possible that the conditional nature of the decision which references “funding limitations and competing National priorities” will mean that the BLM may still do nothing in these complexes; thus exasperating the situation for the wild horses, for livestock permittees, and for the public land resources. However, I remain hopeful that the BLM (or Congress) will again take a fresh set of eyes to my solution as the BLM (and Congress) balances the conditional nature of the decision.

The assertion that wild horse populations increase by 20% per year fails to take into account a large attrition rate. In the wild, horses only live to around 11 years of age and the survival rate for foals is much lower than in captivity. This is also nature’s way, and in reality the growth of the wild horse population is more accurately calculated to be 5% year over year. For wild horses, quality of life as it was intended to be should be the objective – not euthanasia of healthy horses simply because the existing broken system of government mismanagement is not making the correct decisions in the interests of these horses by giving away their lands. These populations of horses are not starving to death in the wild: they are undergoing the same seasonal cycles of fat gain and loss, as well as death from natural causes, that any wild animal such as bears would experience.

The thousands of horses kept in short and long term holding are a major expenditure for taxpayers, and are a contributing factor that prolongs the lives of these horses to closer to 25 years but under atrocious conditions they should never be exposed to. Horses in holding are kept with little to no room to move, and are transported to the locations that house them in large groups on trailers that employ fear as a tactic to force the horses into standing in the confined trailers for long periods of time with no space. Horses are often trampled and break limbs in the process, and the helicopter roundups of these animals are just as cruel, as wild horses and burros are frantically prodded along from above. The operations that have been granted jurisdiction over these horses in short and long term holding are not regularly monitored by the BLM and the numbers of horses reported in their care are not checked, leading to payments



received by many for horses that have died or have been sold off the books by the facilities themselves to killer buyers for slaughter. This financial double-dipping not only hurts the taxpayers ultimately paying the stipends that are meant to go toward caring for horses that are not even on the property any more, but it also means the horses are far from protected and in serious jeopardy of being sold to their deaths at the hands of unverified buyers.

Sanctuaries can be established that will not only save taxpayers over \$2 billion over the course of 20 years, but they would also ensure the true protection of these wild horses within defined land boundaries that cannot be manipulated by the government. Mustang Monument is the case in point sanctuary I have built at my own expense as a living example of this carefully constructed plan I've invested my life in building. The solution for wild horses and the government exists – it just won't be acted upon and approved by the administration so that we can save this American treasure once and for all.

Even considering the euthanasia of healthy horses is a crime as it represents a vicious act of animal cruelty, the likes of which would never be considered for containing domestic pet or exotic animal populations. This proposed allowance of euthanasia for horses would look more like a firing squad pointed right at the animals the government was chartered to protect rather than a humane process done in the interests of the horses and burros.

Reopening slaughterhouses is a similar violation of the rights these horses deserve. As prey animals of the utmost degree with the highest level of cognition and awareness, there is no humane way to slaughter a horse. Every step towards doing so sets off natural instincts and frantic responses to escape, and they are fully aware of what is happening throughout the process. Many cannot be killed prior to dismemberment, making this an inexcusable act of violence. 80% of Americans are horrified by the idea of horse slaughter, there is no demand for the meat in our domestic market and the slaughterhouses themselves are operated by foreign companies that pay virtually no taxes on the products they export. Not to mention the fact that the wild horses were not bred for slaughter, and thus there is no telling whether consumption of the meat would even be safe or permitted by regulatory health agencies.

With the new budget under review, the distribution of incomplete and incorrect information is more harmful than ever, which is why we will continue to educate with facts to combat fake news distributed by the BLM and lobbyists.