



Society for Range Management

June 2, 2005

The Honorable Gale Norton, Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Norton,

The Society for Range Management is a professional organization of varied interests that have a common commitment to prudent management of Rangelands throughout the world. Our membership includes: scientists, land management agency staffs and managers, consultants, rangeland users and other interests that recognize the products and values of Rangelands. At our recent annual meeting in Fort Worth, Texas, February 5 – 11, 2005, several committees discussed the implications of Wild Horses and Burros on Rangelands.

In recent years, it has been increasingly problematic for public land agencies to meet goals of maintaining healthy Rangelands, while providing a balance of uses of rangeland. In some areas, wild horse and burro populations have exceeded the rangelands capacity and have infringed on wildlife habitat, forage allocated for livestock production and jeopardized rangeland health. The current means of controlling wild horse and burro populations, though useful, have fallen short of meeting the needs to control herds. Adoptions and sanctuary arrangements are commendable efforts of the agencies. Contraception strategies being implemented may hold promise in some areas. Even with these means, there are horses and burros which are un-adoptable and are not suitable for sanctuaries that are being held in feedlot care facilities.

As part of the recently enacted Consolidated Appropriations Act, a provision was established that allowed for sale of excess animals that were: (A) 10 years or more of age or (B) had been previously offered for adoption at least three times. Also, these animals would be made available for sale without limitation. This provision provides yet another tool with which the government agencies can manage our wild horse and burro populations within their existing budgets.

Having this provision is only a tool for management. It is not necessarily the preferred tool, and in actual practice it should be the “tool of last resort” for agencies to manage our wild horse and burro populations and Rangelands. This is a tool that is useful for the long term and will reduce the costs of managing our rangelands and wild horse and burro populations.

Rangelands where wild horse and burro populations exist are not a limitless resource nor should wild horses and burros have priority over native wildlife, healthy rangelands and other uses of Rangelands.

The Society for Range Management has established a **Policy Statement** for Rangeland and Range Resources as follows:

Rangeland and Range Resources

Rangelands, a broad category of land comprising more than 40% of the earth's land area, are characterized by native plant communities, which are often associated with grazing, and are managed by ecological, rather than agronomic methods.

The term “range” can also include forestlands that have grazing resources, or seeded lands that are managed like rangeland. Range resources are not limited to the grazable forage, but may include wildlife, water and many other benefits.

HEADQUARTERS OFFICE:

445 Union Blvd., Suite 230, Lakewood, CO 80228-1259; Phone: 303-986-3309; Fax: 303-986-3892
Email: info@rangelands.com; Home Page: <http://www.rangelands.org>

- **Management of Rangeland Ecosystems**

The Society believes that rangeland ecosystems should be managed to provide optimum sustained yield of tangible and intangible products and benefits for human welfare. This can only be achieved through the sound use of ecological and economic principles. The use of valid resource inventories and monitoring are a basic requirement for planning and management of rangeland resources. Other manipulative management practices, including fire and integrated pest management may be employed to create positive changes in the landscape through development of sustainable, desired plant communities.

- **Multiple Use of Rangeland Resources**

The Society supports managing combinations of rangeland uses, which best meet the needs and desires of people and are compatible with the sustainability and adaptability of the land. Multiple use management, where appropriate, is encouraged on both public and private lands.

Uses of rangeland the Society for Range Management supports include:

- **Livestock Grazing:** *Rangelands constitute an important forage base for livestock, and livestock constitute an important management tool for rangelands. The Society supports appropriately planned and monitored livestock grazing based on scientific principles that meet management goals and societal needs.*
- **Water Management:** *Rangelands constitute a large portion of the water producing land area of the earth. The Society promotes rangeland management that results in healthy ecosystems which enhance the quality of water and minimize soil erosion and sedimentation.*
- **Wildlife Management:** *Rangelands provide habitat for many species of wildlife. The Society promotes ecologically sound wildlife management integrated with rangeland management practices to maintain or restore desired wildlife habitat.*
- **Management of Aesthetic Value:** *Rangelands possess natural beauty and other aesthetic values. The Society supports the concept that range management activities should not detract from aesthetic values of rangelands and may often enhance them.*
- **Recreational Use of Rangelands:** *Rangelands provide recreational opportunities. The Society supports development of recreational opportunities, as appropriate, in range management planning, providing that such use is compatible with other rangeland resource values.*

In addition, the Society for Range Management has adopted the following **Position Statement** specific to Wild Horse and Burro management as follows:

WILD HORSE AND BURRO MANAGEMENT

Society for Range Management policy is to support wild horse and burro use of rangelands in accordance with the Wild Horse and Burro Act and as part of the multiple use mix of products and benefits for human welfare in locations where these animals existed when the law was passed. The law specifies management to provide “a thriving ecological balance”. SRM interprets this to mean that long-term sustainability and productivity must be the primary consideration in devising legislation and policy for management planning and administration of rangelands, including establishment of proper numbers and management levels for wild horses and burros. Rangeland “health” standards and guidelines are equally appropriate for all herbivores.

Wild horse and burro populations increase rapidly and their numbers commonly expand beyond herd management areas and exceed carrying capacity unless excess animals are regularly removed. Adoption programs and sanctuaries for excess horses have only been partially successful. Overstocking results in deterioration of vegetation, soils, and watersheds and leaves a potential for expansion of invasive species. Serious conflicts with wildlife, endangered species, domestic livestock, and other uses of rangelands have resulted.

The federal government must implement more effective methods to manage and control populations of wild horses and burros. SRM supports changes in laws, policies, and administration to effectively and economically manage wild horse

and burros to maintain healthy populations, reduce conflicts with other uses, and maintain long-term sustainability of rangeland resources.

WILD HORSE MANAGEMENT METHOD

The Society believes in the practice and enhancement of multiple use values of rangelands, while maintaining basic soil, water and vegetation resources. The Society also believes that a “thriving natural ecological balance” is essential to the health and maintenance of viable wild horse and burro populations.

Therefore, SRM recommends that public land agencies develop the planning, implementation and monitoring of vegetation management that incorporates wild horse management strategies along with other resource demands. Funds saved through the following recommended strategies should be used for the basic resource management in the herd management areas.

The Society for Range Management believes new and innovative herd management strategies can reduce the number of unadopted wild horses that are removed from the rangelands. These herd management strategies should include:

- a. Leaving the breeding herd on rangeland for its natural life.
- b. Removing excess from young of the herd.
- c. Leaving sufficient young to offset death loss and sustain the integrity of the herd.
- d. Retaining desirable characteristics.
- e. Removing undesirable characteristics from the gene pool.

The Society for Range Management urges the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service to adopt the use of herd management strategies and explore other cost effective methods.

Also, following the acceptance of Rangeland Health as a basis for assessing Rangelands, the Society for Range Management passed the following **Resolution** specific to Wild Horses and Burros.

Wild Horses and Burros

WHEREAS, the Bureau of Land Management has adopted and implemented standards and guidelines for rangeland “health” as a basis for assessing livestock grazing effects, and

WHEREAS, the Society for Range Management takes the position that all land uses should provide for long-term sustainability of rangelands, and

WHEREAS, the Society for Range Management recognizes the standards and guidelines for rangeland “health” as prepared are equally appropriate for all herbivores, and

WHEREAS, the Society for Range Management is concerned about present management of wild horses and burros on Bureau of Land Management lands,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Society for Range Management strongly urges the Secretary of the Interior to:

1. adopt rangeland “health” standards and develop guidelines as a basis for assessing wild horse and burro grazing effects; and
2. implement timely corrective actions when wild horse and burro grazing impacts result in the inability to meet or progress toward rangeland “health” standards.

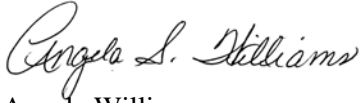
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The Society for Range Management urges Congress and agencies to act in the long term interest of Healthy Rangelands and the sustainable products and uses of rangelands including Wild Horse and Burro populations.

The Society for Range Management is ready and able to provide objective information and council on the implications of legislation and policy as it relates to Rangelands and uses of Rangelands. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,



Angela Williams
President

cc: Kathleen Clarke, BLM Director
Paul Beddoe, Western Interstate Region & Legislative Representative, National Association of Counties
Richard Pombo, Chairman, Committee on Resources, U.S. House of Representatives
Pete V. Domenici, Chairman, Committee on Energy & Natural Resources, U. S. Senate
Conrad Burns, Vice Chairman, Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests, U.S. Senate