

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
FOREST SERVICE RETIREES
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PUBLIC LANDS FOUNDATION
PO Box 7226
Arlington, VA 22207

Senator Jeff Bingaman, Chairman
Senate Energy and Natural Resource Committee
304 Dirksen Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Bingaman:

The National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR) and the Public Lands Foundation (PLF) have jointly written this letter to express our opposition to S. 1579, which would amend the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act. The proposed legislation provides no solutions to the current problems faced by the agencies. We would also suggest to you that the problems associated with the management of wild horses and burros cannot be solved by legislation alone. A way must be found to bring groups with disparate positions together to find solutions to this issue.

NAFSR is a private, independent, non-partisan, non-profit association, whose members believe in the US Forest Service (USFS) and its missions. Members dedicated their careers to protecting, developing and managing the nation's National Forest System lands and advising and cooperating here and around the world on such matters. Many of its members have extensive leadership and professional experience in the management of natural resources, including rangeland resources.

PLF is a national non-profit, all volunteer membership, conservation organization dedicated to the ecological stability of the public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). It is made up of mostly former BLM employees with many years of experience in natural resource management. The PLF advocates for sound scientific decision-making on the National System of Public Lands.

Our organizations are very concerned about the current situation facing both the BLM and the USFS, as both agencies administer lands where wild horses and burros are protected and can be found. The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act has been impossible to manage on a scientific basis due to many factors, including a lack of appropriated funds and public and congressional opposition to some of the remedies provided in the 1971 Act.

We believe that management of wild horses and burros must be about maintaining a thriving ecological balance on the rangelands for which both agencies are responsible. In 1971, Congress intended that the program be about maintaining healthy horses on healthy ranges and that the range should be shared by all users. Without healthy rangelands, there can be no herds of wild horses, livestock grazing or healthy wildlife populations. It is essential that wild horses and burros be managed for appropriate numbers of animals by either removal of excess animals or expanded use of fertility control.

Since the 1940s, the BLM has reduced grazing by livestock on public lands by nearly 50 percent. Similar reductions have occurred on National Forest System Lands. These reductions were accomplished for the purpose of protecting range resources, the same is necessary for wild horse and burro management activities.

We also believe that expansion of herd management areas as proposed in the legislation to return horses to places they may have been found in the past would result in ecological devastation. Both agencies determined where appropriate numbers of horses should be maintained through public planning processes. Where decisions were made to not manage for wild horses, it was primarily because of private land ownership patterns, lack of water or forage to sustain horses or other unsuitable conditions.

The program has had some success relative to adopting excess horses and burros over the years, but current economic conditions and the significant drop in horse adoptions are worsening the problem. According to the Government Accounting Office report GAO-09-77, dated October 9, 2008, the BLM, as of 2007, had successfully adopted approximately 235,700 excess animals since passage of the Act. However, since 2007 the adoption demand has dropped so low, that the BLM now faces enormous challenges to protect the health of the range and address the issue of what to do with thousands of excess animals.

Instead of passing S. 1579, we feel the Congress should support funding to continue efforts to reach appropriate numbers of horses and burros on the range, and support the Secretary of the Interior's proposal to create new wild horse refuges in the east and mid-west

as an interim solution. In the long-term, we believe that the Congress should encourage the various factions who are currently battling over horse numbers, locations and removal methods to come together and try to reach a more pragmatic solution.

The NAFSR and PLF believe a long-term solution should begin with a grass roots effort to bring all parties together to determine the acceptable number of wild horses and burros that should be maintained in the West and to discuss the creation of National Wild Horse and Burro Ranges to accommodate this acceptable number of animals. These National Ranges would be managed for the maintenance and protection of wild horses, burros and wildlife. These ranges could be created from combinations of existing herd management areas and result in increased number of horses, in balance with the range resource. Livestock permits could be purchased with donations to eliminate significant conflict. Other herd management areas which are not appropriate for long term management of horses could be eliminated where determined appropriate. We believe the best outcome can only be derived from the designation of new horse ranges in the West, where these horses belong.

If these things can be accomplished, then the issue of what to do with excess animals will still remain. However, we believe that with extensive use of fertility control, the reproductive rate can be reduced to the point where the need for horse removals will be about equal to the level of current adoptions.

We would be willing to discuss these issues with your staff if it would help.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jim W. Golden

Jim W. Golden,
Chairman of Board of Directors
National Association Of
Forest Service Retirees

Sincerely,

/s/ Henri R. Bisson

Henri R. Bisson,
President
Public Lands Foundation

Cc: Senator Lisa Murkowski, Ranking Member
Energy and Natural Resources Committee Office
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510