

BLM WILD HORSES & BURROS PROGRAM

Position Statement in Response to USDI Secretary Ken Salazar's Initiative

Utah Association of Conservation Districts

Issue

The health and multiple-uses of western public lands are threatened by increased numbers of wild horses and burros. The BLM will require increased federal funds for feed and care of corralled horses. Further, the Salazar Initiative will require additional expenditures including for fertility control.

Background

The 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act mandates the protection, management, and control of wild horses and burros to ensure healthy herd populations at levels consistent with the land's capacity to support them. The BLM manages more than 38,000 wild horses and burros that roam public rangelands in ten western states including Utah. Another 35,000 wild horses and burros are fed and cared for at short-term corrals and long-term pastures. Costs for the program, particularly those for animals in holding facilities, have risen dramatically in the last several years. In Fiscal Year 2009, for example, approximately \$29 million, or about 70 percent of the total wild horse and burro program budget of \$40.6 million, was spent on animals held in corrals and pastures.

A recent audit of the program by the government's General Accounting Office has pointed out, continuing to manage wild horses and burros using current practices are not sustainable.

In October 2009, Secretary Salazar proposed a national initiative intended to create a cost-efficient and sustainable management program by, balancing annual herd growth rates with adoption demand largely by fertility control, establishing preserves in the productive grasslands of the Midwest and East, and showcasing treasured herds in the West with special designations. BLM Director Bob Abby said, "...we need a fresh look at the Wild Horse and Burro Program...As part of this effort, we want all those with an interest in wild horses and burros and their public lands to consider our initial ideas and offer their own." Over time, the implementation of Secretary Salazar's initiative is expected to reduce the number of unadopted wild horses in short-term corrals or long-term pastures and reduce the costs to the American taxpayer. New legislative authority and appropriations from Congress would be needed. *Source: www.blm.gov*

Position

The health and the multiple-use of our public lands are critical to the economic viability of western ranchers and communities. Wild horses and burros are feral animals and, though advocated for special protection by some interest groups, require management. The 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Herd Act gave the BLM the ability, when populations rebounded to unsustainable levels, to remove excess animals for sale or humane euthanasia. Congress, the Obama administration, and the Salazar Initiative should not limit the BLM's ability to manage wild horses and burros as livestock including humane utilization for protein. Further, management options should reduce, not increase the federal budget.