

**Statement to National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board; Sacramento CA meeting of April 14, 2014**

**by Craig C. Downer, Wildlife Ecologist**

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Dear Board Members and Interested Public:

I greatly appreciate this opportunity to testify concerning America's wild horses and burros and their great importance for Life on Earth. And what better time than early Spring, season of life's renewal!

As an ecologist, I know there is no greater renewer than the horse, whose roots in America are most ancient and of great duration and whose positive contribution to the future of life is most vital.

Horses are post-gastric, or caecal, digesters, rather than multi-stomach, pre-gastric, ruminant digesters. Into the latter fall nearly all the other medium- to large-sized grass-grazing or foliage-browsing herbivores in North America, including pronghorn, bison, bighorn, deer, elk, mountain goats, as well as domestic cattle & sheep, none of which are as ancient and long-standing on this continent as the horse.

For Nature's own wise and age-old reasons, these ruminants need to be complemented by the horses! Reasons are: (1) greater soil regeneration via humus, and replenishment of nutrients and moisture by the same token; (2) successful seed dispersal and germination of a greater variety of plant species; (3) opening up water sources both during hot and cold seasons for many other species to share; (4) major reduction of dry, flammable vegetation that allows more palatable forage for the ruminants and other plant eaters. This also prevents catastrophic fires – a major consideration here in the West, as in many places the world over.

I explain in detail such positive benefits in my scientific article (available at [www.thewildhorseconspiracy.org](http://www.thewildhorseconspiracy.org)) and newly updated book: *The Wild Horse Conspiracy*. The main point I want to get across to you today concerns the urgency of preserving as many of the wild horse lineages as possible! Dozens of these unique herds have either been totally displaced from their rightful legal areas on the BLM and USFS lands, as defined by the WFHBA, or from other Native American, state, local, or private lands where they have lived for generations, some clear back to the 1600s or even 1500s, such as the Navajo and public herds of Arizona and New Mexico, a small portion of which have been compassionately and heroically rescued by caring individuals and organizations. These unique populations are most genuinely preserved as to their long term vigor and survivability when allowed to remain at long-term viable numbers and given long-term-viable habitats IN THE WILD!

Though the Act charged our federal government to act proactively to preserve, restore, and protect these precious "national heritage species and aesthetic resources," quite tragically an insidious conspiracy of wild horse and burro enemies has insinuated itself into the very positions of authority that oversee our nation's wild horse and burro program. To make a long story short, many millions of legal wild horse acres – around 54 out of 88 – have been zeroed out using every conceivable or inventable excuse! And to add insult to injury, even in those areas where the wild equids are still permitted to live, they are assigned so-called Appropriate Management Levels that are almost entirely genetically non-viable. As concerns this, the IUCN Species Survival Commission recommends 2,500 individuals for any given equid population 's long term viability in the wild, while BLM typically only recommends 150, even

though around 3/4ths of their Appropriate Management Levels fall below this level. Another point is that out of around 350 original BLM Herd Areas, only 179 still contain any horses or burros at all, and these are nearly all at dysfunctional, non-viable levels and kept so by the massive helicopter roundups each year! Livestock receive on average 82% of the forage allocations within the already reduced Herd Management Areas in spite of the law that dictates to the contrary.

Another critical point is that the herds are not being allowed the time, space, and non-interference that they require to harmoniously adapt to each unique ecosystem they inhabit nor are they being allowed to establish the stable social bands and herds that naturally limit their populations once these amazing animals have filled their ecological niche. In other words, they are not being allowed to fill the “climax” niche for which millions of years of coevolution have prepared them. Karen Sussman of the International Society for the Preservation of Mustangs and Burros has abundantly proven this point over many years.

Though true restorers of the ecosystem, these beautiful and beneficial animals are being scapegoated for abuses to life on Earth that are basically attributable to us two-leggeds. If we can only re-establish long-term viable populations in their rightful BLM Herd Areas and US Forest Service Territories, then in that blessed day when people finally come to their senses, the 50,000 horses and burros in holding facilities can be returned to the unique and fascinating regions from which they or their ancestors came or similar places where they would be compatible missing pieces in the ecological jig-saw puzzle (Sec. 6).

This is the great vision that many wild horse and burro advocates are proposing for your consideration today. You have the ear of the authorities in charge, and reform is urgently needed to restore the herds to their legitimate land and freedom. This reform couldn't come at a more crucial time! Horses are true healers, both of ecosystems and of people; and you can also count on my professional as well as personal support to make this beautiful dream come true! This will be one where the principles of Reserve Design for balanced, naturally self-stabilizing herds will be realized! If we only think it through, believe in it, and act upon it, it will surely happen. Have no doubt. And please remember this: I am not against the BLM, USFS, or government, I just want these officials to honorably & fairly carry out the law!

Before closing, I urge you to heed my recent petition “Stop the Excessive Roundups” as well as my Reserve Design proposal both of which were presented to the Secretary of Interior as well as to the BLM and US Forest Service wild horse and burro program directors in early February, 2014, along with my book: *The Wild Horse Conspiracy* (all available at [www.thewildhorseconspiracy.org](http://www.thewildhorseconspiracy.org)). To date, I have not had the courtesy of a professional response. --This attitude must change! The wild horses and burros deserve their land and freedom as the “principal” presences thereon according to Section 2 c of the WFHBA. This is their right; and it is also the right of every wild horse and burro appreciating citizen! This is a “Quality of Life” issue that concerns the “General Public” over selfish public land exploiters. The United States of America is a “Democracy” not a “Corpocracy” and all Americans should be heard, not just the moneyed interests used to enormous taxpayer subsidies at enormous ecological expense.

Along with this statement, I am including a recent report by a Biologist-statistician Jieun Lee of the Carnegie-Mellon University. This factual report calls into question certain blanketing claims by BLM officials concerning wild horse/burro “over-population” and the lack of water/drought as justifications for their further reductions to what are in effect dysfunctional, non-viable, under-populated numbers.

Thank you for listening and I look forward to your thoughtful response concerning these crucial points.