

## **PROPOSAL FOR WILD HORSE/BURRO RESERVE DESIGN PROJECT**

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Unless urgent action is taken, wild horses and burros in today's America face a bleak future.

Though the unanimously passed Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 (WFRHBA) originally set aside around 88 million acres for their preservation in the wild, the rights of these animals and of their public supporters have been undermined and denied by the very officials charged with protecting them.

Current policies toward these national heritage species are thinly disguised plans for either bringing them down to cripplingly low, non-viable population levels or for totally eliminating them from their legal areas. Even if some 30,000 wild horses and burros may remain on the public lands, this figure is in no way commensurable with the amount of ecologically appropriate habitat in which they have the legal right to live. The small number of horses and burros our government intends to leave on each of the 200-or-so remaining designated areas will result – indeed, has already resulted – in an over fragmentation of populations that jeopardizes their long-term survival.

Our government's current goal of drastically reducing already tiny and genetically vulnerable wild herds includes the partial sterilization of mares, through PZP injection, and the unnatural skewing of sex ratios to establish excess males in this naturally harem-type horse society. Today, our nation's last remaining wild horses and burros find themselves in a very critical situation. They are actually more imperiled than they were in 1971, for their chief enemies reside within the very agencies charged with their protection!

To remedy this intolerable situation, Americans must immediately and audaciously respond with a well-conceived plan for change. As a wildlife ecologist and fourth-generation Nevadan personally familiar with the wild horses and burros of the West, I have come up with such a plan – a way to restore these animals, known as returned-native species, to viable natural herds throughout the West. My plan entails ending the cruel, disruptive roundups and reproductive manipulations – practices that make a mockery of the 1971 Act and, of principal concern, cause untold suffering and death to these freedom-loving creatures.

Wildlife, wilderness and conservation professionals call this strategy **Reserve Design**. Reserve Design combines ecological, social, and political considerations in order to achieve desired results. Basically, wild horse/burro Reserve Design involves the setting aside of areas of wild-equid-containing, year-round habitat where human intervention is buffered against and strictly controlled, and where natural processes are allowed to reestablish natural checks and balances. In this way, a significant degree of internal harmony is achieved for all diverse yet interrelated species living in the area's ecosystem.

**Critical steps for realizing Reserve Design to be described in the project are:**

[1] Properly identify the short-term and long-term survival requirements of viable populations levels of the principal species to be accommodated in the reserve. Our chief focus would be to promote a wild horse/burro-containing ecosystem, where all species are allowed to adapt naturally over the generations.

[2] Conscientiously identify appropriate geographical areas suitable for the implementation of wild horse/burro-containing reserves. This would involve travel to and flights over a wide variety of places throughout the West in collaboration with the Light Hawk conservation organization, which has promised its support.

[3] Wisely incorporate natural equid predators, such as puma and wolf, that would both limit and tone, or strengthen, wild horse and burro populations.

[4] Wisely incorporate natural barriers that would limit the ingress and/or the egress of certain species, including the wild horses and burros. This would avoid conflicts and set up conditions for the natural self-regulation of populations.

[5] Identify where buffer zones, artificial barriers, or other means of impeding movements in and out of a reserve should be established in order to keep the species in question from coming into conflict with humans. Buffer zones possibly involving non-injurious means of adverse conditioning could be employed. Also, "semi-permeable barriers" that do not restrict most species but do prevent equids from passing out of the reserve may be used.

[6] Identify the presence and abundance of necessary food, water, shelter, mineral procurement sites, elevational gradients for seasonal migrations, etc., that will accommodate the long-term needs of viable wild equid populations and allow the natural rest-rotation of grazing and foraging between the natural subdivisions of the reserve.

[7] Identify geographical regions whose human inhabitants are benignly disposed toward the creation and long-term implementation of extensive, ecologically balanced wild horse/burro-containing reserves. This would involve travel and town and government meetings.

[8] Identify ways of and benefits from implementing Reserve Design that would result in win-win relationships centered around the presence of wild horses and burros. Ecotourism is one major possibility here. Restoring native ecosystems, including soils and native species, would be another major benefit. The reduction of flammable vegetation through equid grazing and the restoration of hydrographic basins through enrichment of soils would be other positive contributions of the wild horses and burros. Indeed, the restoration of the “equid element” in North America is crucial to combating life-disrupting global warming itself.

[9] Identify how best to educate the public concerning the many ways that horses/ burros, as ecological “climax” species, have of self-limiting their own populations once their respective ecological niches are filled. This knowledge is key to our realizing a truly humane relationship with wild horses and burros in America, one that does justice to these magnificent animals.

This list does not exhaust all the considerations for soundly establishing the Reserve Design that I would include in my professionally researched report with proposed areas. If provided the financial resources, I would further elaborate upon this important and timely plan.

#### **Basic steps for a professional reserve design, with associated costs and durations:**

[1] Review literature on Reserve Design. Consult government, private and non-profit organizations. Research university, government, and public libraries as well as the internet.

[2] Consult authorities on Reserve Design and consult official implementers of nature reserves. Visit government and university offices and conduct interviews, particularly of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the United States Forest Service (USFS). Universities to be visited: University of California-Berkeley, Stanford University, Colorado State University-Ft. Collins, University of Colorado-Boulder, University of Nevada-Reno. (Note: I received my A.B. from UC-Berkeley and my M.S. from UN-Reno, and am a lifetime alumni at both.) Visit United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) offices, particularly national wildlife refuges (NWR) containing or involving wild horses, especially Sheldon-Hart NWR in northern Nevada and southern Oregon and Malheur NWR in southeastern Oregon. My visit to the Malheur would be in combination with a visit to the Steen Mountain National Conservation Area. This is home to the famous Kiger mustang herd that spills east into the Alvord Desert. I would also visit the Montgomery Pass wild horse herd on the Nevada-California border near Bishop, the Cibola-Trigo and Cerbat wild horse herds in Arizona, and Utah’s Sulphur wild horse herd. The first two herds are believed by many to be naturally self-stabilizing. National Parks offices and the parks themselves that have a history or actual presence of wild horses and burros would also be visited. These would include Grand Canyon, Death Valley, and eastern California portions of the Mojave Desert and the National Conservation Area here. Also included would be Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota, for its authentic old Indian pony herd. Various non-profit groups would be

consulted, especially the International Society for the Preservation of Mustangs & Burros in Lantry, South Dakota, in combination with my trip to Theodore Roosevelt National Park; The Cloud Foundation of Colorado Springs, Colorado, in combination with the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range, and Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area in Wyoming and Montana, and Saving America's Mustangs in combination with BLM wild horse Herd Management Areas in northeastern Nevada.

[3] Undertake an intensive survey of maps and documents concerning BLM and US Forest lands as well as other appropriate – especially adjoining – land where wild horses and burros are presently found or could reasonably be established per Section 6 of the WFHB Act. This phase will identify those regional centers of actual or potential wild horse/burro presence that would be most appropriate for Reserve Design. I would consult with those most familiar with regions being considered as appropriate for Reserve Design. I would also conduct flights over certain identified regions in conjunction with the Light Hawk organization, which has recently supported me on several flights to help the wild horses.

**Duration for Phases 1, 2 & 3: Six months.**

[4] Final composition of Reserve Design proposal. This would subsequently be presented to the public and to government as well as private entities. I would give presentations to legislative and executive branches of both state and national governments as well as to the BLM and the USFS, the two agencies charged with carrying out the mandate of the WFRHB Act. I would also address counties and cities.

**Duration for Phase 4: Two months.**

**Total Time Required: Eight months.**

The robust aim of Reserve Design is to restore wild horses and burros where they belong throughout America and to secure their long-term future. This would, in effect, restore the true and original intent of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971.

For more information on how to support this proposal through a tax-deductible contribution, and the level of support required, please contact Craig Downer.

Craig's book *The Wild Horse Conspiracy* may be ordered in hard copy at [www.amazon.com/Wild-Horse-Conspiracy-Craig-Downer/dp/1461068983](http://www.amazon.com/Wild-Horse-Conspiracy-Craig-Downer/dp/1461068983) or as an eBook in color or b & w at [www.amazon.com/dp/B009XJ64P4](http://www.amazon.com/dp/B009XJ64P4). Chapter IV explains how Reserve Design can work to produce naturally self-stabilizing, long-term viable, and ecologically well-adapted populations of wild horses and burros.

Unless otherwise indicated, full acknowledgement of supporter(s) will be in the proposal.