

RED DESERT SIEGE

UPON

LIFE * LAND & LIBERTY

DEMOCRACY DIES IN THE DESERT



My treasures do not clink together or glitter. They gleam in the sun and neigh in the night. -Arab proverb

By: Pamela Lynn True & Craig C. Downer
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For half a century now, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) have been managing our wild horses and burros nearly to the point of extinction. They have been succumbing to outrageous demands by public lands ranchers, oil, gas and mining corporations and other exploitive interests, while turning a deaf ear to the millions of American citizens who would dearly love to see these national heritage species fairly treated!

These two federal agencies were entrusted to protect, preserve and manage America's wild horses and burros since the inception of the Wild Free-Roaming Horse & Burro Act of 1971 (WFRHBA). This is one of the few laws ever to have been unanimously passed by Congress and embodied a core ecological mandate that honored the horses' and burros' natural place on our shared life home: Planet Earth. August, 2021 marks this law's 50th anniversary, and we should be celebrating its success not bemoaning its failure!

The WFRHBA nobly and benignly declares: "wild free-roaming horses and burros shall be protected from capture, branding, harassment or death" and that "they are to be considered in the area where presently found [1971 as year-round habitat] as an integral part of the natural system of public lands." It declares they are "living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West" and that they "contribute to the diversity of life forms within the nation and enrich the lives of the American people." And truer words were never spoken.

Unfortunately, these federal agencies, in their capacity as public servants charged with realizing this wonderful act, have persistently violated its principal mandates, twisted objective scientific findings justifying the benign niche and role of these national heritage species and blatantly ignored the will of the great majority of the American people, who are the rightful owners of our public lands, wildlife and natural resources.

With our nation's current energy dominance agenda, so many of our public lands are being leased or sold to oil and gas companies. And mining companies are also being given outrageous privilege to despoil and poison large sectors of our public lands. Furthermore, the insatiable quest by ranchers to monopolize nearly every square inch of our BLM and USFS lands is being acceded to and to the terrible detriment of nearly all wildlife, including the returned North American native wild horses and burros. According to the WFRHBA as amended by the Public Rangelands Improvement Act (PRIA), Herd Management Areas (HMAs) are to be managed principally for the wild horses and burros over other uses. At least 12% of BLM and USFS lands in around 350 legal areas should be principally managed for the wild horses and burros but our federal agencies have cut this down by half and are still reducing forage allocations and meanly seeking to "zero-out," or eliminate the horses and burros from ever more of their legal areas. Many advocates cry foul and believe their ultimate plan is to "zero-out" all wild horses

and burros from America. They present many proofs confirming that special interest agendas have “captured” these agencies and are making them subvert the very laws they are sworn to uphold fairly and justly.

Wild horse enemies have long been engaged in a rampant misinformation campaign to convince politicians and government officials, as well as the public that there is always a terrible overpopulation of wild horses and burros in our nation, when nothing could be further from the truth. They scapegoat or blame the wild horses and burros for the degradation of our land, water and air and for the disappearance of many of our wildlife species and their habitat, while overlooking the real causes of such and the many ecosystem-restoring contributions of the mustangs and burros (see co-author C.C. Downer’s peer-reviewed article: “The horse and burro as positively contributing returned natives in North America”).

Our public lands are being sold out to land destructors and its costing American taxpayers billions of dollars. This lopsidedness benefits the few at the expense of the many. To fund the abusive and unjust “Path Forward” currently devastating America’s last remaining underpopulated herds puts them on a perilous course to extinction! If we fail to stop this, these wonderful and uplifting, ecosystem-restoring presences may soon disappear from the American landscape forever.

Wyoming BLM’s Red Desert Complex wild horse roundups of 2018 and 2020 constituted one of largest mustang wipe outs in modern times. BLM’s Environmental Assessment (2017 EA, an amended 2015 EA) announced that 80%, or 2,096, of an estimated 2,620 wild horses would be gathered. The Red Desert Complex consists of five federally designated wild horse HMAs and from these, nearly all of the remaining, modestly populated mustangs have now been removed. And practically all wild horses outside of the HMA boundaries, between HMAs or on checkerboard lands south of the Complex have now been removed (as of mid November, 2020) by means of a draconian helicopter roundup.

Yes, many of us had evidence that BLM was very much exaggerating the herd numbers, since biologically impossible increases were being reported from one year to the next and little or no recognition was being made of first year as well as adult mortality rates. And we dutifully pointed this out to BLM.

During the 2018 roundup, observers had evidence to believe that BLM stopped after 1,444 mustangs had been gathered simply because they ran out of horses. Many long-term wild horse observers, including local residents considered the Red Desert HMAs virtually “wiped out,” since so few and very sparsely distributed mustangs could be encountered, though they searched extensively throughout the many thousands of legal HMA acres. Stricken by the injustice, they lamented there were only “ghost horses” left in the Red Desert wild horse country they loved and frequented to be with their cherished mustangs, many of whom they had named, photographed and cherished.

For both horse and human, the Red Desert wild horse roundups have been extremely traumatic experiences – indeed, every roundup is! We feel that our wild horses are being stolen from us, in a brutal unjust way that causes us incredible personal harm.

In 2018, ten horses were killed, mostly tender young foals, fatally injured and then shot by members of the roundup crew. Young foals cannot keep up with their family bands. The helicopter pilots run these horses for 10 miles or more often over rough terrain, ice and snow, rocks and gullies and sometimes at high speeds. And they do this during summer, fall and winter seasons. BLM has a holocaust of roundups and sterilizations scheduled over the next six months and adding more weekly which may surely gut the wild horses and burros entirely.

Too often during the helicopter chases, the wild horses are stampeded into barbed wire fencing. Also, with helicopters baring down on them, the horses or burros are sometimes hit with landing blades. Throughout the West, such abuse has been witnessed quite frequently by roundup observers and film footage of such has been taken involving defenseless little foals and diminutive burros. Many of the “targeted equids” are not old enough to survive this brutality. A significant number of foals lose their soft, tiny hooves or break a leg trying to keep up with adults; if they make it to the capture pens, many are trampled and suffer permanent injury. Many of these young ones simply give up and die of trauma, then are perfunctorily hauled away for disposal.

Recorded videos of the 2018, Red Desert Complex roundup, as well as the BLM gather report showed at least four foals run to an immediate death. A fifth was euthanized after breaking his leg. Chased for miles on an injured leg, a sixth foal was put down because of a previously broken fetlock. Then shortly thereafter, a seventh foal died, as a consequence of the extreme trauma and exhaustion she had

suffered during the roundup, euphemistically referred to as a “gather” by BLM. Other deaths included a six-year-old stallion who was attacked and blinded by another stallion, while both were jammed together on a trailer for shipping to a temporary holding corral. These sorts of anguishing experiences occur frequently but are made light of by the gather crews and BLM overseers.

During the 2018 roundup, three horses were euthanized by the BLM-contracted crew whose vet claimed these horses’ pre-existing conditions would not permit them to have normal lives – yet they were managing to survive quite well just before the roundup. Many view with suspicion, BLM’s judgements as to which horses to put down. It is telling that during the 2018 roundup, Henneke body condition scores (BSC) for the captured horses averaged between 5 and 6 - which is extremely healthy for wild horses (6 even borders on overweight). So, BLM’s lamenting excuse to reduce Red Desert wild horse numbers for the wild horses’ own good appears quite lame.



Red Desert Roundup 2018. A mare was desperately trying to get to her filly to rescue her when a cowboy came and brutally lassoed and choked this filly as she struggled desperately to get away from this human predator. All the while Mama looked on in horror.



The above Red Desert filly lying in the dirt in the capture pens. She died from trauma and exhaustion shortly after this photo was taken – an innocent victim of extreme thoughtlessness, cruelty and abuse!

It is important for us to consider that after the roundup in 2018, despite healthy range and wild horse conditions, BLM announced its urgent intention to remove another 1,200 horses from the Red Desert Complex. The WFRHBA states that BLM or USFS should remove horses in order to restore a Thriving Natural Ecological Balance (TNEB), yet a massive imbalance of cattle and sheep grazing as well as oil and gas fracking operations exist in the Red Desert Complex. This greatly dwarfs the wild horses as well as wildlife, wilderness, public recreation and other very important considerations on our public lands. A Uranium mine also operates here!

Fast forwarding to 2020, BLM used a comparison between an early-year 2020 aerial census and 2017 EA census to claim wild horse numbers had doubled. The agency asserted 3,000 wild horses were present. But remember, in 2018 they removed 1,444 horses and released 25 birth-control darted mares. Basic math indicates something wrong. Sticking out like a sore thumb is BLM's use of the blanketing 20% population increase per year. Could BLM be equating herd birth-rate with growth rate? A valid population estimate must consider the annual death rate of (a) newborn and yearling horses, often 50% or more, (b) juvenile horses and (c) adult horses, whose mortality rate is typically 8% to 20%. Also, it is important to note that an evaluation of movement patterns from nearby wild horse herds showed no substantial decreases in their populations, hence the idea that the horses migrated in from elsewhere appears unfounded, as Exhibits in the recent Wyoming Federal Case attest (see *Downer & Kleinert vs BLM*, 20-CV-191-SWS, heard on 10-29-2020, Judge Skavdahl).

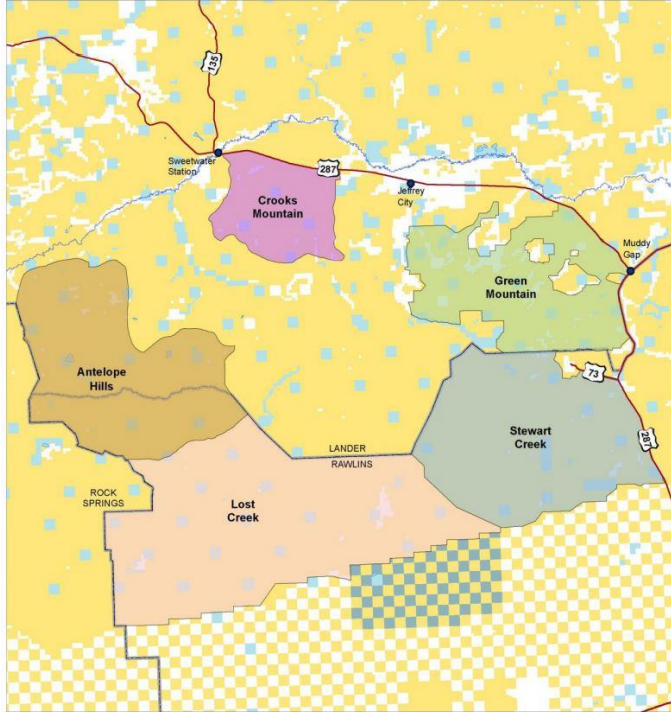
In October, acting Pro Se, James Anaquod Kleinert (wild horse documentary film maker and author of “No Country for Truth Tellers”) and Craig C. Downer (wildlife ecologist and author of “The Wild Horse Conspiracy”) filed a civil suit for a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) and Injunction against the 2020 Red Desert Complex wild horse helicopter gather. Summoned were the BLM Wyoming State Office, Rawlins and Lander Field Offices and the BLM National Headquarters in Grand Junction, Colorado. During the hearing, both plaintiffs presented their case as well as a BLM assigned lawyer who had been backed by a team of six other Department of Interior lawyers. It is telling that many of the most salient points brought by the two co-plaintiffs were not addressed, such as the gross imbalance in forage allocations greatly favoring livestock within the legal wild horse HMAs and the several millions of legal original Herd Area (HA) acres that Wyoming BLM had already “zeroed out,” or decided not to manage for wild horses at all therein.

A case of the latter occurs in the middle of the five existing HMAs of the Complex --the largest original HMA in this area: Arapahoe Creek. It was chosen to be no longer managed for wild horses because of vested interest pressures. This drastic change occurred at the end of the 1990s. Nonetheless, BLM asserts “herd interconnection” as a primary justification for assigning low Appropriate Management Levels (AML) to the Complex’ five remaining HMAs. For example, Crooks Mountain has been assigned a genetically non-viable AML of 65 to 85. Similarly, Lost Creek and Antelope each have AMLs of 60 to 82, because BLM says the horses move freely among all the HMAs here (see table below). Yet, there is a failure to recognize that as soon as the horses go into the adjacently lying Arapahoe Creek HA, they are subject to removal. Because of the original 1971 legal wild horse preservation designation of Arapahoe Creek, it makes no sense to declare this a “no horse’s land”. BLM calls the Arapahoe Creek HA a “Donut Hole,” but they should have called it “the Trap.” Whatever we may call it, it’s non-wild-horse management belies BLM’s justification for low AMLs.

Concluded by mid-November, the 2020 roundup aimed for total removal of wild horses from the Arapahoe Creek HA. Yet, in a perplexing manner, BLM stated that the Arapahoe Creek wild horse numbers were rolled into the wild horse numbers in Crooks Mountain and Lost Creek HMAs. Thus, BLM never gave an estimated number of horses for Arapahoe Creek. Many wild horse advocates view BLM’s decision to “zero-out” this HA as extremely adverse to the well-being of the Complex’ interconnected horse population. This greatly hampers any truly safe interconnection among the adjoining HMAs since it sets up all horses who enter this area for removal. This area should facilitate a higher interbreeding population

but is now declared as off-limits for wild horses. We should insist it be reinstated for wild horse occupation in order to prevent inbreeding, especially in light of the fact that three of the five assigned AMLs are well below genetically viable levels.

Map 1. Red Desert HMA Complex



Arapahoe Creek “HA” referred to as the “Donut Hole” lies in the center of the five HMAs. (Map taken from BLM 2017 Environmental Assessment for Red Desert wild horse gather.)

From BLM’s Environmental Assessment, here is a list of the five HMAs still being managed for wild horses and their corresponding low-end to high-end AMLs and the numbers of horses BLM targeted for removal. Absent is Arapahoe Creek HA.

HMA	AML	Est. total population	Horses to remove
Stewart Creek	125-175	511	361
Lost Creek	60-82	531	471
Antelope Hills	60-82	629	569
Crooks Mountain	65-85	884	819
Green Mountain	170-300	369	199
Totals	480-724	2,924	2,419

In order to gain a just overview – the big picture – of what has been and continues to be going on, we must carefully consider the following:

Since the total area in these five HMAs is 753,000 acres and the total AML is 480 to 724 with an average of 602, BLM is planning on allowing only one individual wild horse:

- (a) for every 1,569 acres, or 2.5 square miles at Low AML,
- (b) for every 1,040 acres, or 1.6 square miles at High AML, and
- (c) for every 1,155 acres, or 1.8 square miles at Average AML.

Quoting from co-plaintiff Downer in his statement to the Wyoming Court (10/29/2020): “What BLM calls the ‘appropriate management levels’ (AMLs) – population restrictions imposed by the Agency on the five HMAs of the Red Desert Complex – are extremely inequitable. Thus, they violate the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act (WFHBA) as to its core intent (see Section 2 c) concerning land and resources that are to be ‘devoted principally’ to the wild horses, not to livestock, nor to oil and gas companies. ... The absurdity of such stocking densities speaks for itself: the so-called ‘appropriate’ wild horse population would result in practically empty wild horse HMAs! Even if BLM’s evidently exaggerated wild horse population of 3,000 were correct, it would actually represent a moderate population level considering the vastness of the Red Desert Complex, one that would be just and fulfilling of the original intent of the WFHBA. The IUCN Species Survival Commission Equid Specialist Group recommends a population of 2,500 wild horses for survivability in the world of nature (Duncan, 1992, IUCN, Page 5). If there were, indeed, 3,000 horses present in the Red Desert Complex, as BLM claims ... the stocking density would be 251 acres per individual horse, or fewer than 3 horses per square mile. Such a sparse dispersal cannot be deemed an overpopulation in a habitat where the horses – not livestock – are legally the principal resource recipients. In contrast, BLM authorizes cow-and-calf pairs to be stocked per a density of between 30 and 50 acres per pair, or 13 to 21 pairs per square mile.”

Though the 2017 EA indicated that an additional roundup of 80% of an estimated population of 2,620, or 2,096 horses, would take place, the press release for the 2020 roundup indicated plans to remove 2,400 horses – 304 additional – in order to return wild horse populations to within the appropriate management levels and ensure long-term viability of sage-grouse populations in the area. The EA also pledged to:

- Manage the HMA populations to preserve and enhance the historic, physical and biological characteristics of the herd, including noted Iberian characteristics in the Lost Creek HMA, with its dangerously low AML of only 60 to 82.
- Maintain sex ratios and age structures, which would allow for the continued physical, reproductive, and genetic health of the horses.
- Preserve and maintain a healthy and viable wild horse population that would survive and be successful during poor years when elements of the habitat are limiting due to severe winter conditions, drought, or other uncontrollable and unforeseeable environmental influences upon the herd.
- Manage the HMA herds as self-sustaining populations of healthy animals in balance with other uses and the productive capacity of their habitat.

However, objective wildlife biologists consider the established AMLs and forage allocations, by which the wild horses only receive one-thirteenth of the forage within their legal HMAs, to be inconsistent with the above mandates.

The legal complaint of Downer & Kleinert emphasizes as follows:

- BLM is abrogating its responsibility to protect, preserve and defend vital and viable herds of wild horses within their five legal Herd Management Areas (HMAs) in the Red Desert Complex.
- In BLM's most recent Environmental Assessment, there are glaring omissions concerning the primary ecosystem disturbance factors that impact a Thriving Natural Ecological Balance (TNEB) within this Complex, and that affect the USFWS Endangered Species Candidate, the Greater Sage Grouse. Those disturbance factors also affect many other wildlife and plant species, soils and the aquifer, and include vehicle and road impacts.
- In particular, the large-scale issuing of oil and gas drilling permits in the Complex is not addressed. Nor is the Uranium mine.
- Also not addressed is the lopsided proportion of livestock use versus wild-horse use as concerns the allocation of forage, water and other habitat components.

- Not addressed are the serious discrepancies in reported wild horse population estimates and growth rates (revealed in case Exhibits).
- BLM appears to be in clear violation of both NEPA and the Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act (1971) and plaintiffs were concerned about possible dishonesty as is covered by 18 U.S. Code 1519.
- Concerning the Sagebrush Focal Area, which is critical to the survival of the Sage Grouse, BLM again singled out the wild horses for blame while overlooking the major factors impacting this important habitat for grouse survival.
- BLM ignored the many positive contributions by the wild horses to the ecosystem, such as: Improving the health of the soil -- their droppings build humus and this bolsters aquifers as well as plant communities; Dispersing intact seeds that can successfully germinate, including the seeds of native flora that, in turn, support native fauna; Mitigating or even preventing catastrophic wildfires by grazing dry or potentially dry flammable vegetation; Fulfilling their role as prey and scavenged species; Breaking open frozen water holes or ice-and snow-encrusted vegetation for access by other species of wildlife; Creating natural water catchments by wallowing.
- BLM's "Fact Sheet Red Desert Wild Horse Herd Management Area Complex," indicated that there are 65,346 cattle animal unit months (AUMs) and 25,484 sheep AUMs. The combined cattle and sheep forage-allocations yield a total of 90,830 AUMs within the wild-horse habitat of the Red Desert. So, in terms of forage, water and other habitat utilization and impact, by dividing 90,830 by 12 months, we reveal the equivalent of 7,569 year-round cow-calf pairs (or several times this in number of sheep) occupying, stripping forage, consuming water, trampling soils, and so forth, within the Complex. Thus, livestock are allotted nearly 13 times the forage, water, and other resources as are apportioned to the wild horses within the Complex. Livestock are also set out at favorable grazing seasons, while the wild horses have these HMAs as their sole year-round and lifelong homes.
- Again, plaintiffs noted that the 3,000 figure is 17% higher than the population reported as of March 1, 2020. Independent studies (National Research Council, 1980; McCort, 1984; and Gregg et al. 2014) whose combined sample size encompassed 14,623 wild horses in different HMAs across several states, disclosed that foals compose 17% to 20% of the typical

herd. However, this research also found that 32% to 50% of foals perish before reaching one year of age (the weighted average was 40%). Further, BLM acknowledged that annually, on average, more than 8 percent of adult wild horses die on the range. But how much more than 8 percent?

- Wolfe (1980) estimated an adult wild horse mortality rate of 15% to 20%. The National Research Council (1980) went further concluding that a normative herd-growth rate would be “well below 10 percent.”
- Yet, 2020’s unlikely growth rate pales in comparison to previous, biologically impossible increases reported for the Red Desert herds. For instance, in 2016, BLM reported that the Red Desert Complex of herds had increased 64% in one year, with even higher rates for three of the component herds: Antelope Hills 79%, Green Mountain 81%, and Lost Creek 108%. The year 2011 was one in which BLM reported biologically-impossible increases for each of the Red Desert herds: Antelope Hills 170%, Crooks Mountain 113%, Green Mountain 188%, Lost Creek 109%, and Stewart Creek 92%. Also noticed: for Crooks Mountain HMA, BLM had reported unattainable population increases of 73% in 2018 and 111% in 2014.
- BLM continues to issue numerous permits for oil and gas drilling projects within the Red Desert Complex. Too often, those permits are awarded per “categorical exclusion,” meaning without prior environmental review as required by NEPA. The oil and gas projects disturb the peace of the wild horses’ habitat, block them from roaming freely and contaminate water, soil, and air. The noxious and noisy disturbances caused by drilling operations also spoil the experience of visitors that come to view the herds in what they expect to be a dedicated, peaceful habitat. Further, wild horse supporters across America and around the world are distressed, as are we plaintiffs, that the beautiful Red Desert Complex is being industrialized.
- Recently, a massive project involving the construction of 1,100 miles of pipelines serving the oil and gas industries has been put forth by the BLM that would greatly impact Wyoming BLM lands and its wild horses. This could be related to the recent gutting of the Red Desert Wild Horses. (See: https://trib.com/business/energy/conservation-groups-protest-massive-pipeline-project-destined-for-wyoming/article_2e6fa303-42bf-53f3-b747-a3b51fd7b884.html.)

As a team member assisting with the above-mentioned civil suit for an emergency TRO to stop the Red Desert Complex Roundup, I, Pamela L. True filed a comment as an exhibit to the Wyoming Federal judge presiding over the case regarding several concerns with the ongoing roundup. I pointed out BLM's violation of their own 2017 EA as well as the WFRHBA, NEPA and their own Comprehensive Animal Welfare Policy NEPA document. This agency is ignoring so many of its provisions to safeguard the welfare and humane treatment of the wild horses. The following are some of the principal points I presented to the judge:

1. BLM is neglecting the preservation of genetic viability as stipulated within their EA, to include the historic Iberian genotype and the very rare Curlies. They just round them all up with no selection. The original intact family bands were not retained, no foals were returned, sex ratios are skewed, sterilization and extremely low, genetically non-viable AML's are treated as if they were in accordance with the WFHBA. Centuries of genetic building and adaptation to the ecosystem through natural selection is being destroyed. No procreation...no life!!
2. Though the 2017 EA states that mares will be darted with PZP 22, BLM is now using GonaCon since Oct. 2019 principally on wild horses post roundup. Sterilization with GonaCon is long term and is known to be potentially permanent if a second dart is injected 30 days later; and is capable of sterilizing both genders. This process of immunoneutralization by GnRH effects a temporary non-surgical castration in both males and females. Very convincing physical evidence exists of stallions returned to the range who have been double branded on both neck and hip. This indicates stallions are possibly being darted with immune-contraceptive vaccines. If this is the case, it is being done in secret. Also, branding of our wild horses is against the original provisions of the WFRHBA. BLM brands all horses it gathers and takes off their legal habitats-- but to brand and even double brand our wild horses who remain wild on their public land ranges is extremely offensive and out of tune with the true spirit and intent of the law.
3. Another harmful and frequently fatal practice by BLM roundup operations concerns helicopter stampeding of wild horses for miles in frigid weather with temperatures well below freezing. This happened and was documented by observers during the 2020 Red Desert gather and seriously violated the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Policy (CAWP) that BLM must adhere to. According to scientific studies, running or exercising horses at temperatures even as low as 23 deg. F. can cause permanent damage, frosting of the lungs,

chronic respiratory problems, bleeding or death. In the above wild horse removal operation, BLM contractors continued for many days to roundup these horses and even in-spite of high winds and cold-exacerbating chill factors. These prolonged frigid temperatures and the merciless harassment of the wild horses in these conditions undoubtedly produced many extremely harmful effects on the horses of which the public is unaware!

4. Many Comments were made by advocates who observed and documented the Red Desert Complex Roundup. One persistent complaint was that BLM and its contractors were not allowing proper observation of the roundup and that abuse to the wild horses could be occurring in secret. Observers were consistently put a mile away from the capture site with a Mesa blocking most of the gather operation during both the 2018 and 2020 roundups. This is common practice by the BLM at nearly all roundups. Substantial evidence shows that when we are able to properly observe according to our legal first amendment rights, the abuse and deaths occurring to the gathered wild horses are shocking! For example, many wild horses have broken their necks at the final stage of the helicopter chase when entering the traps. As a horse woman, I consider their traps to be poorly designed with little to no consideration for the wild horses' safety!

Summation

Our legal petition for an immediate Temporary Restraining Order and Injunction to stop and reconsider justifications for the Red Desert Complex wild horse roundup was unfortunately denied! The people's voice went unheeded once again in order to favor the agenda of special interests. No admission of merit or reprimand of any sort toward the BLM was issued in spite of many well substantiated points in the complaint. We were not prepared for this level of total disregard for "we the people" -- the rightful owners of the wild horses, their legal Herd Areas and all our Public Lands.

The BLM Red Desert Gather Report stated in total, 1,960 Wild Horses were removed from the Red Desert Complex in October and November of 2020. Only 197 were returned -- 100 as sterilized horses. No family bands were left intact, even though they are essential for the horses' survival -- especially going into winter! As is so typical, ten more were killed during the abusive 2020 roundup. Three wild horses were injured when being captured. These injuries involved a broken neck, a broken leg and a broken head! The other seven were considered to be "pre-existing"

conditions that justified the horses being euthanized -- but the truth is: all ten of these horses would be alive today if there had not been a roundup and who knows how many more died without detection by those who cared. The mortality figure is probably much greater than ten because of the serious assault and trauma inflicted upon the horses during the roundup and the frigid weather they were subjected to during their terrorizing helicopter chasings. Indeed, many observers including Kleinert and Downer, have remained in the gather areas after major roundups to discover evidence for a significant number of mustang injuries and deaths caused by the helicopter roundups.

After the roundup, no foals were returned; sex ratios were skewed and little effort to preserve their unique genetics was made. There should have been a major emphasis by BLM to preserve the Iberian as well as the rare Curly and very possibly other rare and valuable genotypes present in the Red Desert Complex. We also feel that balance and interchange among the various groups of mustangs in the Complex, as well as the horses' individual well-being and enjoyment of life were and continue to be generally ignored as well as how these horses fulfill an important role as returned native species and restorers of the Wyoming high desert ecosystems.

Because of the COVID Pandemic, the public may have little or no opportunity to even see or adopt the 1,763 wild horses who were permanently removed from a now largely wild-horse-empty Red Desert Complex, now incarcerated at Canon City Prison. These horses should not have been removed in the first place. They were in excellent condition with Henneke body scores averaging near 5. They were not starving to death, even though BLM officials often claim that the roundups are being done for the wild horses' own good. There was and remains plenty of forage and water for the modest number of horses who until recently inhabited this vast area -- which seems so empty now!

The real reason they were removed has to do with the unending complaints received from the cattle and sheep ranchers who have grazing leases in the Complex. These ranchers demanded the horses' removal and threatened and cajoled to get their way. To be fair, also did corporate oil, gas and mining operations that have been given extensive leases throughout the Red Desert.

At least 80% of Americans believe these wild horses have a right to stay on our public lands and that they should be treated as the principal species for resource allocation, according to the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act. Furthermore, since there exists slim adoption demand, these horses should have been

allowed to remain where they do a world of good, including soil enrichment, seed dispersal, catastrophic wildfire prevention and, not least of all, enhancers of America's Quality of Life, since the General Public greatly treasures these animals.

A Retrospect

Over a decade ago, in 2009, in his capacity as a wildlife ecologist, co-author Downer responded to BLM's request for scoping comments concerning a proposed roundup in the Red Desert Complex. He stridently complained that the proposed AMLs were completely inadequate to preserve genetic viability. Also, of major significance, he pointed out that in Wyoming, BLM had already eliminated, or "zeroed out" wild horses from at least 54% of their original Herd Areas by means of their biased Resource Management Plans. Thus, the majority of the land where the wild horses have the legal right to roam freely in a natural, peaceful, and adequate habitat has been closed to them. They are no longer there, but livestock, oil and gas drilling operations, a labyrinth of roads and OHV trails, intensive hunting, etc., sure are!

This 54% figure equates to 5,552,337 wild-horse-empty, yet still "on-the-books" legal acres for the herds in Wyoming. It stands to reason that in those remaining HMAs still populated by wild horses, this "national heritage species" should not be further marginalized – squeezed out by livestock, oil and gas leasing, mining, and other monopolizing interests! As concerns the wild horses and their legal habitat in the Red Desert Complex, the federal government is duty-bound ethically to curb exploitation of the "Commons for the Common Good." But it is up to us Americans who are clear-sighted and have retained their moral compasses on this very important issue to stand up and insist upon justice for the wild horses and their rightful land and freedom!

This "Path Forward" to extinction of our Federally protected American Mustangs and Burros does not stop at the Red Desert. BLM has slated a holocaust of future roundups and sterilizations on just about every HMA in the ten Western States in Red Desert fashion. Our cherished wild horses will very soon be gone from the American Landscape if we do not stand up for them now. They will have become "extinct" in these areas – a clear violation of the Endangered Species Act, which also protects special wildlife populations, or herds, such as these.

Call to Action

What needs to be done with the status quo both in the Red Desert and all Wild Horse and Burro HMAs? Grazing leases need to be reduced and even retired within the

HMA's and many of the zeroed-out original 1971 Herd Area acreages need to be repopulated with wild horses and burros. The original HMA designations were only around 12% of BLM managed Public Lands and similar on US Forest Service lands. These have been reduced to less than 6% of our Public Lands and yet the wild horses and burros are being scapegoated for all the damage done by the aforementioned special interests dominating all of our Public Lands. For starters: Arapahoe Creek needs to be restored as a wild-horse-occupied HMA. But currently the Path Forward is on a fast track to remove thousands of wild horses and burros to satisfy the most extreme greedy desires of the National Cattleman's Beef Association and other such groups. Perversely, this has been enabled by such formerly wild-horse-supporting organizations as the HSUS, ASPCA and Return to Freedom. This unwholesome alliance needs to end! This outrageous plan has scheduled the annual removal of 15,000 to 20,000 wild horses and burros for the next ten years and their stockpiling in feedlots and pastures that will cost the taxpayer millions of dollars annually.

The "incentive program" that BLM touts as a wonderful boon to the wild horse adoption program must be discontinued. Too many wild horses are being dumped at kill buyer auctions after a year passes once the "adopters" unscrupulously pocket their \$1000 per horse or burro. As proven by caring organizations such as Animals' Angels, many mustangs end up in the slaughter pipeline – and this has become a daily occurrence witnessed by observers at the Mexican and Canadian borders!

The roundups and sterilizations must stop!! Wild horses and burros are legally protected wildlife and should be treated as such. BLM should consider Craig Downer's holistic "Reserve Design" conservation plan and rewild wild horses in holding for their ecological benefits, including the mitigation and even prevention of catastrophic wildfires as well as to relieve the burden to taxpayers, especially in these pandemic times of economic hardship. The voice of *we the people* must not continue to be ignored by BLM-USDI, nor by USFS-USDA. Rather, in keeping with the WFRHBA, NEPA, FLPMA, PRIA, the National Historical Preservation Act, the Endangered Species Act and other bedrock laws of our Democracy, both BLM and US Forest Service must honor their sacred duty to uphold all the laws of our Nation, not just favor a life-destroying status quo that favors nature-dis-attuned, greedy and selfish tunnel-vision goals for life.

Finally, we call upon all Americans to join in the campaign to stop the ongoing unjust, cruel and draconian roundups and sterilizations of our cherished Wild Horses and Burros! Please write, email and call your state and federal legislators and

governors, as well as BLM and USFS officials with your concerns and to call for an immediate moratorium on wild horse roundups and sterilization pending an investigation of the Wild Horse and Burro Program. Visit and contact us below to learn more about this crucial issue and how you can help. Be a Voice for the Voiceless!

Wild horses and burros are wonderful presences in our world who deserve to live freely and naturally! Please help them to realize their healing place and role in our shared home, our precious planet Earth. Have a heart for the horses! Get to know the wild horses or wild burros nearest you and become their defender.

How to contact your Senators:

https://www.senate.gov/senators/How_to_correspond_senators.htm

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Wildlife Ecologist, Wild Horse and Public Lands Activist

Author of “The Wild Horse Conspiracy” available on Amazon

To learn more about Craig’s great works

and his “Reserve Design” for Wild horses, visit his pages:

www.thewildhorseconspiracy.org, <https://andeantapirfund.com>

www.gofundme.com/mstngreservedesign

James Anaquad Kleinert, Southwest Colorado

Acclaimed Wild Horse Documentary Film maker

Wild Horse and Environmental Activist

Author of “No Country for Truth Tellers” available on Amazon

You can watch his entire film “Mustangs and Renegades – A Modern Day Western” and support his work at the following link:

<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/mustangsrenegades>

To get a taste of James’s great works go to his YouTube channel:

<https://youtube.com/channel/UCOAZU22MmXTJSNYg5-W6Rdw>
[www.gofundme.com/mustangs-amp-renegades.](http://www.gofundme.com/mustangs-amp-renegades)
www.mustangsrenegades.com