

Protecting America's Wild Horses and Burros



Safeguarding the welfare of wild horses and burros has been a focus of the Humane Society of the United States for decades. Since the implementation of the BLM's wild horse and burro program, approximately 270,000 wild horses and burros have been removed from the range, but without sufficient implementation of fertility control, range populations have continued to grow, and political controversy surrounding the program has intensified in recent years. The program is near reaching a "breaking point" in which the BLM is very likely to be directed by Congress in the coming years to sell wild horses and burros without limitation (to slaughter), or destroy "excess" wild horses and burros unless Congress is presented with a humane pathway forward.

We support a proposal that is that pathway forward because [it is the best option](#) to ensure that our nation's wild horses and burros experience safe, humane and non-lethal outcomes. While the proposal will allow for additional removals in the first few years, those removals are to be coupled with mandatory fertility control application- so that over the course of the 10 year program, removals will decrease while fertility control application increases. The proposal is modelled to completely phase out the need for large-scale removals on BLM lands after 10 years – and envisions a future in which the large-scale removals that have been conducted over the past 50 years will no longer occur.

The Humane Society of the United States, the Humane Society Legislative Fund, ASPCA, Return to Freedom and other stakeholders [have announced](#) their support for this proposal that includes only non-lethal options and protects wild horses and burros from slaughter. Below are some answers to frequently asked questions about this proposal:

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Q. Why is this proposal necessary?

A. The Wild Horse and Burro Program is broken. The BLM has removed approximately 270,000 wild horses and burros from our public lands, without any significant utilization of fertility control tools, without properly balancing the allocation of forage and water on the range, and without any plan to ensure the long-term viability and humane treatment of wild horses and burros.

Year after year the BLM has become further locked into a system where removals continue in perpetuity and the costs associated with the program continue to rise.

Because no solutions have been presented to Congress, political controversy surrounding the program has intensified in recent years, and it has reached a “breaking point” in which the BLM is very likely to be directed by Congress in coming years to sell wild horse and burros without limitation, or destroy “excess” wild horses and burros (i.e., send these horses to slaughter or implement a mass euthanasia program). Unless the BLM’s Wild Horse and Burro program is reset, the future is dire for our nation’s wild horses and burros. That is why the HSUS, HSLF and other animal welfare organizations have joined with diverse stakeholders to support the push for a non-lethal solution that moves the agency from slaughter and other lethal options.

Q. If this proposal isn’t implemented, are the threats to wild horses and burros really that dire?

A. Yes. The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 grants the BLM the authority to sell wild horses and burros in holding facilities without limitation (to slaughter) when those animals are more than 10 years old or have been passed over for adoption at least three times. Further, the Act allows for the BLM to destroy healthy horses and burros that it considers “excess.” While this authority has been blocked by Appropriations language since 1994 (save one year), the political and ecological landscapes are shifting such that if the program is not “rebooted” it is extremely likely that the language blocking the BLM from using lethal measures will be lifted by Congress in the near future.

Q. What does the proposal do?

A. The proposal includes four tiers that must be undertaken simultaneously:

1. **Robust fertility control program:** Comprehensive large-scale application of proven, safe and humane fertility control strategies to help stabilize wild horse and burro populations on the range and to slow population growth.
2. **Strategic, non-lethal gathering:** Targeted gathers of horses and burros in densely populated Herd Management Areas that cannot sustain large numbers of animals, to protect horses and burros from forage and water shortages, lower populations, and facilitate non-lethal fertility control and population control efforts.
3. **Rehoming of horses:** Relocate horses and burros in short-term holding facilities, and those taken off the range, to large, cost-effective, humane pasture facilities that provide a free-roaming environment for wild horses and burros.
4. **Increased adoptions:** Promote the adoption of wild horses and burros into good homes to improve the lives of currently warehoused horses and burros, reduce the total cost of the program,

and redirect funds to long-term strategies for the care and sustainability of horse and burro populations.

This proposal represents an entirely new, humane and comprehensive approach to wild horse and burro management– combining a number of techniques currently in use with new and innovative approaches into a larger framework for humane and long-term care of wild horses and burros.

Q. Who was the proposal submitted to?

A. The proposal was submitted to legislators on the House and Senate Appropriations Committees. In order for the proposal to be implemented, BLM must receive additional funding in the Fiscal Year 2020 Appropriations Bill. It is the hope of all parties supporting the proposal that language will be included in the FY20 Appropriations Bill, directing the Bureau of Land Management to begin the program, and funding its implementation.

Q. Are lethal tools included in this proposal?

A. No. The goal of this program is to take lethal tools off the table, and create a pathway forward to help manage wild horses and burros without resorting to lethal methods, including but not limited to slaughter. All parties supporting the proposal have committed to the inclusion of Congressional language that no programmatic funding can be used towards the unlimited sale/and or destruction of healthy wild horses and burros. Further, the program specifies that any long-term holding pasture facility that takes in wild horses and burros removed from the range must also agree that no horses or burros under their care are sold to slaughter and that no healthy wild horses or burros are destroyed. These pasture facilities will be required to sign a contract with the BLM stipulating that they will abide by the BLM’s anti-slaughter and destruction provisions.

Q. Are there too many wild horses and burros on BLM lands?

A. While the Humane Society of the United States and the Humane Society Legislative Fund do not believe that the currently set Appropriate Management Level is properly supported by scientific information, we recognize that the BLM is mandated to maintain the public lands for multiple uses, and under that legal landscape, the BLM believes that management of wild horses and burros is necessary in many Herd Management Areas. Despite years of pressure and efforts by organizations and advocates to try to convince them otherwise, it has been unsuccessful, and Congress shares their view. At this point, the reality is that if a permanent solution as offered by this proposal is not implemented it is extremely likely that the status quo will lead to lethal and inhumane solutions such as slaughter and mass culling

HSUS and HSLF believe the appropriate question is not whether there are too many wild horses and burros on the range, but whether horses and burros are likely to experience safe and humane outcomes given the current state of forage and water on the range, and given the status quo methods of management. They are not.

Because both the BLM and Congress are pushing for a significant decrease in the number of wild horses and burros on BLM lands using both lethal and non-lethal methods, our intent in supporting this proposal is to present a non-lethal pathway towards a more responsible and humane wild horse and burro program that includes the relocation of horses and burros in short-term holding and increases adoptions. This program proposal necessitates lowering on-range population numbers closer to agency determined AML,

and the removal and relocation of horse and burros to more humane long-term care and private adopters so that we can get to the point where large scale gathers are a thing of the past.

Q. Will more horses and burros be coming off the range because of this proposal?

A. Yes and No. The program will require the gathering of horses for fertility control, for adoption, and for stabilization of herd size in sync with the available forage and water on the range. The proposal was modelled to run a 10 year course. Removals are expected to increase for the first few years to harmonize herd size with habitat availability, and allow implementation of a fertility control program that is sustainable, then decrease over the remainder of the proposal and then no longer be conducted. It is important to note that although gather numbers will be larger in the first few years of this proposal, they would taper off over the remaining proposal term, and that the status quo under BLM's current management structure (which is what would continue if the proposal is not adopted) would result in more horses and burros being removed from the range in the long-term, and as discussed above would very likely to be expanded to include lethal population control efforts including slaughter and mass culls.

Additionally, modeling showed that if this proposal is followed there will be fewer horses and burros in off the range holding facilities at the end of ten years than there would be if we were to continue with the BLM's current status quo management structure.

Q. Is this proposal meant to be in place permanently?

A. Yes and no. The proposal was modelled to run a 10 year course. However, this doesn't mean the proposal "ends." Following the 10 year period, the BLM must continue the ongoing use of fertility control tools, and supplement where necessary with small-scale gathers of adoptable wild horses and burros. During this period, long-term holding facilities will be phased out, as horses and burros continue to be adopted, and large numbers of additional horses and burros are no longer being removed from the range.

Additionally, we have built into the proposal terms that require reporting from BLM to Congress in years three, five and seven to ensure that the proposal is being properly implemented. This will help ensure that the program stays on track to end large-scale removals in the future.

Q. When wild horses and burros are removed from the range under this proposal, where will they go?

A. Wild horses and burros removed under this program will be relocated into long-term pasture facilities, which provide a free-roaming environment. In order to find additional pasture facilities, the BLM must issue a Request for Proposal for organizations and entities throughout the United States that can provide cost-effective humane, long-term, off-range pasture for wild horses or burros. The BLM would retain ownership of and be accountable for ensuring protection of the animals removed from the range, as well as enforcing consequences for non-compliance. Federally-protected status will be maintained.

Additionally the proposal also directs that the approximately 14,000 wild horses and burros currently held in corral facilities in the United States be relocated to the more natural environment of pasture facilities.

Q. Does the proposal call for increased use of fertility control tools?

A. It mandates it. The proposal includes mandatory use of fertility control tools. The proposal was modelled on the basis of using a fertility control tool that is given annually (such as Zonastat-H which has a mean efficacy rate of approximately 90 percent according to the National Academy of Sciences) to treat 90 percent of the mares on the range. However, the proposal acknowledges that the use of safe and humane longer-lasting fertility control tools will lower costs, reduce the need for yearly treatment, and will speed population decline. As such, the proposal supports the use of longer-lasting safe and humane tools that are currently available, and requests that additional **safe and humane** tools should be implemented as they become feasible.

Q. Since fertility control tools are so effective, couldn't they alone be used without removals of wild horses and burros from the range?

A. No. Currently available fertility control tools are effective, but years of fiscal constraints and mismanagement have left many horses and burros at risk. Solving this problem requires an integrated approach of gathers, fertility control, relocation and adoption. While HSUS and HSLF disagree with BLM's population targets, the fact is that the agency and Congress are going to pursue those targets with or without this program, and (absent our help) likely by the use of lethal means such as slaughter and mass culls. There is no feasible way to **quickly** decrease the number of wild horses and burros on the range solely using fertility control tools because of the sheer numbers and locations of horses and burros needing treatment, the fiscal constraints the BLM is working under, and the agency's and Congress' desire to see population levels stabilized in coming years. It is only through a combination of techniques, occurring simultaneously, that a humane outcome can be achieved for wild horses and burros without resorting to lethal population control methods such as slaughter and mass culls.

However, this proposal is looking at the program as a whole. There are Herd Management Areas where effective fertility control programs are underway, and other Herd Management Areas where populations can be solely managed with fertility control tools. We continue to encourage the BLM to maintain those programs, and expand them to additional areas.

Q. Will the Humane Society of the United States and the Humane Society Legislative Fund continue their work on improving fertility control tools?

A. Yes. Supporting the use of fertility control tools as a humane means of stabilizing wild animal populations where it is needed or beneficial is extremely important to the HSUS and HSLF and we are excited to continue our work on improving fertility control tools as well as delivery techniques. For instance:

- The HSUS [collaborates](#) with biologists and officials to use immunocontraception to control the size of wild horse and burro herds and has conducted and supported field studies in places such as Arizona, Colorado, Maryland, Montana, New Mexico, South Carolina and Utah.
- The HSUS [holds](#) the federal registration for the PZP product Zonastat-H, and maintains all necessary state level registrations to ensure the product is readily available for use in wild horse and burro management programs.

- The HSUS is currently working on the [Platero Project](#), in conjunction with the BLM, to assess the feasibility of using fertility control to help stabilize the [burro](#) population in the Black Mountain Herd Management Area in northwestern Arizona.
- In 2016, the HSUS and the Dietrich W. Botstiber Foundation [launched](#) the [Botstiber Institute for Wildlife Fertility Control](#), which aims to advance the development and implementation of humane, non-lethal fertility control methods to stabilize wildlife populations where justified, including populations of wild horses and burros.
- The HSUS continues their [partnership](#) with Purdue University on the creation of a single-shot, 3-4-year immunocontraception vaccine for wild horses and burros.

Q. Will the Humane Society of the United States and the Humane Society Legislative Fund continue their work to prevent America’s equines (both wild and domestic) from going to slaughter?

A. Yes. Ending the slaughter of America’s equines is extremely important to the Humane Society of the United States and the Humane Society Legislative Fund – a goal on which we have focused for years and on which we continue to work. For instance:

- The HSUS and HSLF continue to lead the charge in advocating for The Safeguard American Food Exports (SAFE) Act, [H.R. 961](#), which would ban horse slaughter in the U.S. and stop the export of American horses for slaughter abroad.
- The HSUS and HSLF also continue to lead the effort to secure “Defund” language in every year’s appropriations bill. The [defund](#) language effectively bans horse slaughter for human consumption anywhere in the U.S. by preventing the U.S. Department of Agriculture from using funds to inspect these facilities.
- The HSUS and HSLF also continue to lead the charge in ensuring that appropriations language is put into place preventing the BLM from selling wild horses and burros without limitation (such as for slaughter), or destroying “excess” healthy horses and burros. We are also advocating for this appropriations language to include preventing the United States Forest Service from selling wild horses and burros without limitation, and from destroying horses and burros in their care.
- The HSUS also continues to litigate to prevent the slaughter of our nation’s wild horses and burros. For instance, the HSUS, joined by several other organizations, is [suing](#) to stop the U.S. Forest Service from carrying out a plan that could result in the sale of wild horses, now being rounded up in California, to slaughter.
- HSUS also works to reduce the number of horses becoming at risk for slaughter and increase the rehoming of adoptable horses, through education and raising awareness about responsible horse ownership, and through our efforts as co-founders and funding partners of the [Homes for Horses Coalition](#). This is in addition to our [Forever Foundation](#) training program for horse rescue staff and volunteers, and the encouragement of more responsible breeding practices through the [Responsible Horse Breeders Council](#).

- You can read more about our work to stop the slaughter of horses in America for human consumption [here](#).

Q. Does the Humane Society of the United States' and the Humane Society Legislative Fund's support of this proposal constitute a partnership with the other groups supporting the proposal?

A: No. Both the HSUS and HSLF are big tent organizations that look to find common ground with others to drive positive change for animals forward, however this does not mean there is any sort of formal partnership with the other groups supporting this proposal. This does not impact any of our other important campaigns, including preventing the slaughter of America's equines for human consumption.