




Animal Welfare Institute

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Managing for Extinction: BLM's mismanagement of the wild horse and burro program

- When the US Congress unanimously passed the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act in 1971, America's wild horses roamed on 53,518,146 acres of Western rangeland. **Today, the Bureau of Land Management (the primary agency charged with managing and protecting our wild horses and burros) manages wild horses and burros on 34,340,678 acres – a decrease of more than 35%.** This stunning land loss is the direct result of erroneous management and decision making by the BLM.
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- Despite the BLM's claim regarding the number of wild horses, there is no accurate count of wild horses on public lands. In 2008, the BLM's best guess put the number at 29,644 wild horses and 3,461 wild burros, totaling 33,105 wild horses and burros. The BLM complains that wild horses are competing with livestock and damaging the environment, but there are **an estimated 8 million livestock grazing on approximately 235 million acres of federal public lands in 11 western states. The vast majority of all BLM administered lands (92%) is leased for livestock grazing.**
 - Over 10 years ago the BLM established long-term holding facilities to provide care for these animals until they could be adopted or lifetime care for those animals deemed "unadoptable" instead of operating a responsible management strategy to protect wild horses and burros on the range. The idea was to guarantee the welfare of these animals, but the program has become so unbalanced that **the BLM now spends more than half of its annual budget simply warehousing horses unnecessarily.** Strapped for cash and insisting that more horses need to be removed from the range, the BLM is now proposing mass euthanasia of warehoused wild horses. Not only will the BLM have wasted over 100 million taxpayer dollars spent on animal care, but the agency will be killing the very horses the American public wants protected.
 - **If wild horses are removed for an emergency situation (i.e., fire/drought) they are rarely, if ever, returned to their ranges.** In contrast, domestic livestock are not always removed during these situations and if they are, they are generally returned when the range has recovered. Wild horses and burros constantly roam large tracts of land, unlike domestic livestock who tend to congregate in small areas around water holes. In addition, because wild horses and burros have been historically mistreated by the US government, many herds were forced into some of the most inhospitable and undesirable areas of federal lands during the last century, where they were required to adapt in order to survive.
 - The BLM manages 258 million acres of public land yet it claims that there is not enough land for only an estimated 33,105 wild horses and burros.
 - Not only are public lands suffering ecological damage because of livestock over grazing, **the federal grazing program is costing the American taxpayer almost \$150 million a year according to a recent GAO study.** Wild horses are caught up in this fraudulent and wasteful program.