

Coalition for Healthy Nevada Lands, Wildlife and Free-Roaming Horses

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July 31, 2020

Nevada Association of Counties



Coalition for Healthy Nevada Lands, Wildlife and Free-Roaming Horses

Rebekah Stetson, Chairwoman
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July 31, 2020

To: NACO Public Lands Steering Committee

From: The Coalition for Healthy Nevada Lands, Wildlife and Free-Roaming Horses

Re: Proposed Resolution to Retain and Restore Healthy Nevada Lands

Dear Chairman Higby and Committee members,

Our Coalition for Healthy Nevada Lands respectfully requests that, at your meeting this week, you consider adopting our draft Resolution to Retain and Restore Healthy Nevada Lands and forward to your NACO board with intent to present to the 2021 Nevada Legislature.

Our Coalition was formed to address the current impacts of free-roaming horses and burros to Nevada land health, through public education and targeted actions such as this request to you. Along with this request we submit to you a set of supporting documents, the first of which is a recent letter of concern we wrote to our Nevada Congressional delegation. This letter is a good summation of who we are, what our concerns are and specific actions we support.

We have a growing number of organizations, coalitions and concerned individuals who share our goals, have requested to be on our mailing list to stay informed and be supportive of any action we embark upon. If you adopt this resolution, we are joined by many bi-partisan voices to back a legislative resolution effort.

In addition, we have contacts with key legislators to line up as critical sponsors to the proposed resolution. It is our strategic plan, and we hope you agree, that we would be successful with two Senators and two Assemblymen/women, on both sides of the aisle, as sponsors. We have already begun to put out feelers and would be happy to share our thoughts on this front with you.

Our coalition's working group has chosen this support request of NACO as you have well-earned respect and good standing in our state and legislature, with far more capacity to lead a legislative campaign than our small band of volunteers. What we can bring to the table is a good assortment of professionals in key fields, organizational leaders and conservation activists

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to provide well-informed testimony and documentation. It is our sincere hope that we can work together in the up-coming 2021 Legislature to pass this resolution while bringing critical education and momentum on this issue at a time when swift action is essential.

We look forward with hope and anticipation to your response to this request.

With respect and appreciation for your consideration,
Rebekah Stetson, Chairwoman
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RESOLUTION Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Management

July 2020

Whereas, The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 (WFRHBA) ensured free-roaming horses and burros (FRHB) existing on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) or Forest Service (FS) lands in 1971, would be protected and managed as valued components of our public lands. Their range was to be sufficient to sustain herds, while ensuring a "thriving ecological balance" with wildlife, livestock and other public land multiple uses in accordance with the Multiple Use, Sustained Yield Act of 1960.

Whereas, the WFRHBA directed BLM and the FS to determine in consultation including wildlife agencies, appropriate numbers (Appropriate Management Level (AML)) of FRHB to retain thriving ecological balance of habitat, forage, and water needs of wildlife, livestock and FRHB by assessment of plant and riparian sustainability. Once over AML, FRHB numbers were defined as excess to carrying capacity of the land.

Whereas, in Nevada, water comprises a mere 2% of our public lands, in the form of scattered springs, small streams and ephemeral playas, and is essential for the survival of wildlife, livestock & FRHB alike. Since 2010, AML determination must include the level of functionality of those small riparian/water sources on which all living things on public lands depend.

Whereas, in Nevada, thriving ecological balance (AML) was determined to be 12,800 horses and burros in 83 Herd Management Areas (HMA's).

Whereas, Nevada is host to over 50% of all FRHB West-wide on our fragile, drought-prone Great Basin and Mojave Desert lands.

Whereas, in order to achieve the thriving ecological balance mandate, BLM and the FS management plan for FRHB is to remove above AML excess FRHB, make them available for adoption or placed in short term or long term holdings, including lifetime pastures, or treated with fertility inhibitors and returned to public lands.



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Whereas, FRHB populations double every 3-5 years. The over AML populations of FRHB of the last 4 decades have impacted habitat, forage, and water resource sufficiency, in turn imperiling the health and well-being of wildlife, livestock and FRHB themselves.

Whereas, today in Nevada every HMA on average is 300% over AML, with 50,000 FRHB on BLM lands and 2,500 on FS lands. Outside of WHBA authorization and direction, with little to no management, there are approximately 5500 additional FRHB on state, tribal and 500 military lands.

Whereas, inadequate, short-term congressional BLM budget allocations have prevented the effective removal of excess FRHB required for healthy ecosystems and resulted in additional problems including insufficient pasture and holding facilities, no adequate long-term fertility inhibitors and populations above AML growing exponentially.

Whereas, in 2019 Humane, wildlife and livestock organizations collaboratively crafted a plan, The Path Forward, to reduce FRHB populations to AML. The plan in turn became a focus of the 2020 BLM Report to Congress for Achieving a Sustainable Wild Horse & Burro Program, requiring sufficient long-term funding for success.

Whereas, the NV Legislature recognizes Wild Horse Annie's work, resulting in passage of the 1971 Wild and Free-Roaming Wild Horse and Burro Act, ensuring a place for FRHB on public lands while retaining a thriving ecological balance on those lands, is failing to achieve the contract goals that were made in good faith and that balance needs be restored as quickly as possible.

Therefore, be it resolved that the NV Legislature supports BLM's 2020 Report to Congress urging sufficient short-term funding for immediate effectiveness and long-term funding for sustained efficacy, apportioned according to FRHB numbers in each state.

Be it further resolved, given the fragility of our Nevada Great Basin ecosystem, the NV Legislature supports reducing excess FRHB to achieve AML within 10 years to restore the health and viability of our public lands and habitats for wildlife and FRHB into the future.



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Supporting documents and videos:

1. Supporting Letters

- a. Letter to Congressional Delegation from Coalition for Healthy Nevada Lands - May 28, 2020

2. Bureau of Land Management [ABOUT THE PROGRAM](#)

- a. BLM [PROGRAM DATA](#) (comprehensive)
- b. Fiscal Year 2020 [Nationwide population estimates:* 95,114](#) as of March 1, 2020
- c. Fiscal Year 2019 [Wild Horse and Burro Program Highlights fact sheet](#)
- d. BLM [2019 Wild Horse and Burro HA and HMA Statistics](#) as of March 1, 2019
- e. [2020 Report to Congress: An Analysis of Achieving a Sustainable Wild Horse and Burro Program](#)
 - i) 2020 Report to Congress: [Fact Sheet](#)

3. Videos:

- a. [This American Land: Controlling Wild Horses](#) (8 minutes):
- b. [Horse Rich & Dirt Poor](#) (16 minutes):

4. Collaborative groups and coalitions:

- a. [The Path Forward for Management of BLM'S Wild Horses & Burros](#)
- b. ASPCA [A New Dawn for America's Wild Horses and Burros](#)
- c. [Western Governors' Association Policy Resolution 2018-01, Wild Horse & Burro Management:](#)
- d. [National Horse & Burro Rangeland Management Coalition](#)
(National Association of Counties = member):
- e. FREES: [Free Roaming Equids and Ecosystem Sustainability Network](#)
- f. [BLM Wild Horse and Burro > Partnerships](#)
 - i) [Mustang Heritage Foundation](#)
 - ii) [America's Mustang ECOSYSTEM IMPACTS](#)
- g. Letter of support from the Coalition for Nevada's Wildlife - July 21, 2020



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May 28th, 2020

From: Coalition for Healthy Nevada Lands, Wildlife, and Free-Roaming Horses
Rebekah Stetson, Chairwoman

Subject: Support for BLM's Proposed Wild Horse Management Proposal

The Coalition for Healthy Nevada Lands, Wildlife, and Free-Roaming Horses appreciates BLM's recognition that free-roaming horses and burros (FRHB) impact wildlife, plants and pollinators. We are a coalition of passionate Nevadans composed of members of conservation organizations, natural resource professionals, and concerned individuals. We are dedicated to creating and implementing change as together we recognize that our FRHB populations are having not only a major impact on their habitat, but also on Nevada's wildlife and natural landscapes. In its newly released [2020 Report to Congress: An Analysis of Achieving a Sustainable Wild Horse and Burro Program](#) BLM proposes a multi-method approach and a multi-million dollar program to reduce FRHB populations to sustainable levels over the next twenty years. While the Coalition supports the goals of the Report, we are concerned about its ability to meet objectives before more damage occurs to wildlife and horse and burro habitat.

The BLM proposed expense is quite a hefty price tag and we believe it is more than justified, in fact, essential. **Here is why:**

Nevada is home to over 50% of all FRHB on BLM lands in the United States. In Nevada, the FRHB population numbers have exceeded land health capacity for decades. For Nevada, BLM set a biologically based horse and burro population number for land health sustainability at approximately 13,000 horses and burros. Currently in Nevada, those numbers are at 52,000 on BLM lands, with another 10-12,000 residing on Forest Service, military, tribal, and state lands—over 6 times what our lands can sustain! Without BLM implementing an aggressive horse and burro population reduction program, that number will double in the next 4-5 years to over 100,000. Without BLM taking immediate action, the status quo represents an ever-increasing crisis, which will grow more difficult and expensive over time. We all must step up to aid and empower the BLM to implement immediate action.

The Coalition recognizes that horses and burros are part of the multiple-use fabric of our public lands and we all enjoy seeing them. A drying climate and increasing fires bring a changing plant composition to our fragile Great Basin, less favorable to foraging ungulates that include horses and burros. At the same time, we realize that Nevada will likely continue to host over half of BLM's wild horse and burro population. However, we do not wish to witness the continued decline of our public land sustainability



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caused in large part by the current excessive horse and burro populations. This is a direct impact to Nevada's wildlife and wildlife habitat. Without proper management, the free-roaming horses and burros will increasingly either starve or die of thirst, a heart wrenching atrocity to us all.

The costs to manage horse and burro numbers are now much higher because of complexities that are inhibiting adequate management. Over the past decades this inadequate management has left excess horses and burros on the range to breed and expand their population. BLM anticipates these costs to increase from \$80 million per year in 2020 to \$116,819,000 in the first year of program implementation and to \$238,000,000 by year five. The reduction in horse populations presumes that off-range pastures will be leased, adoptions will increase, and long-term fertility control will be administered. This cost, as the report indicates, does not include fertility control research. Only with long term population control of FRHB on public lands can the program ultimately minimize costs and be successful. The expense of both long- and short-term holding sites, implementing timely gathers, and utilizing long-term effective fertility controls, will continue to exponentially increase if aggressive action is not taken now. Our state and nation must act quickly or the economic and ecological costs will continue to escalate, with long-term consequences for our wildlife and ultimately for horses and burros.

We support BLM's recognition of the increasingly negative impact of a program that has not been adequately funded, implemented nor publicly supported. BLM's determination to proactively address this issue is a laudable step toward restoring the health of our public lands. We urge swift approval by Congress. Because Nevada has over 50% of all BLM horses and burros, we urge that commensurate funds and efforts be expended in Nevada. The Coalition will enthusiastically work with BLM, USFS, and other interest groups to implement a successful program and to ensure that the sustainability of Nevada's lands are enhanced and preserved.

We understand that the issues brought forth in this letter are complex. We are here to help create awareness, educate and create solutions together. Please reach out with any questions or comments. Thank you for all that you do to support our beautiful state of Nevada!

In gratitude and reverence,
Rebekah

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Coalition for Nevada's Wildlife

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July 21, 2020

Nevada Legislative Committee on Public Lands

Jered.McDonald@lcb.state.nv.us

Maria.Aguayo@lcb.state.nv.us

Committee Members:

The Coalition for Nevada's Wildlife (Coalition) is in strong support of population control of the excess feral horses and burros that occupy our public lands. The Coalition is dedicated to the protection and enhancement of our wildlife resources. Excess populations of feral horses and burros have a serious impact on the health of rangelands upon which wildlife, domestic livestock, and these feral horses and burros themselves depend. Feral horses and burros easily outcompete our native wildlife species and have significant adverse impacts. With over half of the total population of feral horses in the U.S. residing in Nevada, the driest state in the union, the present conditions are more than critical. As Nevada struggles to prevent the listing of Sage Grouse as a threatened and endangered species, feral horse populations jeopardize these efforts. Listing of this iconic bird would have serious economic ramifications to ranching, mining, energy, and outdoor recreation.

We ask the Committee to urge our Congressional delegation to accept BLM's 2020 Report to Congress with the exception that the projected 20 years to reach Appropriate Management Levels (AML) be accelerated in Nevada to a maximum of ten (10) years. Sufficient long-term funding must be appropriated not only to accomplish this goal but to allow for future monitoring and management to sustain AML. This is the only acceptable approach as Nevada's rangelands, and all of the species that are dependent are critically impacted.

Thank you for your consideration.

The Coalition for Nevada's Wildlife

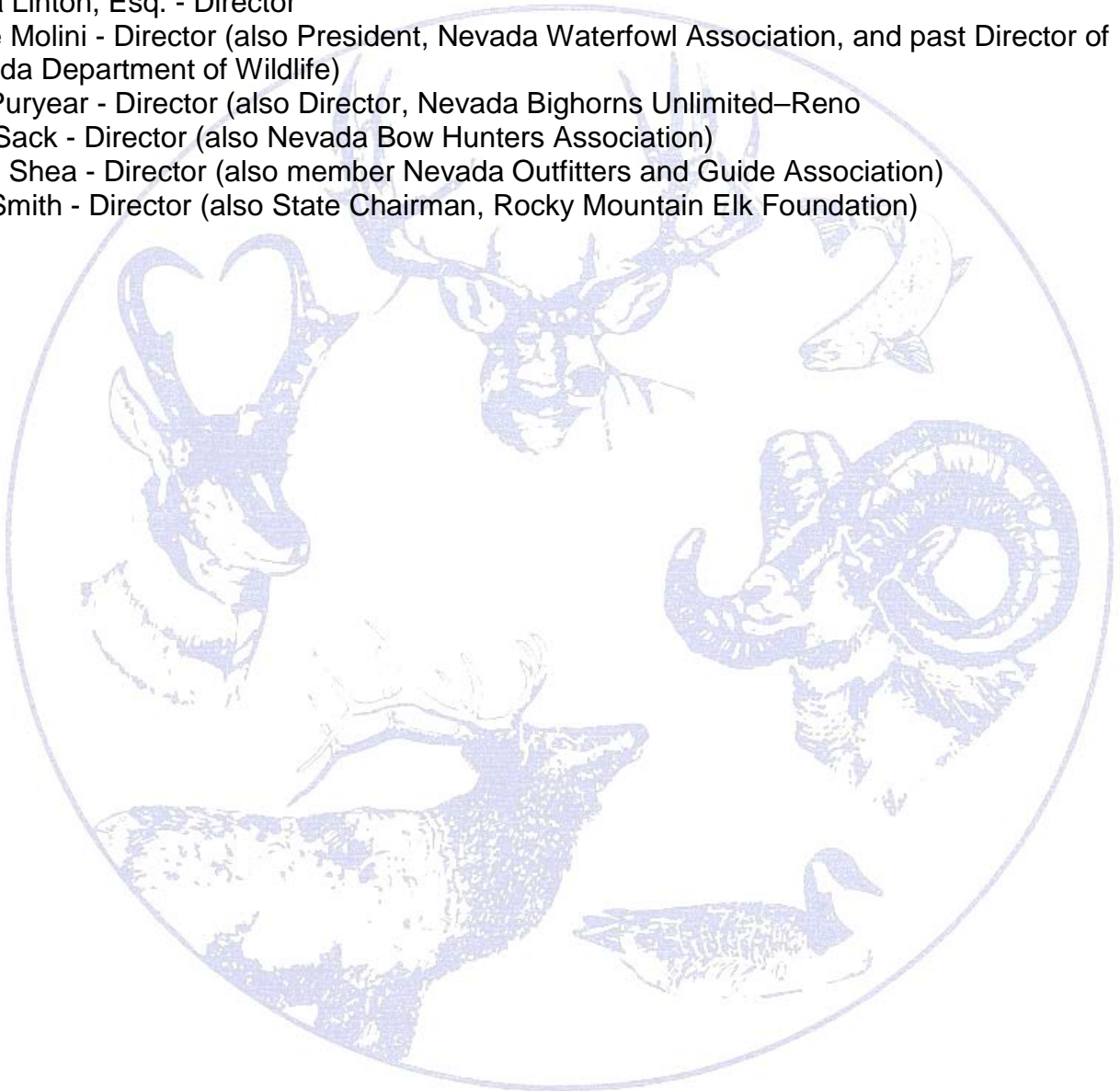
Larry J. Johnson - President (also Director of Nevada Outdoorsmen in Wheelchairs, and 30 yr. past director, Nevada Bighorns Unlimited)

Tom Smith - Vice President (also Director, Truckee River Flyfishers)

Joel Blakeslee - Director (also President, Nevada Trapper's Association)

**NEVADA SPORTSMEN AND CONSERVATIONISTS WORKING FOR
THE ENHANCEMENT OF WILDLIFE AND HABITAT**

Karen Boeger - Director (also Director, Back Country Hunters and Anglers)
Brunner, Bob - Director
Judi Caron - Director (also past President, Northern Nevada SCI)
Mike Cassidy - Director (also past President, Northern Nevada SCI)
Rex Flowers - Director (also former Washoe County Advisory Board)
John Hillenbrand - Director (also Director, Carson Valley Chukar Club)
Johnathan Lesperance - Director (also President, Nevada Sporting Dog Alliance)
Linda Linton, Esq. - Director
Willie Molini - Director (also President, Nevada Waterfowl Association, and past Director of Nevada Department of Wildlife)
Jim Puryear - Director (also Director, Nevada Bighorns Unlimited–Reno)
Bob Sack - Director (also Nevada Bow Hunters Association)
Sean Shea - Director (also member Nevada Outfitters and Guide Association)
Les Smith - Director (also State Chairman, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation)



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