



## Protect America's Wild Horses – Support H.R. 249

**Longstanding wild horse protections were removed through an omnibus rider.** Late in 2004, Senator Conrad Burns (R-MT), who was defeated for re-election, attached a highly controversial rider to the 3,300 page Omnibus Appropriations Bill. The amendment, passed with no hearings or public review, reversed longstanding federal policy that protected wild horses from being sold at auctions and subsequently shipped to slaughter plants.

**Representatives Nick J. Rahall (D-WV) and Ed Whitfield (R-KY) have re-introduced H.R. 249 to restore the federal prohibition on the commercial sale of wild free-roaming horses and burros.** *“A public outcry has again begun across the United States over the change in law that now allows the commercial sale and slaughter of these animals,”* said Rahall. *“We need to act before it is too late for thousands of these animals.”*

In May 2005, the U.S. House passed an amendment to the Interior Appropriations bill that removed the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) funding for wild horse slaughter. In spite of this landslide bipartisan vote (249-159), this amendment was not included in the Senate version of the Interior Appropriations bill, and it was ultimately left out of the final version of the bill. Senator Burns, who led the charge in late 2004 to strip wild horses of federal protection from slaughter, was the Chairman of the Senate Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, so it was not entirely unexpected that this amendment was stripped. Last fall, the same funding limitation unanimously passed the House by voice vote.

Thanks to our work in two federal courts, enforcing Congress's action two years ago, all three foreign-owned horse slaughter plants in the United States have been shut down for now. But we are not in the clear just yet. In order to permanently ban the slaughter of our wild horses in the United States, and to prohibit them from being exported for slaughter, where they face longer transports and an even more grisly death, Congress enact a permanent ban on the sale, and eventual slaughter, of our treasured wild horses.

**Sadly, it is already too late for some mustangs.** Hundreds of wild horses have gone to slaughter since the enactment of the Burns rider. In April 2005, six horses purchased specifically as a result of the rider by Oklahoman Dustin Herbert were sent immediately to slaughter in Illinois. Mr. Herbert had told the BLM that he would use the horses for a church youth program. Also in April, 35 of the 83 horses initially bought by a Sioux Indian group but later re-sold to a broker went to slaughter at the same Illinois plant. BLM has tried not to sell any horses to slaughter, but it is impossible to prevent once title has passed.

**The number of wild horses in the US is dwindling.** In the 1800s, over two million wild horses roamed the American West. When Congress initially passed the Wild Free-Roaming Wild Horse and Burro Act (WFRHBA) in 1971, stating that these majestic animals needed Congressional protection because they were “fast disappearing from the American scene,” the number of wild horses was approximately 60,000. Today, the combined number of wild horses and burros is less than 30,000, demonstrating that these animals need more protection, not less. The entire wild horse and burro populations of six western states have been completely eradicated. [over]

**Wild horses and burros have been federally protected for decades.** In 1971, Congress passed the Act in response to enormous public outcry over the shootings of hundreds of thousands of horses and burros and the slaughter of horses for pet food and human consumption in European restaurants. The 2004 Burns amendment guts the WFRHBA by requiring that Bureau of Land Management sell wild horses over the age of ten or those offered for adoption more than three times. The lives of 8,400 horses are now in jeopardy due to this controversial rider.

**The BLM's current removal policy is costing over 39 million tax dollars a year.** According to the USGS, \$7.7 million could be saved annually through the use of contraceptive measures alone. Since 1988, the wild horse population of Maryland's Assateague Island has been successfully controlled using a contraceptive vaccine (PZP) developed with the help of The Humane Society of the United States.

**Wild horses are genetically healthier than domestic horses.** Dr. E. Gus Cothran, Equine Geneticist for University of Kentucky, found that America's wild horses have greater genetic diversity, with little to no inbreeding, than domestic horses.

**Millions of acres of federally granted land have been taken away from the animals.** The 1971 Act mandates that wild horses and burros be managed on 47 million acres of public lands on 303 herd areas. Since 1971, the Bureau of Land Management has reduced the number of herd areas to 201, taking approximately 13 million acres of land from the federally protected animals.

**Private cattle outnumber wild horses and burros at least 100 to 1 on public lands.** The BLM's private livestock grazing program encompasses 214 million acres of public lands and costs over \$130 million to manage annually. Over 4 million head of private cattle enjoy subsidized grazing on public lands. A congressionally mandated study by the National Academy of Sciences found that, in one year, livestock consumed 70% of grazing resources on public lands, while wild horses and burros consumed less than 5%.

**Horses are not causing rangeland degradation.** A 1990 GAO study determined that the primary cause of the degradation in rangeland resources and damaged riparian areas is poorly managed domestic livestock grazing, that wild horse removals have not demonstrably improved range conditions, that wild horse behavior patterns make them less damaging than cattle to vulnerable range areas and that wild horse removals are occurring in some locations not being damaged by widespread overgrazing (GAO/RCED-90-110).

**Americans want wild horse protection.** H.R. 249 is as wildly popular as the Burns amendment is despised. Phone calls have poured into the sponsor's office at the rate of 180 per hour – that's 3 per minute, when the bill was introduced. NBC, ABC, The New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Sacramento Bee, Salt Lake Tribune, and the Washington Times have all covered the issue since the November 2004 passage of the omnibus rider.

**The answer is simple.** There is no need to sell off and slaughter America's Western heritage. There is room for both wild horses and cattle on our public lands – we just need a more reasonable balance and allocation for these horses. **On the millions of acres of public land in the U.S., we can surely make room for 32,000 horses.** Immunocontraception is an effective means for reducing populations humanely, if necessary. BLM could work cooperatively with public land ranchers to explore incentives for sharing land with wild horses. The first step must be restoration of Congress's original mandate – no wild horses or burros for commercial sale. The passage of H.R. 249 is critical if we are to preserve these majestic animals.