

ISPMB  
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NEWSLETTER

International Society for the Protection of Mustangs & Burros



*Spirit of the Ancients*

# WILD HORSE & BURRO DIARY

A Publication of the International Society for the Protection of Mustangs and Burros  
*The Oldest Wild Horse and Burro Organization in the United States*



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# Heber Herd Update

We are pleased to say that the Heber Herd remains wild and free in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest for another year. The final decision in the Territory Plan has not been issued by the Black Mesa Ranger District, which means there can be no action against the horses. This makes 20 years that this herd has remained intact with growth under 3 percent and very little mountain lion predation. ■



A Heber wild horse family, seen pictured in their forest home.

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**Cover:** Two stallions in ISPMB's Gila herd spar before their move into a new pasture. ISPMB recently was able to open additional acreage for the herd in an adjacent pasture; read the story on page 3.



# ‘Your’ Gila Herd – The Herd that Keeps On Giving!

## A DEMONSTRATION OF WHAT A TRUSTING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANS AND HORSES CAN ACHIEVE

*By Karen Sussman*

The herd spreads out in their new pasture.



© KAREN A. SUSSMAN

Watching the new generations of these rare Spanish horses whose descendants originally came from Spain to Arizona in 1660 is a continual learning process.

These horses live by ISPMB's vision for our organization that we recently adopted: "Wild horses and burros shall define their own destiny." This means every decision these wild horses make is their own decision. We are there to observe and watch as they choose their path. We may encourage them but we never force them into anything that they do not choose.

With that, we had a remarkable experience with these extremely brilliant animals. We know that horses are territorial, and we honor that. While in their pasture, we were able to open additional acreage for them in a contiguous pasture which required them to ascend a hill to see the opening of the only gate.

The herd is used to ISPMB's old red farm truck coming to visit. They will often come and investigate. However, they will not come when parked atop this hill looking down at them. Knowing the rains have not hit South Dakota yet and with the grass just coming up, it would be much better for them in the upper pasture.

This is when the experience of a lifetime happened. It could only be based on trust that has developed over time between the herd and myself. I sat atop the hill and watched them for a while. I then got out and called them to bring attention to myself. They know my voice well as they have accepted me as part of their herd even though I don't live with them 24-7.

*(continued)*





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The Gilas graze in their original pasture before walking up the long hill to the opening that leads to their new pasture.

Soon another band came into the pasture. They now were testing this new plan and some were going back into the old pasture. Again, they returned.

Going through a small gate with barbed wire fencing on both sides could prove detrimental if a foal or family member is left behind, especially if the band begins to move away from the gate.

We have four new foals and the mothers were diligent in coming back to get their foals to follow them through the gate. Two mothers from one band came back to the gate when they realized that their foals were on the other side of the barbed wire fence and had not followed them out. Without the mares' attention to this, the foals could have tried to go through the

Soon one band started to walk up the hill. The mares were the most curious. And just when I thought we were making progress in luring them to the top, the band stallion chased them back down.

Patience is the key and talking to them in an encouraging voice helps. This band finally came to the top of the hill and found a block of salt there that occupied them. This salt block was about 20 feet away from the gate. In the meantime, the rest of the herd was making its way up the hill very slowly, which made this band feel comfortable at the top seeing that the entire herd was not too far from them.

I then got back into my truck and moved it through the gate into the next pasture and once again got out to talk to them. The gate was only 12 feet wide and, for a wild horse, that is a very small gate.

By this time several of the bands were congregating around the salt block and the first band walked through the gate. I can say they found out about the old cliché, "The grass is always greener on the other side." This time it was true.

Soon another band came through and began eating the grass around my truck. I again got out and just called to them in a soft voice and stood where they could see that I was in this new pasture.



© KAREN A. SUSSMAN

The journey begins into the new pasture with this mare, her foal and family.



There's no turning back now!

© KAREN A. SUSSMAN





barbed wire. These foals were already a month old and no longer tied to their mothers as newborns would do. Of course, just watching this made my heart race knowing what could happen to these foals. But just watching these mares leave their band stallion to come back through the gate to retrieve their frightened little ones was amazing.

Soon all the bands came through enjoying the grass. They were spreading out along the top of this pasture and moving further away from the gate. There were just two yearling studs left that were playing together and not paying attention to the gate until they noted all the horses were no longer in the pasture with them. They ran along the fence line, and I knew I couldn't keep up with them. I got in my truck and turned them in the direction of the gate again and stopped and watched. Yes! They saw it and galloped through joining the rest of the herd!

It was a thrilling experience to watch the herd decide to take off as wild horses and gallop across this new pasture. The winds were picking up now (about 20-30 mph) which really excited them. Finally, they came to an area below the top of this pasture and out of the wind and began to graze. I remained parked for another hour just to watch them and make sure they were comfortable.

As my truck crept closer to the herd, I was surprised by Rojo Grande, our red stallion, who came to the truck to see me. Something he has never done before. I was able to snap a selfie which is very difficult as you can't ask them to stay to be photographed!

All in all, it was a magical experience since they decided on their own volition to move—a very dangerous situation if one would try to move them without their consent. ■



A trusting wild Gila horse gently nuzzles  
ISPMB President Karen Sussman

# President's REPORT

*Choosing to learn from  
wild horses can inspire  
transformative change*

By Karen A. Sussman

Since 1981, I can say my life has been changed since my encounter with wild horses and burros. It was that year that I adopted my first wild horse. Riding since the age of four, I was headed into the world of Quarter Horses, riding with one of the most esteemed trainers, Al Dunning, in Scottsdale, Arizona. How did the transition from Quarter Horses to the wild happen? It just so happened that my Quarter Horse, Peanut Butter Cup, was injured right before the big Quarter Horse Congress in Ohio. My trainer was going to be riding her there in the 2-year-old pleasure classes. She never made the show but Al came back to announce that she surely would have won! What a disappointment.

I have come to believe that events we perceive to be "negative" in our life can actually produce positive change. I have witnessed this several times now. It is as if we are being directed in a different direction. Not being able to show my Quarter Horse due to her injury, my attention became focused on my recently adopted wild horse. She was a filly 18 months of age that I named Shooting Star because I believed she came from the heavens.

“I believe that events we perceive as “negative” in our life can produce positive change... It is as if we are being directed in a different direction.”

Over the next year, she transformed my life. I had been riding for many years and had extensive opportunities to ride all kinds of horses but this horse would prove to be different. (And yes, in school, I read all of Walter Farley's books about the Black Stallion, a wild horse. I was in love with the Black Stallion!).

Because of my early reading interests, I had filled out an adoption form with the BLM several years before I had gotten Star. In fact, the adoption site that she came from was held only 10 miles from my little ranch in Scottsdale. I never received a notification from the BLM that they were even holding an adoption. The BLM specialist told me later that they had 50 adopters for the 50 horses. Their applications were filled out prior to mine and that is why I wasn't notified.

However, I received the call from the BLM to adopt this filly as she failed her adoption with people in our neighborhood. We already had five horses by that time, three of which were ponies for my children. And so, my journey began.

Six years later, I adopted my second wild horse. A black stallion who had his very own band of mares. His mares were easily adopted leaving this beautiful stallion for me. My goal was to prove to the BLM, whom I began to volunteer for, that 10-year-old animals were adoptable. At that time, they believed that they were not good candidates for the adoption program. I named him Black Diamond's Fate. He also transformed my life and was a great teacher, like Star. He and I were filmed creating an advertisement for Stephen Spielberg's film, *Spirit*.

This brings me up to today. Now with more than 40 years in sharing my life with wild horses, I am so very, very thankful that my Quarter Horse and the "universe" gave me this most important opportunity which I may not have taken if Butter Cup hadn't been injured, dashing my dreams of someday owning a world champion reining horse.

I hate to even write the word "owning" as it is so foreign from my horse language of today. I am the lucky one now to SHARE my life with these wild creatures. I am happy to say that, for the most part, our Gila herd dictates and defines their own lives as noted in ISPMB's vision: "Wild horses and burros will define their own destiny."



Living amongst them and being completely trusted by them as their partner for all these years has allowed me to continue to learn about their herd behaviors. These wild animals continue to amaze me. Even writing about just one of them could be an article unto itself.

What I wanted to share is my current realization about these magnificent creatures. It is now the pinnacle of my beliefs. America's wild horses, who have evolved and survived over these past 60 million years, could not have done so without a spiritual component. And it has been a spiritual journey that I have been on since 1981 in understanding just that.

I am honored to be in their company. I have been a student all these years when, early on, I thought I was the teacher! There is no end to learning. I am humbled in their presence. In my heart, I know that they are sacred animals—here to teach humanity. *(For more insight on this, please read Paul Crane Tohlakai's column in this issue.)*

One of my first learnings was observing how this rare Gila herd worked together in harmony for the good of the whole herd. This, in itself, shows their evolution to be far more advanced than humankind at the present time. Do we work together for the good of all humankind?

We must realize that the first human on earth was only 6 million years ago. *Homo sapiens*, modern humans, have been on this planet for only 200,000 to 300,000 years! Already, the horse has 54 million years on us. They survived their counterparts, the woolly mammoths and the sabre-toothed tigers who became extinct. They evolved on the North American continent making them extremely important to the people of our country. We were, at one time, one with our horses. A fact that should never be forgotten. They helped us to become "civilized," if I may use that word.

We know that at least 92 percent of Americans, crossing all religious, social, political and economic divides, want America's wild horses to survive; to live in peace and free from continual roundups that threaten their very existence.

What is happening to our wild horses is nothing short of cruelty in how they are managed by the Agencies. This management has lacked the true understanding of the wild nature of these animals. They are managed as domestic livestock without regard to understanding their wild nature that has evolved over the millennia.

Even worse, many of the wild horse groups believe that they should have birth control to stop overpopulation, buying into the Agencies' mantra of overpopulation for the past 30 years. ISPMB knows that fertility control drugs cause permanent sterility. Older mares who cannot conceive live a terribly unhappy life of being infertile. We have watched as these mares steal first-time mother's foals. This must be happening on public lands, and these foals will die.

We must succeed in *TRANSFORMING* how wild horses are managed in our country. We can only do so with your wonderful support. We truly are watching the eventual elimination of wild horses on public lands. It is happening and mark my words. In this issue, read about the wipeout of wild horses in Wyoming, the potential loss of our public lands, PEER's studies on the degradation of rangelands, and the misinformation Project 2025 uses to support "disposing" of wild horses.

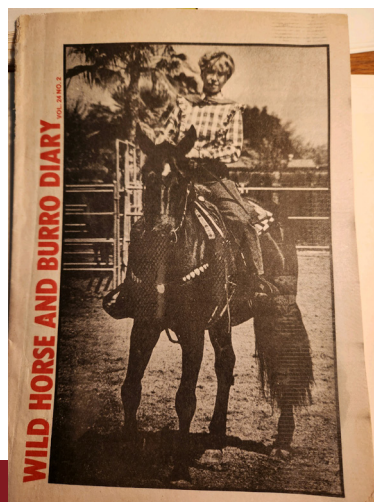
“We truly are watching the eventual elimination of wild horses on public lands. It is happening and mark my words. Join us in saving them.”

Today, I am asking you to become involved by becoming a donor, a member, or a sponsor of a horse, a band, or the herd. If you're able to give monthly, that helps us greatly. We have very little time left to save the last of our country's wild horses and burros. Your help, your voice, and your support are needed more than ever. Join us—I'd like to hear from you. Thank you. You are so appreciated.

Karen A. Sussman, president, ISPMB



Karen A. Sussman  
President, ISPMB



Shooting Star  
and Karen





# Native American Words of Wisdom

## CARRIERS OF SPIRIT: THE SACRED BOND BETWEEN HORSE AND HUMAN

*By Paul Crane Tohlakai*

The human in the horse world has always been about having spiritual relationship that has its place in oral history, evolution of both in creation stories. From this point of view for Indigenous horse culture, the relationship has intertwined for survival. Like other North American 4-legged and other species, our history parallels since the onslaught of world immigration. There's been a genocidal holocaust still prevalent of original inhabitants of this part of Mother Earth.

What it means to "those who can't speak" is evident by insatiable human greed that is rationalized by institutionalized government policies in name of progress.

Indigenous earth-based way of life is a peaceful co-existence with other forms of life—a circle of life that acknowledges the right to live and to die in peace, for all species. Not just humans. Free-roaming horses are not accorded that right. I've spent time with them on three continents: here in the U.S. and Canada, with the Camargue horses in Europe, and the Brumbies of Australia. I've learned from them. Their pleas to be left alone. Their body language. And that "special something about horses" we call the electromagnetic heart center—five times stronger than that of a human. What can heal humanity is being destroyed.



I've said before that our histories run parallel. Both Horse and Indigenous peoples have had to fight for our right to exist. Our relationship is not just utilitarian—it's sacred. We do ceremony together. We pray together. And at life's end, it is often the horse who carries us into the spirit world.

Horses and spirituality are definitely something to consider when we are searching for answers to issues that pertain to both human and horse. Through actual practice—through Native tradition—when horse is included in spiritual ceremony, there is transformation. They bring healing. They show us how to live.

They live in the moment, fully, with presence and awareness. They don't lie. They don't pretend. When you stand next to a horse, it reflects your energy back to you. It shows you where you are strong and where you are hurting. If you come with respect, they meet you in spirit. If you come with arrogance, they show you what needs to be unlearned.

“ In our stories, Horse came to us not to be ridden for glory, but to be honored as a sacred helper. They came to assist with the journey—physical and spiritual. They were not forced. They chose to walk with us. That's why the betrayal today runs so deep. The roundups, the auctions, the killing—it's not just cruelty, it's a breaking of a covenant. A sacred trust. ”

Some people say horses are wild, unmanageable, best removed from public lands. But I say they are teachers. Sentinels. They know where water is, where the winds shift, where danger stirs. They know how to live in balance with the land, unlike many who claim authority over it.

When we lose the horse, we lose a part of our own spirit. Not just as Native people, but as a human species. Because horses carry something ancient. They remind us of who we used to be—before conquest, before fences, before forgetting.

So, we must listen. Not just with our ears, but with our hearts. They are messengers, they do talk, but not in words. We must include Horse in our prayers again, in our ceremonies, in our vision for the future. They are still trying to walk beside us. Still offering healing. Still waiting for us to remember the way. ■

Paul Crane Tohlakai is a member of ISPMB's Council Circle. In his column, he brings the Native American perspective to each issue of our magazine. Paul is a full-blooded Diné (Navajo) from Pinon, Arizona. Among his many accomplishments, Paul is an Indigenous spokesperson for saving North American bison, mustangs, and sacred sites. His major causes include cultural preservation, protection of the environment and redemptive movements. He is an advisor to ISPMB about the Native perspective.

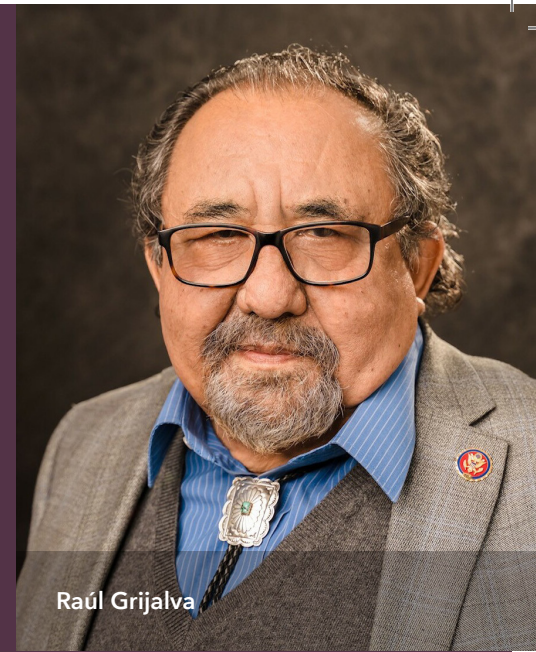


Help us protect your Gila herd—your donation is vital in preserving these rare and beautiful horses.



# ISPMB Acknowledges the Passing of a Congressional Friend of Wild Horses

Arizona Congressman Raul Grijalva



Raúl Grijalva

Congressman Raúl Grijalva was a champion of the rights of animals, especially wild horses and burros. He served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 2003 until his death on March 13, 2025. He was chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee from 2019 to 2023. He gave the following speech in favor of the Heber wild horses on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. on June 6, 2007. The speech, "Honoring Wild Horses," was recorded in the Congressional Record.

"Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor Arizona's wild horses living in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests.

The residents of the State of Arizona deeply value these magnificent wild horses.

These beautiful wild horses are truly the "Living Symbols of the West," as described by the Wild Horse and Burro Act passed by Congress in 1971 to protect the wild horses of the United States.

The Rim Country wild horses date back to mounts brought by Father Eusebio Kino, who began his 1653 mission to eastern Arizona by setting out from the lands of my constituency in southern Arizona and traveling across our State northeast to the "borders of the lands of the Apacheria which border on New Mexico."

These original Spanish horses are the great ancestors of the Mogollon Rim country wild horses. They were the mighty Andalusian war horse, whose origins go back more than 28,000 years to the original Iberian horse; the magnificent Spanish Barb; and the graceful and fluid Spanish Jennet, the mount of many of the great kings of Europe; and the strong bloodlines of these original horses appear almost unchanged in our Rim wild horses 400 years later.

Our Arizona Rim wild horses are the direct descendants of the Spanish horses prized by the conquistadors so highly that the foals were carried in hammocks to protect their legs until they were old enough to travel on the forced marches; and prized by the early cattlemen for their endurance and heart and were the very mounts of the U.S. Cavalry as they rode to protect and expand the American west.

The Arizona Rim Country wild horses living in Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests are a most precious natural resource to be preserved for our children and grandchildren who will be able to see them for generations to come."

Congressman Grijalva also led efforts to protect our public lands and strengthen the Endangered Species Act; he advocated for environmental and Indigenous communities. He will surely be missed by all of us. ■

**The future of America's wild horses depends on your knowledge of the issues covered in the articles that follow. Please take time to read and understand them. Your support of ISPMB is critical to our wild horses and burros' survival.**



Pictured are wild horses in the Salt Wells Creek Herd Management Area in SW Wyoming.



# The Wipeout of Wyoming's Wild Horses

## Fate of 3,000 wild horses hinges on July's court decision

The ongoing dispute between the ranchers and Wyoming's wild horses may be coming to an end after 46 years of constant turmoil on the use of the checkerboard lands.

Checkerboard lands under the management of the Rawlins and Rock Springs Field Offices of the BLM have been subject to many lawsuits since 1979. These lands are one-mile square alternating private lands with state lands and federal lands. However, not all of the lands are checkerboard. Some are considered solid block lands.

Wild horses were identified in 1971 on these federal lands. In 1979, ISPMB became involved in negotiating with Rock Springs Grazing Association (RSGA) to allow 500 horses to roam on their private lands. This was early on in the Act before "excess" (the only reason to remove wild horses) was defined in later court cases. This kept the peace for a short while.

In 1981, Mountain States Legal Foundation sued the BLM to reduce horses back to 500 on their private lands.

The lawsuits continued when in 2013 a Consent Decree was negotiated between the BLM and the ranchers. This agreement was to last for 10 years and then expire. This decree was to avoid further litigation.

The BLM was to gather and remove wild horses from the Checkerboard lands within Salt Wells Creek, Adobe Town, White Mountains, and the Great Divide Basin to keep horses within a certain numbers range.

The planning area included over 2,811,401 acres. Wild horse advocates sued the BLM in 2014 for violating Section 3 of the

1971 Act, determining excess. In 2015, the courts sided with the BLM but the case was appealed and won in the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals in 2016.

BLM cancelled all roundups in 2016. BLM again began removals in 2017 and they were sued again by the advocates in 2017.

The courts suggested that the BLM change their Resource Management Plan (RMP) from "herd management areas" to "herd areas," under the pretense that the BLM had the right to zero out wild horses in the herd areas. ISPMB contends that RMPs cannot dictate numbers of horses but must determine excess through monitoring the habitat. Therefore, this is illegal.

The advocates again lost in the lower court and in March 2025 the case was again heard by the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals. The final decision will be rendered in July of this year determining the fate of these wild horses in these areas.

When the Act passed to protect wild horses and burros, there was a regulation that allowed BLM to remove cattle in lieu of wild horses. This regulation is CFR 4750.5 - Closure to livestock. Since the Act of more than 50 years ago, we can be lucky if this regulation has been employed more than we can count on our fingers on both hands.

Cattle grazing on public lands is a privilege and not a right. Wild horses and burros' existence on public lands is a right.

Yet the fight continues as to who controls public lands. And the question looms, will there be any public lands left? After all, the public lands are for each and every American, but today their existence is threatened. ■



# Will Public Lands Be Privatized?



On April 4, 2025, the Senate defeated the Heinrich amendment in the budget reconciliation bill that would have prevented the sale of public lands. The 48 to 51 vote leads the way for the possible sale of public lands in our country.

This could include 640 million acres of land nationwide. Over 90 percent of these federal lands are located in the West and Alaska. The breakdown is as follows:

- Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages the most land, approximately 244.4 million acres. Within the BLM lands, the National Landscape Conservation System protects over 36 million acres, including national monuments, national conservation areas, wilderness areas, and wild and scenic rivers, mainly in the West.
- U.S. Forest Service manages 192.9 million acres with approximately 166.8 million acres in the West.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service oversees 89.2 million acres with nearly 86 percent in Alaska.
- National Park Service manages 79.9 million acres with 66 percent in Alaska and other western states.

On April 18, Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum signed an order giving the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget (AS-PMB) control over the Department of the Interior, including its personnel and budget. According to journalist Wes Siler of Outside Magazine, the person in this position is a DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency) operative, Tyler Hassen, a CEO of a Houston-based energy company. This position requires a Senate confirmation which was not done. Siler reported that "Hassen is now responsible for 70,000 employees, the administration of numerous international treaties, the welfare of 574 Native American Tribes, 433 national park sites, over 500 million acres of public lands, 700 million acres of subsurface minerals, and 3.2 billion acres of the Outer Continental Shelf."

Secretary Burgum, during his confirmation hearings in January, made a comment that he sees selling public lands as a source of revenue by referring to them as "America's balance sheet."

According to Bloomberg Law in November, quoting Melinda Taylor, senior lecturer at the University of Texas at Austin Law School, "Project 2025 is a 'wish list' for the oil and gas and mining industries and private developers. It promotes opening up more of our federal land to energy development, rolling back protections on federal lands, and selling off more land to private developers."

Please remember that once public lands, which belong to all of us, are sold, they are gone forever. It is important to know that they supply \$1.2 trillion dollars annually in outdoor recreation economy. The beauty of these lands must be preserved forever. The survival of wild horses and burros, and other wildlife, depend upon them. ■



# Supreme Court Rejects Utah's Bid to Privatize Public Lands, House Blocks Another Public Lands Sell-off Attempt

On August 20, 2024, the state of Utah filed a landmark public lands lawsuit asking the Supreme Court to address whether the federal government can simply hold unappropriated lands within a state indefinitely. The "unappropriated" land in question is approximately 18.5 million acres of Utah controlled by the BLM. On January 14, 2025, the Supreme Court rejected Utah's case.

On May 22, 2025, another attempt to privatize public lands in both Utah and Nevada was defeated in the House of Representatives reconciliation bill. This was a bipartisan attempt to stop the federal government from selling hundreds of thousands of acres of public lands.

Ryan Zinke (R-MT), who was Secretary of the Interior during the first Trump administration, spearheaded the move to remove the public lands sell-off from the House reconciliation bill. Zinke was quoted as saying, "It's a no now. It will be a no later. It will be a no forever."

According to Zinke, this was the last chance to remove the public lands sale from the bill before it reached the House floor for the final vote. ■



**Join us in advocating for wild horses and burros. Your donation will directly support their protection on our public lands.**





# Project 2025 Threatens Wild Horses and Burros

For those of our readers who may not be familiar with Project 2025, it is known as the 2025 Presidential Transition Project, a political initiative spearheaded by The Heritage Foundation. It is a blueprint for how a conservative presidential administration taking office in 2025 could rapidly reshape the federal government and implement right-wing policies from day one.

On page 528 of their more than 900 pages, which are available on the internet, is the page describing wild horses and burros. It is filled with misinformation from top to bottom of the page.

For instance: "For decades, Congress watched as these herds overwhelmed the land's ability to sustain them, crowded out indigenous plant and other species, threatened survival of species listed under the Endangered Species Act, invaded private and permitted land, disturbed private property rights, and turned the sod into concrete. BLM experts said in 2019 that some affected land will never recover from this unmitigated damage."

The last sentence states the obvious: "Congress must enact laws permitting the BLM to dispose humanely of these animals."

The BLM has always fought for "sale authority." The first successful instance was done in a rider secretly inserted in the 2005 appropriations bill in Congress stating horses and burros who failed three adoptions may be sold to the highest bidder or animals over the age of 10 may be sold at auction. Unbeknownst to most members of Congress, this clandestine rider was inserted into the 4,000-page appropriations bill by Conrad Burns (R-MT), Harry Reid (D-NV) and Bill Dorgan (D-ND). After the *New York Times* exposed this, Congress still refused to fly back to Washington to amend this situation during their Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday.

What a blow to the greater than 92 percent of the American people who want wild horses and burros protected and treasured. This majority of people cross all social, political, cultural and religious divides and remain united in their fervor of the rights of wild horses and burros.

Other initiatives to sell wild horses and burros for slaughter (previous to the above rider) failed to pass in Congress throughout the years because of the unified efforts of people speaking up to protect wild horses and burros. ■



# National Environmental Policy Act Challenged by Executive Order



The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was passed in 1969 to ensure that conditions be met in which man and nature could exist in harmony, including protecting future generations.

NEPA has a set of rules that have been respected and followed by every administration, Republican and Democrat, for nearly 50 years. These regulations didn't block projects—they simply ensured that environmental consequences were considered, safer alternatives explored, and the public had a right to know what was happening to their air, water and land. This law is the foundation of American conservation.

On January 20, 2025, President Trump signed Executive Order (EO) 14154. "Unleashing American Energy" removed these existing regulations and the agency that oversaw these regulations known as the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).

There are many ramifications in dismantling these rules which could negatively affect our environment for years to come. One possibility is *limiting the extent of analysis* by the federal agencies. This means that the cumulative effects of climate change will not be looked at. Only the immediate concern will be analyzed. ■



# The Culture Of The BLM Supports Domestic Livestock Grazing, Not Wild Horses and Burros

By Karen Sussman

The *culture* of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) was predominately that of a livestock grazing agency. Many of the BLM employees were ranchers or had relatives in ranching. The forerunner of the BLM was known as the Grazing Service, which was responsible for the extermination of tens of thousands of wild horses in the West for nearly 30 years.

This negative attitude toward wild horses does not change overnight with the stroke of a pen on paper (signing the 1971 Act). One can see in the Agencies' actions throughout the years that this culture, *to protect livestock over* wild horses and burros, is still pervasive in the Agency today. Yet, they were mandated by Congress to protect America's wild horses and burros.

The Agency constantly advertises the *myth of overpopulation* of wild horses: that they double every four years; their annual growth rate is 20 percent; and by 2030, there will be a million wild horses on public lands.

How did the Agencies pick 20 percent as the yearly increase of herds when it really is under 3 percent in undisturbed herds?

That decision came way back in 1980 when the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) convened to learn all that they could about wild horses and burros. Two unnamed scientists, who reviewed seven wild herds that were studied in the U.S. and worldwide, concluded that yearly population rates should reflect herd growth at less than 10 percent.

Notably, the 20 percent rate did not include death rates that the BLM wanted to claim. The BLM also looked at the removals over the past 10 years and claimed there was extraordinary growth. What really occurred was that they were able to count more accurately due to the continual technological improvements of counting methods. As an example, the first counts were visual, which underestimated up to a 50 percent undercount of the animals. At that time, there were nearly 60,000 wild horses and burros counted. Imagine if you doubled that count; with accurate counting, there would have been 120,000 wild horses and burros in 1971.





The other notable information gathered from the seven herds studied throughout the world was extremely important. Only one of the seven herds had only one filly that was impregnated at age two. Pregnancy at age two was unheard of in untouched herds. Most mares were pregnant by age four or five. Yet in 1992, we were alerted by the BLM personnel at its Palomino Valley holding facility in Nevada that fillies were coming in and pregnant at two! This was unusual, even for a BLM employee to see. Palomino Valley was the main processing place for wild horses that were rounded up. The reason that fillies were getting pregnant at such young ages was from the massive disruptions of their stable band structures that they had previously had to 1971.

### Why chaos and mismanagement continue on public lands

Here is the real reason that there continues to be chaos on public lands and the continued mismanagement of our "protected" wild horses and burros. The BLM and FS were mandated to study wild horses and burros for at least seven to ten years to learn how to best manage these "wildlife species." They chose not to do this. As livestock people, their culture gave them the false belief that they had experience dealing with horses and cows. The difference is that wild horses are not domestic horses and cannot be treated like domestic horses. (For instance, wolves look like dogs but cannot be treated in the same way—one is wild and the other is domestic.) The Agencies were required to report to Congress in 1983. The following is what was said:

*The NAS final report called for a "long-term" equid research program and an "expanded in-house scientific staff" to provide a solid foundation of scientific data on which to base management decisions." The Agencies decided the following: "The most pressing question concerning further research for the Agencies is whether the benefits of increased knowledge and efficiency will justify the cost. No further research is planned at this time."*

The mismanagement of our wild horses and burros on public lands is the direct result of not understanding these animals as the wildlife species they are. Mismanagement destroys the highly evolved family band structures that make up these herds, and this literally destroys their very nature. Add the use of birth control, which causes permanent infertility, and wild horses and burros on public lands will be destroyed forever.

Sadly, many of the humane groups have bought into the "over-population" myth and now receive funding to inject these magnificent animals with this agent that will eventually destroy them.

*(Please note: ISPMB's two herds studied for 18 years had annual growth under 10 percent [just as the two NAS scientists predicted] under the best of feed conditions, unlike wild horses that must survive harsh winters and other natural disasters.) ■*

## UPDATE: Teddy Roosevelt National Park Horses

The Theodore Roosevelt National Park advocates may have hope for keeping the horses in the park. A bill has been introduced into Congress by Senator John Hoeven (R-ND) S1377 as a bipartisan bill seeking to ensure permanent maintenance of a wild horse herd with a minimum size of 150. It has not been passed in the House or Senate as of yet. ■

A rainbow shines over Half Moon Bay's band in the Theodore Roosevelt National Park.



Your support can help protect wild horses and burros on public lands, ensuring they remain free and thriving for generations to come.



# Who Really Is Degrading Public Rangelands and It's Not Wild Horses or Burros

By Chandra Rosenthal, Director of Rocky Mountain PEER, (303) 898-0798, [croenthal@peer.org](mailto:croenthal@peer.org)

- *Range Damage from Cattle Far Exceeds Wild Horse Impacts*
- *No Livestock Reductions Despite Severe Damage As Wild Horse Roundups Persist*

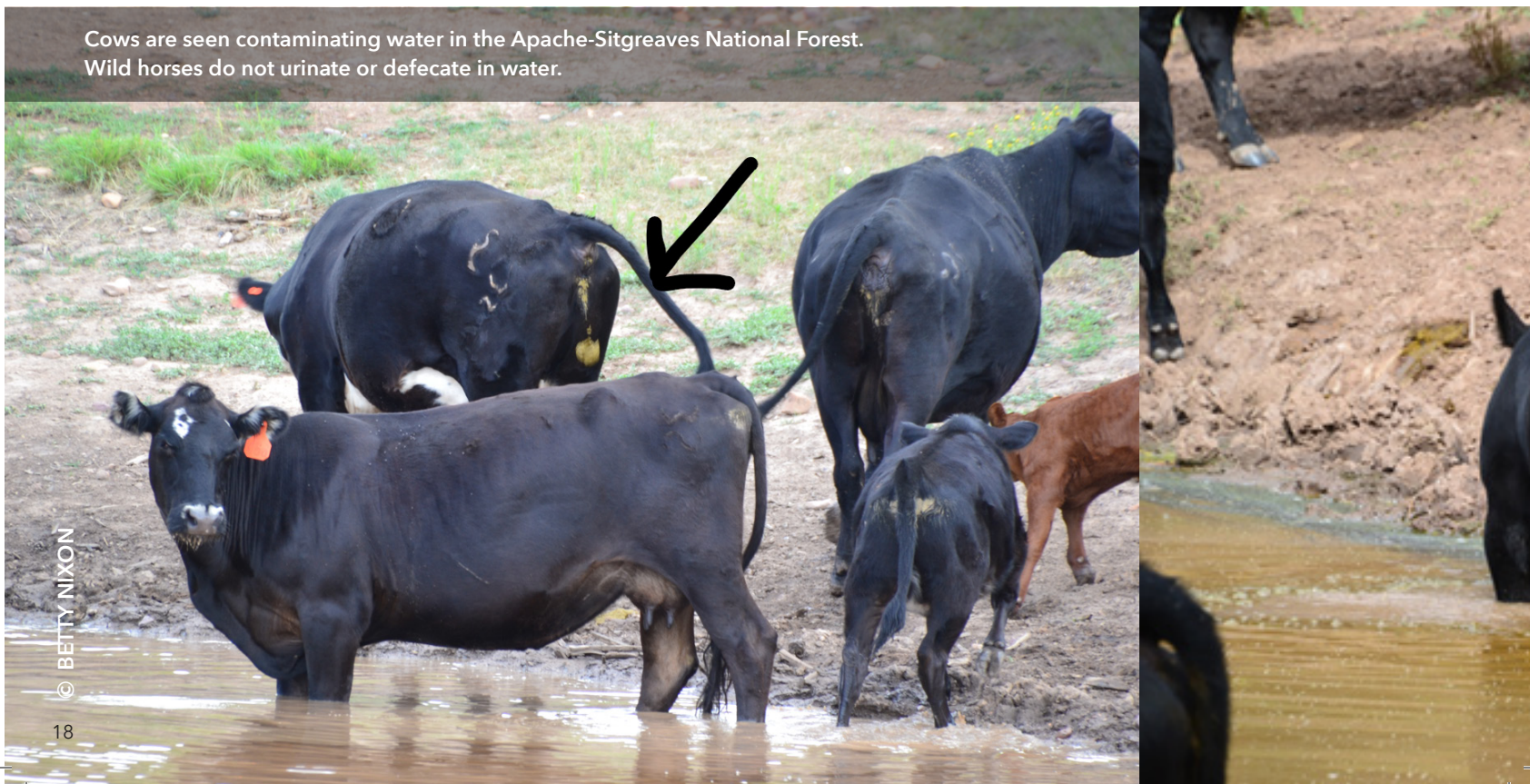
Washington, DC – America's public rangelands suffer far more damage from overgrazing by commercial livestock than from wild horses and burros, according to the latest U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) data analyzed by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER). The damage estimates are based on BLM's own Land Health Standards, which measure the minimum water quality, vegetation, and soil conditions needed to support wildlife.

PEER's analysis of range conditions through the end of 2023 reveals that 44 million acres of rangelands are failing BLM's minimum standards, with livestock being the primary cause, either in whole or in part. Consider –

- More than two-thirds of BLM acreage not meeting its own minimum Land Health Standards are due solely to livestock overgrazing, while less than 1% of those failing acres are due solely to wild horses;
- In the ten Western states under BLM's grazing program, only one (Nevada) has more than 1% of those failing acres where wild horses are even a factor; and
- Nationally, only 77 allotments (out of about 21,000 allotments) are failing due in whole or part to wild horses.

"When it comes to protecting America's rangelands, BLM suffers from a severe bureaucratic cow blindness," stated Rocky Mountain PEER Director Chandra Rosenthal. She noted that an estimated 1.5 million cattle forage BLM lands compared to fewer than 75,000 wild horses. "BLM engages in controversial wild horse roundups, but reductions in cattle herds are rare,

Cows are seen contaminating water in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest. Wild horses do not urinate or defecate in water.





regardless of how bad conditions are on the ground.”

The BLM figures also indicate some 6.9 million acres (approximately the size of Maryland) are also failing Land Health Standards, but the causes have not yet been identified. This is on top of another 36.5 million acres (an area bigger than Iowa) where BLM has yet to complete its land health determinations. Then, there are also another 1.2 million acres where the agency does not have complete data. By contrast, BLM has identified less than one million acres as failing solely due to wild horse impacts.

“Year by year, BLM is falling further behind in its inventory of unassessed rangelands,” added Rosenthal. “Absent a firm grasp of actual land conditions, BLM range management decisions appear to be rooted in politics, and in BLM’s political calculus cows fare far better than horses.” ■



PEER released this press release in 2021. The information is still very relevant.

# Interior Wild Horse Focus Ignores Cattle Impacts

## BLM’S SCIENTIFIC “COW BLINDNESS” IMPEDES SAGE GROUSE RECOVERY

Follow PEER here: [PEER.org](https://peer.org)

Washington, DC – The U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) continues to blame wild horses for ecological damage across the West while avoiding analysis of its own massive livestock grazing program, charges Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) in a letter sent today to Interior Secretary Deb Haaland. A PEER analysis shows that on the majority of lands where the agency has identified wild horses as implicated in the decline of sage grouse habitat, agency records indicate livestock grazing as a significant cause of habitat degradation.

A highly publicized U.S. Geological Survey study released earlier this month found that wild horses are adversely affecting sage grouse habitat. That study is being used as part of the rationale for removing thousands of free-ranging horses from this habitat. Yet the USGS has an earlier version of the dataset used in PEER’s analysis and has in fact used these data to map livestock impacts as long ago as 2011, despite their claim in the study that “Our analysis did not explicitly model livestock (e.g., cattle) ... primarily because of challenges associated with compiling quality spatial data.”

“USGS and BLM have put on scientific blinders when it comes to public lands grazing,” stated PEER Special Projects Manager Kirsten Stade, noting that cows outnumber wild horses on BLM lands by a ratio of more than 30 to 1. “While wild horses do have impacts of their own, coherent landscape and recovery planning require a hard look at the millions of cows foraging increasingly stressed rangelands.”

PEER, which has obtained BLM’s rangeland health data via the Freedom of Information Act, charges that the Bureau of Land Management’s deliberate obfuscation of livestock eco-impacts is a function of political pressure from the ranching industry, and that—

- While the agency scapegoats wild horses for habitat degradation, its data reveal that most of the allotments within Wild Horse Herd Management Areas (HMAs) that fail its standards for rangeland health—approximately

*(continued)*



11.5 million acres of the 21.5 million acres of allotments within HMAs assessed by BLM to date—identify livestock as a significant cause of that failure; Livestock are by far the most frequently identified cause of allotment failure to meet standards for quality of water, vegetation, and soils, as well as the ability to support wildlife nationwide, including for allotments within HMAs. More than 40 million acres, including 15 million acres of priority sage-grouse habitat of BLM lands across the west fail to meet these standards due to overgrazing by livestock;

- Of the almost 22 million acres of HMA area within allotments that BLM has assessed, only a tiny fraction—just 1% or 311,000 acres—has been identified as failing standards due to wild horses alone, with no mention of livestock;
- In Colorado, the Sand Wash Basin wild horse roundup, the largest wild horse roundup in the state’s history, overlaps portions of ten grazing allotments totaling 158,000 acres where BLM assessments have overwhelmingly found livestock—and not wild horses— to be at fault for deteriorated range conditions. In Nevada, another state in which the BLM is conducting wild horse roundups, 88% of allotment acreage in which wild horses have been identified as a cause of land degradation also list livestock grazing as a cause.

“Given BLM’s pattern of denying grazing impacts, Secretary Haaland will have a challenging time honoring her pledge to the American people that Interior will henceforth be guided by the best science available,” added Stadel, pointing to worsening drought conditions throughout the West. “Despite the unmistakable red flags, Interior is not even studying, let alone planning, any widespread, programmatic changes in livestock stocking rates or management to prevent further sage grouse decline.” ■

Bull is covered with hundreds of horn flies.



We record the data from PEER because they have done outstanding work and are committed to insisting that the BLM focus on the health of the rangelands. PEER notes that the majority of damage to our public lands is done by livestock and not wild horses. This agency has had many BLM whistleblowers over the past who have given important data to them and then providing information to the public.



# Illegal Rulemakings by the BLM Have Caused Almost Irreparable Damage

As we continue to examine the Bureau of Land Management and the US Forest Service, we must again look at history to see the lasting effects perpetrated against the wild horses and burros, which Congress MANDATED by law be protected for the American people.

In a rulemaking by the BLM in 1984, the most damage ever to wild horses was executed over the next four to five years until stopped in the Courts, namely IBLA (Interior Board of Land Appeals – the poor man’s court).

A rulemaking is just a BLM rule in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) which interprets a law. One must observe these rulemakings to make sure they are in compliance with the actual law.

The 1971 Act stated that the term **“range”** is where wild horses and burros were found in 1971 and must be protected there. The BLM’s definition no longer was range but **“herd area.”**

In 1984, they created a new term called **“herd management area.”** This term was designed to decrease the area where wild horses and burros would be managed. This was part of the illegal rulemaking that was created and destroyed so many horses and areas where they were found.

## **These terms are not in compliance with the law.**

This 1984 rulemaking, to make it simply understood, allowed for the removal of wild horses and burros in planning documents requested by public interest and preferences. These public interest people were livestock producers with permits on public lands. This was a violation of the law. It is illegal to set numbers in a planning document such as a Resource Management Plan (RMP) and the Agencies must manage for “optimum” numbers of animals.

We cannot forget that Nancy Whitaker, who at that time worked for Animal Protection Institute (API) (which no longer exists), took BLM to IBLA court over these unlawful

regulations. What resulted was the revocation of these illegal rules; the new ruling had stopped wild horse and burro removals for three entire years. In 1992 Ms. Whitaker was alerted that she would lose her first case in Wyoming, as she did. It then became necessary for API to go to federal court to stop Wyoming. Sadly, because of the costs involved, they did not pursue this case.

## **Here is what happened in 1984-88 prior to the court ruling:**

More than 40,000 wild horses were illegally removed from their rightful lands. In 1984 there were 303 ranges where wild horses and burros were found on 47,495,879 acres. After 1984 and until the court cases in 1989-90, the ranges (herd areas as the Agencies called them) were reduced to 195 on 35,000,000 acres. This action was devastating.

Today we are down to 177 ranges left on approximately 26,900,000 acres but the BLM is again trying to complete another zeroing out of four herds in Wyoming. A travesty.

It is interesting to note that during the above writing of these illegal regulations (rulemakings) that were published in 1984, the Secretary of the Interior was James Watt, born in Lusk, Wyoming, and the first president of the Mountain States Legal Foundation, which filed suit against the Wyoming horses in 1979. Secretary Watt was relieved of his duties and resigned as Secretary of the Interior on November 8, 1983, just as the rulemakings were going to be published. In 1995, he was indicted on 18 counts of felony perjury and obstruction of justice before a grand jury investigating influence peddling at the Department of Housing and Urban Development. He was sentenced to five years’ probation.

We are now at the mercy of federal courts costing hundreds of thousands of dollars to fight for our wild horses and burros. We must understand the law and what we are fighting for! ISPMB does and has the history to prove it. It is the funding that is critical. ■

## Podcast


### KAREN SUSSMAN: PIONEER FOR WILD HORSE ADVOCACY

Listen to Karen Sussman’s recent interview with Camron Adibi on the podcast, The Centaur, created by Camron to explore the horse-human connection with innovators in the horse world. Camron uncovers the unique ways humans and horses connect and understand each other, enriching the lives of both. ■

<https://rss.com/podcasts/thecentaur/1991192/>







Horses nip the top of grass and then move on.

© BETTY NIXON

## Cattle grazing costs taxpayers billions

By Karen Sussman

Isaac DeBlasio, an animal rights activist and junior fellow at a conservatarian think tank focused on free market, pro-liberty solutions for fighting animal cruelty, reported on March 25 what we have known for years. In his Townhall piece, "Cattle Grazing Program Exposed: Costs Taxpayers Billions," he makes the following points:

- That approximately 50 percent of fully assessed BLM public rangelands fail to meet designated land health standards.
- There is overwhelming evidence showing the failure to meet those standards is due to cattle on BLM-subsidized lands.
- In 2015, it was found that through the prior decade, taxpayers reportedly lost \$1 billion on the grazing program.
- Cattle are on 155 million acres while horses are on 26.9 million acres.

The above acreage is down from the original acreage of over 47 million acres that horses had in 1971.

Cows have no upper incisors and wrap their tongue around the grass, pulling their head up to tear the grass off and often pulling the roots out. They also camp in one area until all the grass is grazed down to the nub.

We know that it costs ranchers only \$1.35 an AUM per month to graze nearly 2,000 pounds of beef. This would include a cow that is 1,200 pounds and her calf, approximately 800 pounds.

*Can anyone tell me the following: Can you feed a mouse for \$1.35 per month? Truly, what living creature can you feed at that price per month?*

We also know that the livestock grazing program takes up 155 million acres of land and yet produces less than 2 percent of the beef in the U.S.

We must ask, with the information presented in this magazine, why does it appear that public lands ranchers hold all the power? We, the majority of the people—comprised of more than 92 percent of Americans who support wild horses and burros—can hold this power if we are educated about the issues and support the organizations like ISPMB that can make a difference. ■

“Over 1 billion annually is spent on drought subsidies through the IRS and USDA, shielding ranchers from the financial consequences of unsustainable grazing during a climate crisis.”

Range Damage from Cattle Far Exceeds Wild Horse Impacts,  
PEER, May 29, 2024



# Ways in Which You Can Help

## ISPMB's Gila Herd – Keep Them Running Free

Supporting ISPMB is so very important. We are the only major wild horse organization that is adamantly opposed to the use of birth control on wild horses and burros. We know that with continued use it causes permanent sterility in horses and burros in as short as three consecutive years of dosing.

We are the only organization that has studied wild herd behaviors of horses that haven't been captured in up to 50 years before coming to ISPMB.

We know what is needed to transform how wild horses are managed on public lands thus protecting these animals and guaranteeing their survival.

### Ways to donate:

- Visit our "Spirit of the Ancients" page and sponsor a horse, mare and foal, band or herd.
- Becoming a sustaining member and donate monthly.
- Gift an Acre of land.
- Visit our back cover and see the areas of giving from \$5 to \$50,000.
- Most importantly, please remember us in your will. Your lasting legacy and name will be remembered on the wall of donors at our interpretive site. We hope to secure property within the next year.



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## How to Save Public Lands Wild Horses and Burros

Understanding the plight of our wild horses and burros is the best defense. We encourage you to read our magazine and share our magazine with your neighbors and friends. Knowledge is the key to their freedom so share your wisdom with as many people as you can.

Above all, be prepared to write to your Congressman and Senators should we ask you. Remember to e-mail unless you write a post card. All regular U.S. mail is likely still quarantined for several weeks until deemed safe due to letter poisoning with anthrax in 2001. At this point, we do not know this administration's stance on wild horses and burros. We will keep you posted. ■

“ Understanding the issues is key to the preservation of our wild horses and burros. ”





© KAREN A. SUSSMAN

## *Make a Difference & Give Today* to Save Our Wild Horses and Burros

ARE YOU PUTTING YOUR DOLLARS TO THE BEST USE? 18 YEARS  
OF UNDERSTANDING WILD HERD BEHAVIORS HAS LED ISPMB  
TO KNOW HOW BEST TO MANAGE WILD HORSES.

**YOUR DONATION TODAY WILL HELP US TO BRING THIS MESSAGE FORWARD!**



© KAREN A. SUSSMAN



# ***Your support is critical***

to the future of all wild horses  
and burros in our country. Please  
help us in our fight to bring the  
truth forward that there is no  
overpopulation of wild horses  
and transform how these animals are  
managed on public lands.

**We are so grateful  
for your support.**



## **We Protect Your Privacy**

We do not sell or trade your name to anyone. This has been ISPMB's practice since our inception.



# Spirit of the ANCIENTS

## SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM



**ISPMB manages an extremely rare Spanish herd of wild horses.  
Your sponsorship will help us keep them running free!**

Become a part of the sponsorship program with the International Society for the Protection of Mustangs and Burros (ISPMB), the oldest wild horse and burro organization in the United States.  
Your sponsorship helps with the care of our Gila herd and supports ISPMB's conservation goals.

### Sponsor a wild horse \$150/year



Sponsor a harem stallion, mare, foal, bachelor or stallion and receive a certificate with a photo of your horse and the history of the gila Herd.

### Sponsor a Mare and Foal \$500/year



Sponsor this beautiful mare and her foal showing their close bond and follow them as the foal grows. Receive a certificate with their photo. This makes a wonderful gift that someone you love is sure to cherish.

### Sponsor a Wild Horse Band \$1,000/year



Receive a certificate featuring a unique band from the Gila Herd. You'll also receive an 8x10" colored photo along with the herd's history.

### Sponsor a Herd \$5,000/year



Receive a certificate, an 8x10" colored photo and a three-day vacation viewing, photographing and interacting with the herds. Your name will be inscribed on our donor wall as a founding member of our International Wild Horse and Burro Heritage Center.

**Join our Spirit of the Ancients sponsorship program. To donate:**

VISIT OUR SPONSORSHIP PAGE:  
<https://ispmb.org/sponsor-a-horse/>

MAIL DONATION TO:  
International Society for the Protection  
of Mustangs and Burros  
P.O. Box 435, Rapid City, SD 57709-0435



# Safeguarding their Future

A gift to the wild horses and burros in your will or trust will help ensure the safeguarding of their future. Your name will be inscribed on our donor wall at the "Garden of Hope" at our Heritage CENTER.

We are extremely grateful to all of our members who have notified us of their intent to remember our wild horses and burros. This Lasting Legacy will be forever remembered as visitors tour our up-and-coming CENTER.

## We remember our members who have passed.



### ***Justyne Van Dyke***

a faithful member since the 1970s.



### ***William Boyd Miller***

who learned to love wild horses through his sister, ISPMB editor Patti Roth.

### ***Diana Saunders***

a supporting member for many years



### ***Red Feather***

We are sad to report that after publishing the article about Red Feather who was rescued at 7 years of age, we received notification that he passed at the age of 30. We know he is missed dearly by his family.



## **GIFT AN ACRE OF LAND \$2,500**

Giftng an Acre of Land assures that our wild horses will be running free and assures your name will be inscribed on our donor wall as a founding member of the International Wild Horse and Burro Heritage CENTER.



# *Your Generosity Helps the Horses!*

WE CAN PUT ANY SIZE DONATION TO WORK:

*\$5 ..... Carrots for one horse*

*\$10 ..... Small bale of hay for one horse*

*\$20 ..... Senior feed for our elders*

*\$90 ..... Large bale of hay\**

*\$150 ..... Sponsor a horse for a year*

*\$500 ..... Sponsor a mare and foal for a year*

*\$1,000 ..... Sponsor a band for a year*

*\$5,000 .... Sponsor a herd for a year*

*\$50,000 ... Feed Gila herd for a year\*\**

*\*Feeds an average horse for approximately a month*

*\*\*Become a lifetime member of ISPMB*



ISPMB's Gila herd

Layout | Design | Print



The Market  
Builder, Inc.

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