

ISPMB  
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2024  
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



PO Box 435, Rapid City, SD 57709  
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# A Heartwarming Story about Red Feather, the Million-Dollar Pony



Red Feather, seen in his younger years, is a beloved Nevada mustang adopted through ISPMB's adoption program in Arizona. Adopted at 6 and now 30, he is still thriving with the same family.

In May of the year 2000, ISPMB's office was preparing to leave Arizona and move to South Dakota where two of its wild herds already resided. This was a big move and ISPMB had nearly 20 rescued wild horses that remained in its adoption program still looking for homes. (See *President's Report*.)

It was this May day when the rescue horses were being transported to a holding area awaiting transportation to South Dakota that life changed for Sabrina Liska and her family.

As Sabrina recalls:

"A friend of mine asked me to come over to help get his place ready for a temporary housing of a group of horses that were transferring to another state soon. I thought nothing of it as I had lived in a very horse-friendly area where such activities were common. So, I went to clean pens and make sure all fencing was secure. As we were working, I found out that these horses were once wild mustangs in the custody of ISPMB. Having a once-wild mustang of my own at home that I loved, this was awesome news and I could not wait to meet them!

"The white stock trailer pulled in. Some of the horses were here! In the midst of these horses, I caught a glimpse of ear tips through the slats of the trailer. Oh wow, they have a baby mustang in there. They could not open the trailer doors fast enough for me to see this baby. When the doors opened, I saw the equine attached to those ear tips. I just melted. It was a

mustang pony! He was all red except for the white stripe on his face. He was fully grown with an extremely soft look in his eyes. I was smitten and knew I had to have him. His name was Red Feather, a mustang from Nevada.

"I signed the ISPMB contract, and I took that halter-broke 12.2 hands little fellow home. He was six-years old according to his BLM freeze brand, just a year younger than my youngest son. I planned to saddle train Red Feather for him."

Sabrina shares that after having Red Feather professionally trained, she rode him on the trail and in the arena for two years. She described him as a quick learner and very easy to ride. Red Feather turned out to be a great mount not only for her son for many years but for other friends who had small children who wanted to learn how to ride.

Sabrina continues:

"My young son started riding him on the trails. Red Feather had a beautiful slow jog and that is all my son wanted to do with him. A canter was just too scary at this point. We joined 4-H and they did slow gymkhanas. As he came to rounding the last barrel, we would yell, 'unleash the beast.' We did walk/trot shows and many miles on the trail. I still rode him occasionally because he was just that fun and a steady Eddie wherever we would go. And we went everywhere!

"I remember the trail ride up the mountain with my son and a friend of mine. Once up there, we let our horses rest for a few minutes and took in the view. As we were ready to head back down, my son said to Red Feather, 'Okay Feathers, you got me up here, now you have to get me back down.' Red Feather, affectionately known as Feathers, did as he was told. We had many, many safe reliable trail rides with that pony. He took great care of my son for years."

Sabrina relates that when her son outgrew Feathers he then went on loan to a friend whose granddaughter fell in love with him and used him for competitive trail riding. From there he went to another friend's daughter who rode him bareback adorning him with ribbons in his hair and gifting him with a black and white zebra blanket that he could wear in the winter. He was truly loved by so many children.

This year Sabrina and her family moved from Arizona to Alabama. Red Feather turned 30 this year and is still thriving. He now has a 15-acre pasture in which to roam and graze during the day. At night he has a barn with fans and bedding. He is grey around his eyes and his vision is not what it used to be. Sabrina says he loves his senior mash and is still so sweet and loving. This is his forever home.

Sabrina says, "For years, my friends would call him the "million-dollar pony" and they were not wrong! I was in the right place at the right time to be blessed with such a wonderful animal. Thank you ISPMB for trusting me with Red Feather."

One can only wish that all horses adopted out to families had Red Feather's story. ■

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**Cover:** The Gila Herd is the last herd to receive recognition as wild horses under the 1971 law. In 1996, the BLM was going to remove these animals as unauthorized livestock. ISPMB president Karen Sussman did a three-month investigation in Gila Bend, Arizona with more than 12 hours of interviews by local ranchers who stated the horses were there before they even came to this territory. In doing so, there was sufficient data to send to then-Secretary of the Interior, the Honorable Bruce Babbitt. Within 24 hours, Secretary Babbitt called the Phoenix BLM and stated they were to manage those horses as wild and free-roaming under the law! It was another four years, after receiving a complaint from a rancher, that the BLM removed the so-called problem animals, which they estimated to be half of the herd, estimated at 75 animals. There were actually 31. ISPMB adopted the horses for preservation. When the final census was done, there were no wild horses left in the Herd Area. ISPMB's Conservation Program began.



Sabrina's son stands proudly beside Red Feather, who was saddle-trained just for him.



It was love at first sight when Sabrina Liska saw a gentle-eyed Nevada mustang jump out of a trailer into ISPMB's adoption yard.



Children loved to groom and spoil the adopted pony, Red Feather.

A trusting wild Gila horse gently nuzzles  
ISPMB President Karen Sussman

© MELISSA FARLOW

# President's REPORT

*A positive and compassionate  
attitude truly can change  
the world to create good!*

By Karen A. Sussman

In reconnecting recently with Sabrina Liska and her wonderful pony, Red Feather, I am reminded about the compassion and fervor that abounds for saving America's wild horses and burros. In return, the benefits of such actions last a lifetime. They are eternal.

This brings me to ISPMB's Rescue Program that we operated in Arizona from 1990 until 2000. It was a time when the BLM was being scrutinized for allegedly selling wild horses for slaughter, known as the Del Rio investigation. The BLM looked very good in our state as NO wild horse or burro were sold for slaughter at that time. The BLM was successful because ISPMB bought every wild horse or burro that went through the auctions. How did that happen you ask?

It all started with rescuing three starving wild horses that were being auctioned in Holbrook, Arizona. It was my first auction to attend and I was "hell bent" on saving these horses! I approached the three killer buyers there and smiling and jesting, I said to them, "I just want you guys to know that you can't bid on these three horses because I'm taking them home." Of course, that caused a stir amongst them, and they said: "You can't do that!"

When these three horses came up for bid, because I did not know what I was doing, I held my hand up the entire time. I know I paid a few hundred dollars more than they were worth but I got them. Afterward, talking to one of the buyers, he said, "Why would you want these horses anyway? The BLM's program is so screwed up." We had a nice talk and I invited him to lunch that week as we both lived in Scottsdale. We agreed on a lot of things and he understood how much I loved these horses. He then became our buyer—and I never attended another auction again.

He was the biggest buyer in the state of Arizona. We did not lose one animal! He even brought a horse back from Texas kill pens because he was so beautiful. He said if we did not want him, he would take him back again on his next trip. Of course, we kept him! Near the end of our work together, he told a woman who wanted to sell her small horse to slaughter to call me as I was going to get the horse anyway. She said she wanted the horse slaughtered but relented and donated the horse to ISPMB. It was this relationship that allowed ISPMB to purchase other horses that were facing slaughter in different states as our buyer gave references to other buyers for us, saying that the check would be good and let the horse go!

The horses were housed at an auction yard in Tempe after purchase by our buyer. While generally, no humane group was welcomed there and definitely no cameras were allowed, ISPMB had a solid relationship built over those few years. This relationship was built on trust. If it was a Sunday and the only day we could pick up our horse or horses, we could do so with no one there and then send them the check on Monday. We were trusted and we trusted our buyer to come through for us. It was the perfect working relationship. And best of all, the horses were bought at rock-bottom prices by our buyer, which he passed on to us.

This all ended when ISPMB moved to South Dakota as we began acquiring wild herds in conservation and our buyer was retiring out of the "kill" business at the same time.

During those years, ISPMB rescued well over 100 animals which were placed into permanent homes. At the time of our move, we had about 15 animals that weren't placed as of yet, like Red Feather, but those left lived out their lives with ISPMB in South Dakota. Many of these horses suffered abuse at the hands of their adopters or were extremely stressed from how they were handled during the adoption process. These horses never did find homes, but they did find a forever home with ISPMB.

What is distressing after running such a wonderfully successful program encompassing the entire state of Arizona is the heightened division between opposing camps of people, including opposing views by wild horse groups. ISPMB knows that working together is in the best interest of wild horses and burros. The world is so divided now, groups can no longer hear each other.

This brings me to ISPMB's first-hand knowledge that wild horses, when undisturbed from roundups for years and years, actually limit their own growth due to the wisdom of the stallions and the stability of their band structures. There is no need for birth control which has deleterious effects on the mares and can cause permanent sterility in a few short years of consecutive use. And who are we to determine who gets birth control and who does not? Shouldn't it be the animals, whose evolution over all these millions of years, surviving longer than most mammals on earth, who determine survivability by allowing them to choose their families? We know from ISPMB's studies that bands will stay together for a lifetime!

And most importantly, birth control is being given when there has never even been a study done by the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service (the Agencies) on how best to manage wild horses and burros by understanding their behaviors and true nature. Instead, they are managed like domestic livestock instead of the wildlife they are.

Yes, ISPMB has studied our two herds for more than 20 years, giving us great knowledge of what it takes to keep a herd stable and limiting its own population. Now we are applying that information to what we see in the Heber wild horses in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests in northern Arizona.

Bringing this **TRUTH** forward at this time is most critical to the future of all wild horses and burros in our country. And at a time when **POWER** and **MONEY** speak louder than any truth or even listening to truth:

- When wild horse groups are receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars to implement birth control which has deleterious effects on the animals;
- When wild horse groups' missions are built upon giving birth control and some groups believing the animals will never have to go through the adoption program, which has proven to be not true;
- When wild horse groups who have never studied herd behaviors are making management decisions for our wild horses with the government Agencies;
- When the Agencies never followed through in 1980 by doing a 5 to 10-year study of wild horses and burros to understand their behaviors so they could manage accordingly as recommended by the National Academy of Sciences; and
- When the Agencies' leaders believed and attitudes still prevail that the Wild Horse and Burro Program would be eliminated in less than a decade after the passage of the Act to protect them.

The above are all failed missions for the organizations and failed policies for the Agencies who manage "your" wild horses and burros. Those that are suffering the most from these failures are America's wild horses and burros.

We ask you for your help, your financial support, to bring the **TRUTH** forward so that future generations can be assured that wild horses and burros will exist on our public lands into the future. The time is now to unite and to hear the truth. ■



Karen A. Sussman  
President, ISPMB



© KAREN A. SUSSMAN

# Your Gila Herd Update – The Herd that Keeps on Giving

By Karen A. Sussman

This herd continues to amaze all of us. The herd ranges in ages from over 20 to our newborn foals this year. We are pleased to have eight new foals this year and seven last year. The herd is stable and doing well in spite of the continuing drought here in South Dakota.

We anticipate a very cold winter coming, according to some reports. That is, if we can ever be sure of the weather. Unlike years ago, weather is no longer predictable! October has been 20 degrees higher in temperature than our normal.

Living amongst the animals now for their lifetimes has showered me with great discoveries and understanding of their behaviors. To be out in nature walking amongst them is exhilarating. There is no better medicine than to be accepted into the herd by these extremely intelligent, kind and loving animals. They have known me for all of their lives and there has been great trust and bonding with them.

They definitely differentiate between vehicles coming into the pasture. Their favorite, which sometimes they surround, is ISPMB's farm truck. Occasionally this truck brings treats like small bales of hay that they just love. They appear quite wary when any other trucks come in their pasture. And for sure their favorite color is red, the color of our truck.

After all these years with these magnificent horses, it is the trust that I have in them and the trust that they have in me which is absolutely extraordinary. Yet they remain wild to make all their decisions and do what they want to do. I am just happy to be part of their lives.

We thank all of you for helping us with your financial support, making sure that this herd continues its beautiful life in conservation. You should come and visit! ■

# ISPMB Says Goodbye to One of Its Most Courageous Horses of the Gila Herd

By Karen A. Sussman



© KAREN SUSSMAN

Beautiful Tierra lived an independent, long and free life with her herd members, despite her handicap.

In 2004 a filly was born to one of our original mares named Angelica. We named this cute little filly, Tierra. She was dark dun and had the most beautiful eyes. She was very wild like her mother as we had just acquired the Gila herd in the year 2000.

She injured her left front ankle early on around the age of four. Reviewing the injury at that time with our vet, it was something that she could live with. She continued her life of discovery, excitement, and playfulness. However, her left front leg no longer looked normal, but was slightly deformed, and she had a limp. It was noticeable to visitors who came to see the horses.

In 2010, when we had a large corporation visiting for a week with its members, someone questioned why we would have this horse. Why wouldn't we euthanize this horse? It was a fair question as the horse industry kills most horses that have any deformity or can no longer be of service to make money for that industry. My comment was equated to human disabilities. I said, "Should that mean that we euthanize anyone in a wheelchair because they no longer can walk?"

We all made a promise to Tierra that if she should ever have pain in that leg that she could no longer bear, then we would put her down. It is notable that if wild horses have undue pain, they will lose weight and not be able to keep it on. Or they would lay down more often. Neither of which Tierra did.

Then in 2014, my employees called me to the pasture to look at Tierra again. It appeared that she reinjured her leg. It is a day that is indelible forever in my mind. I immediately came to the pasture. Tierra was not a horse that would come close to you but that day she passed within two feet of me. She stopped abruptly and looked directly at me as if to say, "Don't do it!"

(continued)

This behavior of Tierra could not be interpreted in any other way than her communicating to me her wishes. I promised her that I would not euthanize her and would only do so when the time came that she could no longer navigate anymore.

There is much more to this story that will go into a children’s book someday. She no longer lived with her herd after 2016. This horse had strength and courage beyond any horse that I’ve ever known. In the last several years of her life, she learned how to eat carrots with her two pasture mates. At those times, I actually could feel her muzzle as she would eat a carrot right from my hand. Yet, I could never touch her.

While Tierra contributed no foals to the Gila herd, she was an icon of survivorship. She was an icon of independence. And she was an icon of determination. Even with her handicap, she showed tremendous strength. She was respected by her herd members.

I felt honored that she entrusted me to care for her. That trust was exhibited on the day we euthanized her. There was no suffering at the end as I promised her. She was 20 years old when she passed on October 17, 2024. Her memory will be with us forever.

We must fight for animals’ lives even when they no longer look attractive to the public or to the horse industry. They deserve to live their lives to the best of their ability. Tierra was living proof of all those positive qualities of a great horse to cross our paths. May she rest in peace now.

*And may we have compassion for all living with disabilities.* ■



# Native American Words of Wisdom

By Paul Crane Tohlakai

Being Indigenous was to recognize and accept the natural species needed to propagate its own kind on land shared. It was to be Caretakers to insure continued harmony and balance to flora-fauna pre-colonization.

Our challenge today is to recognize and accept what colonization has done to what may have been the healthiest land on Mother Earth. Wildlife, including the horse nation, thrived after coming home to their point of origin. They complimented Indigenous species in the Circle of Life here. The ecosystem back in the early 1800s harbored endless bounty. The Great Plains, in particular, have been described as the “Serengeti of North America.”

Things changed. The very source of life—clean air, water, plants and Mother Earth herself—has since been assaulted, desecrated and exploited for over 500 years now. The very source of life is now a resource to exploit. How long can it sustain human overconsumption?

Wild free-roaming species, such as the horse, bison, eagle, wolves, bears and yes, their human counterpart, are still subjects of silent genocide.

Native American point of view, perspective and wisdom for the Horse nation is using “horse sense.” In the circle of life, they are a vital component to insure our future. We humans are the source of problems as we have elevated ourselves at the top of the food chain, not complimenting the circle of life. ■

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.



# Public Lands Conservation Rule Finalized

## Utah, Alaska and Wyoming Rebel, Threatening Privatization

The final rule for adding “conservation” to one of the Multiple Uses on public lands was finalized this year and published in the Federal Register on May 9, 2024 under the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management 43 CFR parts 1600 to 6100.

Multiple Use was defined under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) which passed in Congress in 1976.

The rule was intended to elevate conservation to an equal status with traditional energy development, resource extraction and livestock grazing agendas. This rule sought to correct a system that has been wildly imbalanced:

- 90% of BLM lands are open to drilling
- 60% are leased for grazing
- Only 14% are managed for conservation

While ISPMB responded to the rule, our concern shows that BLM has not been able to follow the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act by monitoring their habitat and only removing the excess. How will they manage conservation? It appears that this could be farmed out to non-profit groups or other agencies.

The Public Lands Rule establishes a framework to ensure healthy landscapes, abundant wildlife habitat, clean water,

and balanced decision-making on public lands.

Currently Utah and Wyoming have sued the federal government in June over the new rule stating the BLM sidestepped the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in issuing the new rule.

These two states are home to 41 million BLM acres of BLM’s total 245 million acres nationwide. In their ongoing fight, the states have recently filed another lawsuit to force the federal government to dispose of unprotected public land under its jurisdiction.

If the Supreme Court rules in Utah’s favor, it could create a precedent for other states to rush in to control federal lands in their states. This would end public lands as we know it across our country.

While Utah has excluded lands in the National Conservation Land system (14% nationwide) from this current case, according to the BLM, there would be 86% of lands nationwide that are not protected.

Utah’s motivation for disposing of public lands is to negate the Public Lands Rule change. The case also deals a significant blow to the fight against climate change.

Bottom line, those lands would no longer belong to each and every American as they do now. They would be state owned and could be privatized even further. ■

# Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility Demand Action by the BLM

## Published with permission from PEER

PETITION | Demand that BLM Address Overgrazing & Restore Land Health:  
<https://peer.org/petition-demand-blm-address-overgrazing-restore-land-health/>

Too often, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is failing to protect healthy rangelands on the 155 million acres devoted to its commercial livestock grazing program.

Healthy rangelands support a diverse array of plant and animal species, provide essential habitats, and promote biodiversity. They offer critical refuge for threatened and endangered species, contribute to soil stability, and prevent erosion. Intact vegetation cover helps to reduce soil erosion by wind and water, protecting the land from degradation.

Rangelands aid in maintaining water quality and hydrological cycles. They act as natural watersheds, recharge groundwater, support stream flow during dry periods, and mitigate the impacts of floods and droughts. Rangelands help ease the impacts of climate change by acting as carbon sinks that hold carbon in vegetation and soils and reduce greenhouse gas concentrations.

**Millions of acres of our public lands are not healthy.** PEER’s recent analysis of BLM data PEER found that tens of millions of acres are in poor ecological health. Specifically, PEER found that more than 56 million acres of land assessed by BLM failed BLM’s land health standards. BLM’s data shows that overgrazing is the biggest cause of land health failure across the West by far. Livestock is identified as the major cause of failure on at least 37 million acres. BLM has not completed land health evaluations on over 36 million acres of grazing allotments.

To enhance its ability to manage public land effectively, BLM urgently needs to improve its land health program on grazing allotments and address the problems of overgrazing on public lands.

## Please join us and call on BLM to commit to change.

BLM must do a better job of protecting our public land. Our future depends on it. ■

# PEER’s Assessment of the Health of Public Lands

## Background

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) oversees over 245 million acres of public land, which is more than any other federal agency. BLM balances the competing interests of conservation, energy development, recreation, ecosystem health and livestock production. 155 million acres of the land managed by BLM are leased grazing allotments of varying size. Rangeland health – or Land Health Standards - refers to the quality and sustainability of waterways, habitats, soil, flora and fauna on the range (43 CFR §§ 4180.1, 4180.2). Many factors impact rangeland health including off-road vehicles, drought, the spread of invasive species, and fire. However, BLM identifies livestock grazing as the most frequently cited cause of range failure.

## 2024 Findings

- BLM has assessed Land Health Standards (LHS) on approximately 114 million acres of grazed public lands. They have yet to assess nearly 36 million acres.
- Of the total acres assessed, 50% (57 million acres) fail to meet LHS, an area approximately the size of the state of Illinois.
- Of the 50% of the lands that failed to meet LHS, the agency said that livestock overgrazing is a significant reason for failure in 33% of cases or approximately 38 million acres.
- There are significant disparities across states, with states like Nevada showing high failure rates largely due to livestock, while New Mexico and Montana exhibit much lower failure rates.



A Heber horse in the Apache-Sitgreaves Forests nips off the tops of grass as she grazes, leaving the roots intact and enabling the grass to grow back. This behavior differentiates wild horses from cattle, which pull grass out by the roots, destroying entire root systems.

- In Wyoming, a massive allotment of over 950,000 public acres is failing to meet LHS. BLM reports livestock overgrazing as a significant cause.
- Records reveal that many allotments have never been assessed, including a 1.4-million-acre allotment in Nevada.
- **Wild horses are cited as “a significant disturbance factor” in only 77 allotments (less than 1%), and 60 times in conjunction with livestock. (ISPMB’s emphasis by bolding)**
- A significant portion of the assessed lands that are “meeting” standards are actually only “making significant progress” towards meeting the standards, not actually meeting them.
- Since PEER last analyzed the data in 2020 there has been a notable increase in the number of allotments that BLM classified as failing, but without an identified cause. This suggests a need for better data collection and improved assessment techniques.

## Range Recommendations

Bureau of Land Management should:

1. Create a central BLM geodatabase containing rangeland health evaluation records. Combine and coordinate all agency databases so that it puts all the data to work and can use all available data in decision making. BLM and the public need real time access to improve management effectiveness.
2. Complete and update Land Health Standards evaluations. Currently, many allotments lack recent evaluations, with some data being outdated by twenty years.
3. Commit to utilizing the data to make land use decisions. For instance, if overgrazing has been identified as a cause for failure, BLM can reduce livestock numbers or adjust the season of use. Similarly, if the cause of failure is off-road vehicles, the agency can restrict permits.
4. Analyze broader trends to identify discrepancies in allotment management across different regions. For example, BLM has identified more than 40% of the lands in Idaho, Nevada and Wyoming as failing to meet Land Health Standards, compared to just 2% in New Mexico.
5. Focus on reviewing and managing allotments located within Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Wilderness Study Areas, Wilderness and Monuments. It is crucial to preserve the historical, cultural, and scenic values of these special lands and to protect fish, wildlife, and other natural resources.

View the full report at: [peer.org/rangeland-health-trends](https://peer.org/rangeland-health-trends)

## BLM Underfunded and Understaffed

BLM is grappling with severe underfunding and staffing shortages. The agency is tasked with the complex management of lands for multiple uses while facing growing demands due to an increase in land management responsibilities and a surge in visitation and recreational use. Yet BLM has been consistently expected to achieve more with fewer resources. Between 2003 and 2020, BLM’s workforce was reduced by about 20%, maintaining a staff level of around 10,000 from 2020 to 2022. This is in stark contrast to the National Park Service, which employs 25 staff members per 100,000 acres, compared to BLM’s four. To enhance its capability to manage lands effectively, BLM needs to urgently address these staffing deficits and prioritize job quality improvements. ■

## FOOTNOTE by ISPMB

ISPMB records 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 the majority of damage to our public lands is done by livestock and not wild horses. This agency has had many BLM whistle-blowers over the past who have given them important data, enabling them to provide information to the public.

You can access their website at [PEER.org](https://peer.org)



# BLM Wins Lawsuits Allowing Them to Eliminate Two Wyoming Wild Horse Herds

On August 14, a federal judge ruled in favor of the BLM, allowing them to significantly reduce wild horses in the checkerboard areas across southern Wyoming.

A checkerboard area is an unfenced area of alternating one-mile square blocks of public and private land set up in the 1860s.

In 2023, the BLM amended its Resource Management Plan (RMP) to eliminate the wild horses in the checkerboard area. This was largely due to an agreement that was entered into by the BLM and local ranchers representing the Rock Springs Grazing Association.

In a separate ruling, the judge denied the ranchers' request to force the BLM to remove all of the wild horses immediately.

In the Rock Springs area, it is the Salt Wells and the Great Divide Basin herds that will be totally removed - eliminated. The White Mountain and the Adobe Town herd of the Red Desert will be allowed to persist.

The three organizations (API, AWHC, WWP) that filed the lawsuit have appealed the decision.

The Wyoming BLM is conducting a NEPA study as of June this year in order to remove 5,000 wild horses from three of the four horse management areas, including the two complete herd eliminations.

Due to the appeal, it is unlikely the required environmental assessment (EA) will be completed. However, the horses may still be rounded up in the area. ■

This is the largest family band of the Heber herd. Large family bands show the stability of a herd free from roundups.



## Update on the Heber Herd

We are happy to announce that the horses continue to live peacefully in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest going on nigh 20 years. While we await the draft record of decision, we expect no real action until late this year or early next year. Keep on calling Secretary Vilsack asking that he make this herd a study herd! Call 202-720-3631. For more information, please go to our website at [www.ispmb.org](http://www.ispmb.org). This herd, if studied, could transform how wild horses are managed in our country. Your continued help is so appreciated. ■



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



Grass is plentiful for the Heber wild horses.

## *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!**

# Take ACTION Save the Heber Herd

PLEASE CALL , E-MAIL, OR WRITE TO  
SECRETARY VILSACK

202-720-3631

EMAIL: SEC.AG@USDA.GOV

Address your letter to:

The Honorable Secretary Tom Vilsack  
1400 Independence Ave. S.W. Ste 200A  
Washington, D.C. 20250 or call 202-720-3631



BUCKSKIN FAMILY OF HEBER  
WILD HORSES IN THE FOREST

© BETTY NIXON



© ISTCOK PHOTO

## Update on Przewalski's Horses in Ukraine

1. We are asking that you declare the Heber herd in northern Arizona in the Apache-Sitgreaves Forest a "study" herd with your authority in Section 10 of the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act.
2. The National Academy of Sciences recommended a 7 to 10-year study in 1980-1982 to understand the behaviors of these wild horses and burros.
3. Your Agencies, the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, decided not to do this study and stated the following in 1984: "The most pressing question concerning future research for the Agencies is whether the benefits of increased knowledge and efficiency will justify the costs."
4. The Heber herd has cost the Forest Service very little over the past 18 years and the herd remains stable and intact. This herd is doing a great job at reseeding the forest after the big fire in 2002.
  - There were 300-400 wild horses in 2005; and in 2021, there were only 414 horses, which is less than a 3% growth.
  - According to your Agencies' miscalculated data of a 20% annual growth that they use, there now should be 4,800 wild horses in the forest.
5. The yearly costs of removing wild horses from their rightful land, separating them from their families, and storing them in privately-owned pastures have cost taxpayers \$77 million dollars annually. Certainly, the study that should have been done in 1982 and

onward would have saved taxpayers millions and millions of dollars and would have saved the herds.

6. Finally, is this not the administration that believes in science guiding your decisions? Then this study will TRANSFORM how wild horses should be managed.

In writing or calling, you are taking action that might just save these magnificent forest horses. And remember, there is power in numbers.

### PLEASE WRITE TO YOUR CONGRESSPEOPLE

1. Ask that Congress appropriate funding to study the Heber herd residing in the Apache-Sitgreaves Forest in northern Arizona.
2. State that this study must be done, not by the FS or the BLM, but by independent scientists who are well-versed in wild horse ecology and behaviors of equids from around the world.
3. Ask that there is a moratorium on removals to allow the band structures within the herds to stabilize once again.
4. Demand that the Agencies stop using birth control of any kind, which permanently sterilizes horses within three consecutive years of use.
5. Repeat points 2-6 in the above-mentioned letter to Secretary Vilsack. ■

Each magazine published, ISPMB follows the plight of these rare Przewalski's horses in Ukraine because they have been held in conservation in the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone since 1998. ISPMB has not been able to find any information on the condition of these animals since the onset of the war. This Exclusion Zone is highly radioactive, and we read that before the war the horses and wildlife there were flourishing.

The Exclusion Zone was declared on April 26, 1986 when the nuclear power plant suffered an explosion rendering a swath of land of a 19-mile radius of the plant uninhabitable. Authorities believe the area will be unfit for humans for 24,000 years. The Russians ordered 100,000 Chernobyl survivors to flee their homes at that time. (*Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union at that time before the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991.*)

It is extremely important to note that, according to experts, the animals' success is due to the lack of intense exploitation of the area by humans since the accident. ■



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Cave drawing of Botai horse

# Domestication of the First Wild Horses Began 5,500 Years Ago

According to researchers, no truly wild horses are left in the world, including the Przewalski's horses

In recent years, scientific consensus has emerged linking the Botai culture of northern Kazakhstan with the first domestication of horses dating back to the 4th millennium BCE. The findings of these scientists through DNA sequencing show that the Przewalski's wild horses are actually descendants of the Botai horses that escaped and turned wild. The title of the last living wild horses in the world has just been stripped from the Przewalski's. ■



Przewalski's horse



## The Story of Fiona and Shrek, Przewalski's Horses

### How did they end up in a Cedar City auction in Utah?

While we know that auction houses usually spell doom for horses in our country, six endangered and highly monitored Przewalski's horses ended up in several of them. One house was located in Aurora, Colorado, one in Peabody, Kansas, and the last one was in Cedar City, Utah.

Together there were six horses and only one is surviving today, Shrek. Fiona was euthanized due to her age and medical problems recently. The third of the six died before being placed, leaving the other three unaccountable for from their journeys through many auctions.

The breaking story in The New York Times ran Oct. 16, 2024 and asked how this could happen. The Times reported that even the keeper of the Przewalski's horse studbook for the Association of Zoos and Aquariums Species Survival Plan was not aware of these missing horses. DNA testing at Texas A&M University proved that these two last survivors were Przewalski's horses.

The Times also noted that the animals were purchased at a Missouri exotic animal auction more than a decade ago.

Apparently Fiona and Shrek were not happy in their many situations. Even with the best trainer in Utah, they lost their pastured home because they would break down the fences to get out. This trainer let them go when he was approached by a man who promised to get the horses in a zoo. No questions were asked and they then ended up at the Cedar City auction! (Please see footnote below.)

How did that happen? The Times reports that the international Przewalski's breeding program manages the bloodlines of the original dozen horses to bolster the breed. A small number of animals born in the zoos are released to private hands if they are not genetically useful to that population. If those animals had foals, they might never be recorded in a studbook.

ISPMB feels this story becomes even broader than Fiona and Shrek's story. It is the story of all horses in the United States that are continued to be sold through the slaughter pipeline to Canada and Mexico. This is one of the most frightening and gruesome ends for our four-legged partners that helped human civilization to survive. Slaughtering horses and burros in the United States is illegal now but there is always the undercurrent to bring it back. What we must strive for is to end it completely by stopping the transport to other countries without any legislative loopholes. You can always write your Congresspeople and ask that this be done! It is an action that must be taken by each and every one of us.

ISPMB is very proud that we were the first organization that brought attention to horses being slaughtered in our country, along with our first president, Wild Horse Annie. *We ended the massive slaughter of wild horses and burros on public lands in 1971.*

We are not finished. There is still much work to do. The most important on our list is to change how wild horses and burros are managed, thereby literally ending the massive roundups that continually destroy the stable family band structures that allow these animals to limit their own growth. ■



### ISPMB footnote by Karen Sussman

Early on in my career with horses, an employee of a large breeding and training breed farm told me how he made a lot of extra money on the weekends by scouring the "horse for sale" ads in the local papers. There would be several ads showing "free ponies to good homes." This employee was in his late twenties and would go to these homes and pick up these ponies assuring the people that he was surprising his child for his birthday, when in fact he wasn't even married!

Thinking of the above story about this poor trainer who thought he was doing good by giving Fiona and Shrek to this shady dealer who took them to auction, we must always remember, "Beware of the Buyer and not the Seller!" ■

# Thousands of Australia’s Brumbies are Shot in New South Wales

The new data from the Government of New South Wales (NSW) indicates that more wild horses have been removed from Kosciuszko National Park (KNP) in the past 11 months since the aerial shooting methods were introduced than in the previous 21 years.

Since ISPMB last reported, the controversy between the proponents of the brumbies and the conservationists who welcomed their removal stemmed from the numbers of horses in the park. The brumby advocates raised \$78,000 on their Go Fund Me page and hired Airborne Logic to count the animals. This aerial survey found 569 horses in an area of 212 square kilometers within the northern part of the park. Their results were published in late April, 2024. This censusing was disputed by NSW.

NSW estimated the population between 12,797 and 21,760 in a survey done in October 2023.

By law, the National Parks and Wildlife Association (NPWS) is required to reduce populations to 3,000 in 32 percent of the park – in areas associated with wild horse heritage values – by June 2027 to reduce impacts on the park’s fragile alpine and subalpine environment. This plan falls under the Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act of 2018 which retains populations of brumbies in 32 percent of the park.

When traditional methods of culling—bait and trapping, rehoming, and ground shooting—failed to meet population control targets, aerial shooting was authorized in October 2023 ending a 23-year-old ban in NSW.

Since November 2021, the NPWS confirmed a total of 8,950 wild horses culled from the park when the KNP Heritage plan came into force. But, in the last 11 months, of the 7,111 wild horses removed, 5,539 were shot using aerial methods approved in October 2023.

After the end of the 7-month ban of visitors to the park during the culling, the proponents were horrified at the number of dead animals and stench of rotting bodies. They maintain that aerial shootings are inhumane when a good shot from above cannot target the horse’s chest or head only, which is required by law. Many of the horses were found in the trees, chased by helicopters, when the open land is usually where they graze. Proponents further state many of the horses had bullet holes in their backs, guts, legs and neck, showing their suffering.

A new survey by NPWS was scheduled to be completed in October 2024. According to the NSW government, the cost of the horse culling operation was \$8.2 million dollars. ■

***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 through our Members' Lasting Memories in our Garden of Hope

**We remember  
our members  
who have passed.**

**Mary Elizabeth Gibson Gambino,**  
who volunteered for ISPMB in her teenage  
years. She will be dearly missed.

**Shirley Haberstroh,**  
a long-standing member.

**John E. Schmeltzer III,**  
a distinguished retired attorney who served on  
our CENTER Advisory Committee.

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.

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

Gifting 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*

