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NEWS RELEASE

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**Horse and burro management must be balanced with wildlife
and other natural resource needs, include collaboration with states**
Arizona Game and Fish director provides comments to national advisory board

DENVER - Arizona Game and Fish Department Director Larry Voyles this week told the National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board that federal proposals to change how wild horses and burros are managed must have a goal of ensuring a thriving ecological balance between horses and burros and wildlife, and include the involvement of state wildlife agencies.

Speaking on behalf of the Arizona Game and Fish Department in collaboration with the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) at the board's public meeting in Denver, Voyles stated that the proposals should ensure the existence of horses and burros as intended in the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971, but cannot allow them to greatly expand their presence and create disastrous impacts on habitat and native wildlife across the West.

"The Wild Horse and Burro Act was initiated when horses and burros were in danger of disappearing from the western landscape. The Act and the Bureau of Land Management have essentially done their jobs to ensure this doesn't happen, as wild horse and burro populations have grown substantially and are not in any danger of being eliminated," said Voyles.

Voyles agreed that the current implementation approach to horse and burro management isn't sustainable and that changes are needed, but he said he would expect any new federal initiative to fix the program, not grow it; and he expressed support for Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar's efforts to build solutions within the existing body of law and regulation.

Voyles stressed the importance of managing horse and burro herds, pointing out that under the current protections provided by the Act, horse and burro populations have proven to be very prolific, and only very active management prevents overpopulation in many areas.

"It's been demonstrated over time that unmanaged or mismanaged horse and burro populations can and do cause significant habitat damage that negatively impacts state wildlife populations and the states' ability to fulfill their statutory responsibilities to manage for healthy wildlife and wildlife habitat," he said.

The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies has emphasized the need for state involvement in any changes to the management of horses and burros, pointing out that even though they are managed primarily by the BLM, ensuring appropriate management is also a state interest because of the impacts to wildlife.

“Under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, the BLM is required to coordinate such actions with the state and ensure that federal management plans do not conflict with state plans where practicable,” said Voyles.

Voyles concluded his remarks by saying the Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board plays a key role by providing input into recommended changes to the management of horses and burros. But he cautioned that generating recommendations through the board’s public process does not relieve the BLM of its fiduciary responsibilities under national policies for natural resources conservation as defined through a variety of congressional acts that form the legal and enforceable framework for agency actions.

“It’s important that the design and implementation of new directions in the management of wild horses and burros comply with not only the collaborative portions of the Federal and Land Policy and Management Act, but also with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act. Any such recommendations would need to be weighed against the potential impacts to state-managed wildlife resources,” said Voyles.

The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board provides input and advice to the BLM as it carries out its responsibilities under the Wild and Free-roaming Horses and Burros Act. The advisory board conducted the June 14-15 Denver workshop and meeting to provide the public with an opportunity to express their views and comments regarding Secretary Salazar’s Wild Horse and Burro Initiative, which he and BLM Director Bob Abbey announced last October.

The public has the opportunity to provide comment on the strategy development document implementing the Wild Horse and Burro Initiative. To access the document and provide the BLM with comment, visit www.blm.gov and click on the link titled “BLM Director Seeks Input for New Direction in National Wild Horse and Burro Program.” Comments must be submitted by Aug. 3, 2010.

The Arizona Game and Fish Department believes that any approach to wild horse and burro management must have the overarching goal of attaining and maintaining a thriving ecological balance as described in the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971, and that any change process must include state wildlife agencies in order to ensure the balance between horses and burros and native wildlife and habitats.

Game and Fish believes some of the changes proposed in the new federal strategy (increased use of research, fertility control, and enhanced communication and marketing for the placement of excess animals) may help the program maintain a thriving ecological balance. However, the department also feels that other proposed changes (potential expansion of horse and burro range, constructing administrative barriers to removals, and eliminating some management tools from the toolbox) should conform to the legal constraints established in existing Federal environmental and natural resources laws given their potential to significantly hinder efforts to attain and sustain that same thriving ecological balance.

For more information on wild horse and burro management as it relates to wildlife conservation, visit www.azgfd.gov/inside_azgfd/WildHorseBurro.shtml.

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