

**COMMENTS BY DIRECTOR VOYLES
TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES NATURAL
RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS,
FORESTS & PUBLIC LANDS, RELATIVE TO H.R. 1018 TO
AMEND THE WILD FREE-ROAMING HORSES AND BURROS
ACT, IN WASHINGTON, D.C.
MARCH 3, 2009**

**Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I am
Larry Voyles, Director of the Arizona Game and Fish
Department, and I am speaking today on behalf of the
Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, a quasi-
governmental organization of fish and wildlife agencies from
19 states and 4 provinces and territories. The Association
promotes the principles of sound resource management in
the public interest.**

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about the management of free-roaming horses and burros in the context of wildlife conservation on western lands. I also want to express my appreciation to the Chairman and fellow Arizonan, for bringing this important public lands management issue before Congress.

The Wild Free-roaming Horses and Burros Act is a policy statement by Congress that we accept, aiming to foster healthy rangelands that provide a thriving ecological balance with free-roaming horse and burro herds, consistent with the land's capacity to support them.

Free-roaming horses and burros exist in, and must be managed in, the context of all the other components of these ecosystems.

The agencies represented by the Western Association have an extensive history with the practical application of this Act.

Our experience in managing wildlife in the presence of free-roaming horses and burros over the past 37 years, has demonstrated beyond question the effects that unrestricted expansion of these large mammals, lacking effective natural predators, can have upon the habitats and rangelands upon which they and wildlife species depend for their existence.

To ensure a vibrant future that includes wildlife and free-roaming horses and burros, we recommend the following:

- 1. That free-roaming horse and burro herds continue to be limited to the areas where they were found upon enactment of the 1971 act.**

Expansion of free-roaming horse and burro herds into formerly unoccupied lands impacts previously protected fragile ecosystems, and expands the scale of the challenge in all respects.

Designated wilderness areas and national wildlife refuges adjacent to current horse and burro herd management areas will be among the first ecologically important areas to be affected.

- 2. Law and policy should drive refinement of our technical ability to accurately inventory free-roaming horses and burros on the range, and accurately set the Appropriate Management Levels for horse and burro herds.**

Achieving a balance between free-roaming horse and burro herds and other components of ecosystems requires setting specific, scientifically-based targets for those herds.

- 3. Federal agencies must continue to use the Appropriate Management Levels as management targets for free-roaming horse and burro herds in specific herd management areas.**

The absence of natural controls permits unlimited herd expansion in both terms of population density and territory. Human intervention becomes necessary to maintain a healthy balance between wildlife, habitat, and free-roaming horses and burros.

4. Law and policy should drive research into innovative tools for herd management, including feasible and efficient removal and fertility control to maintain herd levels consistent with the Appropriate Management Levels.

Practical and effective tools are essential to maintain ecosystem health, for example: The use of helicopters for inventory, roundup, and when habitat conditions or management targets dictate, removal.

5. Congress must appropriate funds sufficient for the management of free-roaming horse and burro herds, within Appropriate Management Levels and the land's capacity to support them, as one component of diverse and thriving ecosystems.

In conclusion, If we fail to manage the balance among free-roaming horses and burros, and the capacity of the land to support them and the wildlife that depend on those lands, then the laws of nature will prevail and we will fail as stewards of all three: land, wildlife, and horses and burros.

As a wildlife biologist, I am acutely aware of the enormous challenges this subcommittee faces in balancing the human desires and concerns for free-roaming horses and burros with concerns for healthy wildlife populations, healthy habitats, and healthy rangelands in the western United states.

Few issues are more emotionally charged than the one you are facing in crafting public desires and concerns into sound public policy in the form of Congressionally-crafted law.

Mother Nature requires no negotiation or finesse. When the laws of nature are violated, animals simply die and species simply cease to exist.

To date, the historical record clearly notes that the laws of nature have trumped the laws of man every single time.

Free-roaming horses and burros will be no exception to nature's law.

Again, I want to thank the chairman and the members of this subcommittee for this opportunity. Should you or members of your staff wish to further explore this issue on the ground, we would be delighted to host such a visit.

Subject to your questions, this concludes my statement.