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*Providing testimony on behalf of the*  
Society for Range Management

*To the*  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
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The Society for Range Management (SRM) is the professional scientific society and conservation organization whose members are concerned with studying, conserving, managing and sustaining the varied resources of rangelands, which comprise nearly half the land in the world. Established in 1948, SRM has hosted over 4,000 members in 48 countries, including many developing nations. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony to inform Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies on our priorities within the Department of the Interior's (DOI) Bureau of Land Management (BLM); U.S. Geological Survey (USGS); and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) U.S. Forest Service (USFS).

SRM's members are land managers, scientists, educators, students, producers and conservationists—a diverse membership guided by a professional code of ethics and unified by a strong land ethic. The ability of SRM to carry out its mission of *providing leadership for the Stewardship of Rangelands based on sound ecological principles* and vision of *A well-trained and highly motivated group of professionals and rangeland users working with productive, sustainable rangeland ecosystems* is directly dependent on the decisions made by the lawmakers assigned to this subcommittee.

Specifically, we'd like to address the ability of federal agencies to implement active land and resource management, and provide employees with professional development through continuing education opportunities.

## **BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

Of the 26 position statements that SRM has adopted since its founding, two focus on the management of wild horses and burros on rangelands.

The Society believes in the practice and enhancement of multiple use values of rangelands, while maintaining basic soil, water and vegetation resources. The Society supports wild horse and burro use of rangelands in accordance with the Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 and as part of the multiple use mix of products and benefits for human welfare in locations where these animals existed when the law was passed. The law specifies management to provide “a thriving ecological balance”. SRM interprets this to mean that long-term sustainability and productivity must be the primary consideration in devising legislation and policy for management planning and administration of rangelands, including establishment of

proper numbers and management levels for wild horses and burros. Rangeland “health” standards and guidelines are equally appropriate for all herbivores.

Wild horse and burro populations increase rapidly and their numbers commonly expand beyond herd management areas and exceed ecological carrying capacity unless excess animals are regularly removed. Adoption programs and sanctuaries for excess horses have only been partially successful. Overstocking results in deterioration of vegetation, soils, and watersheds and leaves a potential for expansion of invasive species. Serious conflicts with wildlife, endangered species, domestic livestock, and other uses of rangelands have resulted.

The federal government must implement more effective methods to manage and control populations of wild horses and burros. SRM supports changes in laws, policies, and administration to effectively and economically manage wild horse and burros to maintain healthy populations, reduce conflicts with other uses, and maintain long-term sustainability of rangeland resources.

One such change would be to lift the amendment introduced by West Virginia Representative Nick Rahall in 2005 that states:

*Appropriations herein made shall not be available for the destruction of healthy, unadopted, wild horses and burros in the care of the Bureau or its contractors or for the sale of wild horses and burros that results in their destruction for processing into commercial products.*

SRM is also concerned with the lack of accountability in the use of taxpayer funds included in Division A, Title I, Section 109, which states:

*“...the Secretary of Interior may enter into multiyear cooperative agreements with nonprofit organizations and other appropriate entities, and may enter into multiyear contracts...for the long-term care and maintenance of excess wild free roaming horses and burros by such organizations or entities on private land.”*

According to the BLM’s 2018 *Report to Congress*, the agency contracts with 30 private landowners, located primarily in Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma, to handle the long-term care and maintenance of over 35,000 horses. Unfortunately, the U.S. taxpayer has no assurance that the private lands supporting these 35,000 horses are in a state of sound rangeland health, condition, and ecological status.

SRM believes that the above Section should be amended to include the sentiment that excess animals should be contracted to a private landowner or entity in an ecologically appropriate region with stocking rates and rangeland health conditions accredited by a Certified Professional in Range Management (CPRM). This third-party approval by a CPRM would certify that the private landowner is implementing sound management practices and is not degrading the productive soils of the Midwest by overstocking wild horses and burros.

SRM supports the humane transfer of excess wild horses and burros that have been removed from public lands to other Federal, State, and local government agencies for use as work animals.

## **U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY**

SRM supports increased federal investment in USGS programs that underpin responsible natural resource stewardship, improve resilience to natural and human-induced hazards, and contribute to the long-term health, security, and prosperity of the nation.

The need for science to inform public policy decision-making has never been greater. USGS scientists and engineers provide hydrological, biological, geological, geospatial, and other types of data that support the effective management of water, wildlife, ecosystems, energy and mineral resources, and contribute to protection and prevention measures for natural disasters.

Over the years, Congress has worked in a bipartisan fashion to invest in USGS science. These efforts have paid dividends and helped the USGS continue to answer the challenging questions facing decision-makers at federal, state, and local agencies across the country. As a member of the USGS Coalition, an alliance of 80 organizations united by a commitment to USGS programs, SRM opposes any potential cuts to the agency's budget.

## **U.S. FOREST SERVICE**

In 2017, USFS worked closely with other federal, tribal, state, and local partners to fight nearly 71,500 fires covering over 10 million acres. The cooperative work done by these various agencies is incredibly important to the land, wildlife, and communities affected by these wildfires.

SRM supports increased funding levels for both USFS non-fire services and Wildland Fire Management programs above levels included within the President's FY2019 budget request.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES**

SRM has continued to work with our community of professional societies to push for Congressional support of federal employees participating in and being active in the continuing education programs provided by professional societies. Active participation must include travel to related conferences and workshops. Furthermore, if Congress wants land management agencies to be the best suited to deal with the high priority issues, included but not limited to, fire management and prevention, species and habitat improvement along with implementing successful strategies that address climate variations it is even more imperative that land management agency personnel have access to the latest research, along with updates from the field and the training and techniques to implement practices.

We were pleased with report language that confirmed Congress' support of professional society-related activities. SRM worked with The Wildlife Society, Society of American Foresters; and American Fisheries Society to draft language that was included in the House report language for Fiscal Year 2018 Appropriations. We respectfully request that this Congressional intent continues to be demonstrated, with a greater emphasis placed on the importance of federal employee involvement in professional societies to foster professional development and growth.

**CONCLUSION**

SRM appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies.