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Before the Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives

Legislative Hearing on S. 1377, the Theodore Roosevelt National Park Wild Horses Protection Act

September 16, 2026

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the North Dakota Department of Commerce's Tourism & Marketing Division, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of S. 1377, the Theodore Roosevelt National Park Wild Horses Protection Act.

We also extend our thanks to Senator Hoeven for sponsoring this legislation, and Senator Kaine for his support as a cosponsor.

S. 1377 would require the Department of the Interior to maintain a genetically diverse herd of no fewer than 150 horses in the South Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park. This legislation is a common-sense, compromise solution that represents months of work between Senator Hoeven’s office, the National Park Service and local stakeholders. Thanks to this hard work, the bill passed the Senate by unanimous consent on June 11, 2026.

If enacted, the bill would reduce the need for future actions that could reduce or eliminate the park's horse herd. By requiring Interior to maintain a genetically diverse herd, develop a management plan that protects both the horses and the park's natural resources, limit removals to narrow and clearly defined circumstances and publish annual findings on the herd's population, structure and health, this bill provides certainty and accountability.

The Tourism & Marketing Division is committed to supporting new visitor experiences and to retaining the existing attractions that draw people to North Dakota. We believe this legislation will maintain the park's appeal and visitors' desire to visit North Dakota. The Park's unique beauty, historical significance and connection to conservation are paramount and allowing horses to roam these lands also enriches our visitors' experiences.

Theodore Roosevelt National Park is known for its stunning landscapes, diverse wildlife and rich cultural history. The presence of wild horses has been a part of this unique ecosystem since the early days of ranching in the Badlands. Ranching legends including Theodore Roosevelt and the Marquis de Morès depended on horses every day at their ranches. Difficult times for Badlands

ranches and Native Americans in the late nineteenth century reintroduced thousands of horses back into the wild. Though they are considered feral, the park's horses and half a dozen generations of their ancestors have not been broken or domesticated. They are a living testament to the rugged spirit of the American West.

Many guests from across the country and around the world come to Theodore Roosevelt National Park to admire its natural beauty and to connect with the spirit of American adventure and exploration that defined Theodore Roosevelt himself. The sight of wild horses grazing in the park's vast landscapes adds to the experience. Visitors who enjoy viewing the park's horses are passionate about the park and its western culture.

The wild horses are also part of what sets Theodore Roosevelt National Park apart from other western national parks. While bison and other wildlife can be found throughout the National Park System, free-roaming horses are a distinctive feature that visitors associate specifically with Theodore Roosevelt National Park. That distinction helps draw travelers to a park that, compared to many of its larger and more crowded western counterparts, still offers a less congested, more intimate visitor experience. This recognition extends beyond North Dakota: AFAR magazine named Theodore Roosevelt National Park among its list of the 10 best places in the United States to see wildlife.

While we do not have an exact metric quantifying how many visitors come to the park specifically because of the horses, the data we do have consistently shows the traveling public’s interest in visiting the park:

- Brownlee et al. (2019), Theodore Roosevelt National Park Visitor Use Study:
    - 86% of visitors reported their primary activity within the park was wildlife viewing, including wild horses
- Visitor metrics: Theodore Roosevelt National Park continues to be the most visited attraction in North Dakota.
    - Geolocation data shows the top origin states in the last year are: Minnesota, Montana, Wisconsin, Illinois, Texas, Michigan, California, Washington, South Dakota and Ohio.
    - NPS reported visitor spending connected to TRNP was $54 million with total economic output of $60 million. And 98.7% of spending was from non-local visitors. (2023)

As I noted earlier in my testimony, the legislation before you today is a compromise product following months of discussions among interested parties, led by Senator Hoeven. Like any compromise, no one got everything they wanted. However, this bill represents a reasonable path forward and provides certainty for the park, state and local stakeholders.

For these reasons, the North Dakota Department of Commerce's Tourism & Marketing Division respectfully urges the Subcommittee to act favorably on S. 1377. Thank you for the opportunity be here today. I look forward to your questions.