



Arizona Game and Fish Department

Esther Rubin, PhD
Research Branch Chief

We Protect and Conserve All Species

- > 800 species of birds, reptiles, fish, and mammals
- 531 Species of Greatest Conservation Need
- 93 Tier 1A species
- ~40 endemic animal species (including invertebrates)



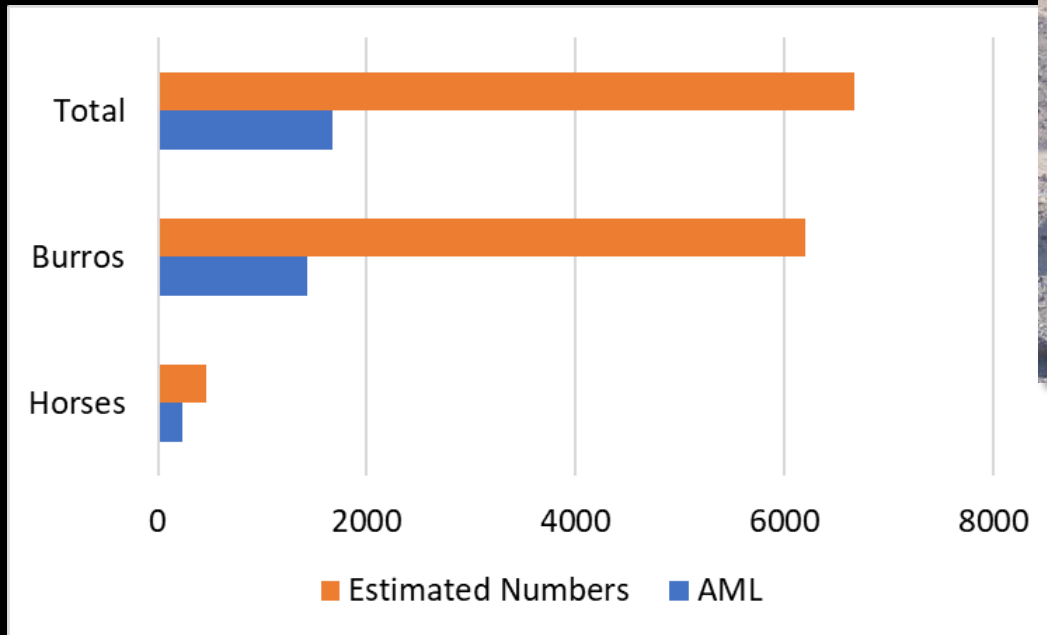
Wildlife Needs Habitat

Diverse Habitats and Flora

- Nearly 4000 species of native plants
- High diversity of altitudes and climate
- Transition zones between the Sonoran, Chihuahuan, Mojave, and Great Basin deserts
- Many habitat specialists:
 - Riparian obligates, grassland obligate birds, cold water fish species



2023 BLM Estimates of Horses and Burros in AZ



Collectively
398% of AML

Concerns

- Effects on wildlife habitat
- Effects on wildlife populations
- Effects on recovery of threatened and endangered species
- Human safety
- Welfare of horses and burros



Effects on Wildlife Habitat

Example: riparian habitat

- Unique habitat that comprise less than 2% of total land area in the southwest
- Supports highest number of species when compared to other habitat types
- In AZ, 80% of species use riparian, and 50% are considered riparian obligates



Effects on Wildlife Habitat

Example: riparian habitat

In an AZ montane riparian system, horses used areas close to stream bank more frequently than cows or elk.

Higher potential for negative impact on riparian and aquatic species (Blum et al. 2018)



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Effects on Wildlife Habitat

Example: Sonoran Desert

- Wide-spread habitat in the Southwest
- Home to long-lived and slow-growing plant species
- Environmental effects are difficult and slow to reverse







AZGFD Commission Resolutions

A RESOLUTION OF THE ARIZONA GAME AND FISH COMMISSION EMPLOYING THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO MEET THEIR OBLIGATION TO CONTROL EXCESSIVE POPULATIONS OF FERAL BURROS TO REDUCE ADVERSE IMPACTS TO WILDLIFE HABITAT AND PUBLIC SAFETY.

WHEREAS, the Commission has received and supports the Mohave County Board of Supervisors' Resolution number 2015-127 encouraging the federal government to control the excessive population of burros in their county, and

WHEREAS, the Arizona Game and Fish Commission recognizes there is an extreme overpopulation of burros in Arizona that negatively impacts wildlife, wildlife habitat, and public safety, and

WHEREAS, the conservation of wildlife resources is the trust responsibility of the Commission on all lands within Arizona to ensure abundant wildlife resources for current and future generations, and

WHEREAS, the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act requires the BLM to establish appropriate management levels (AML) that ensure a thriving natural ecological balance, and to remove excess burros to maintain this balance, and


WHEREAS, the AML for all the herd management areas in Arizona is 1,316 burros but the current statewide burro population is 4,183 animals, and

WHEREAS, the AML for the Black Mountain herd management area in Mohave County is 478 burros but the current population is 1,450 burros, and

WHEREAS, the non-native burros now outnumber the native bighorn sheep within the Black Mountains and are 340% above established AMLs Statewide.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Arizona Game and Fish Commission requests that the federal government immediately initiate all tools to control excessive populations of feral burros and formulate and implement a plan to reduce adverse impacts to wildlife habitat and public safety, and directs the Department to continue to pursue all available strategies designed to insure federal responsibility to reduce overpopulation of feral burros.

ADOPTED on the 15th day of January 2016 by the Arizona Game and Fish Commission.


Kurt R. Davis

Chairman
Arizona Game and Fish Commission



A RESOLUTION OF THE ARIZONA GAME AND FISH COMMISSION EMPLOYING THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO MEET ITS OBLIGATION TO CONTROL THE OVERPOPULATION OF WILD HORSES AND REMOVE UNAUTHORIZED FERAL HORSES TO REDUCE ADVERSE IMPACTS TO WILDLIFE, WILDLIFE HABITAT AND PUBLIC SAFETY.

WHEREAS, the Arizona Game and Fish Commission recognizes there is an overpopulation of wild horses in Arizona that negatively impact wildlife, wildlife habitats, and public safety, and

WHEREAS, the Arizona Game and Fish Commission is aware of unauthorized feral horses present on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, and

WHEREAS, the conservation of wildlife resources is the trust responsibility of the Commission on all non-tribal lands within Arizona to ensure abundant wildlife resources for current and future generations, and

WHEREAS, The Commission has primary statewide responsibility for management actions related to fish and wildlife within the state of Arizona, and

WHEREAS, The Arizona Game and Fish Department acts under the authority of the Commission, and

WHEREAS, the Commission has identified ongoing concerns regarding the impact excess wild horse populations that exceed appropriate management levels, and unauthorized feral horses have on wildlife and wildlife habitats, and

WHEREAS, the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act requires the BLM and USFS to establish appropriate management levels (AML), and monitoring protocols that ensure a thriving natural ecological balance, and to remove wild horses to maintain this balance, and

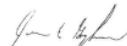
WHEREAS, the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest continues to experience impacts following the intrusion of unauthorized feral horses following the 2002 Rodeo-Chediski Fire, and removal of these unauthorized feral horses has not yet occurred,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Arizona Game and Fish Commission requests that the federal government utilize all measures available within rule or regulation and immediately initiate all efforts to remove unauthorized feral horses present on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Arizona Game and Fish Commission implores the federal government to utilize all opportunities and tools within its authority to identify clear thresholds for action, establish monitoring and clearly defined response protocols to maintain the wild horse population within the Heber Wild Horse Territory boundary within the AML. The federal government must manage in an effort that adheres to the AML identified in the Heber Wild Horse Territory EA, reduces adverse impacts to wildlife habitat and public safety, and maintains a thriving ecological balance for all resources, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Arizona Game and Fish Commission directs the Department to continue to pursue all available strategies designed to ensure federal responsibility to reduce overpopulation of wild horses and federal responsibility for the removal of unauthorized feral horses in Arizona.

ADOPTED on the 5th day of August 2022 by the Arizona Game and Fish Commission.


James E. Goughnour

Chairman
Arizona Game and Fish Commission



AZGFD Commission Resolutions

A RESOLUTION OF THE ARIZONA GAME AND FISH COMMISSION EMPLOYING THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO MEET THEIR OBLIGATION TO CONTROL EXCESSIVE POPULATIONS OF FERAL BURROS TO REDUCE ADVERSE IMPACTS TO WILDLIFE HABITAT AND PUBLIC SAFETY.

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WHEREAS, the AML for all the herd management areas in Arizona is 1,316 burros but the current statewide burro population is 4,183 animals, and

WHEREAS, the AML for the Black Mountain herd management area in Mohave County is 478 burros but the current population is 1,450

WHEREAS, the non-native burros now on the Black Mountains are 340% above established

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Commission requests that the federal government utilize all measures available within rule or regulation and immediately initiate all efforts to remove unauthorized feral horses present on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest...."

ADOPTED on the 15th day of January 2016 by



Kurt R. Davis
Chairman
Arizona Game and Fish Commission



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A RESOLUTION OF THE ARIZONA GAME AND FISH COMMISSION EMPLOYING THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO MEET ITS OBLIGATION TO CONTROL THE OVERPOPULATION OF WILD HORSES AND REMOVE UNAUTHORIZED FERAL HORSES TO REDUCE ADVERSE IMPACTS TO WILDLIFE, WILDLIFE HABITAT AND PUBLIC SAFETY.

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WHEREAS, The Arizona Game and Fish Department acts under the authority of the Commission, and

WHEREAS, the Commission has identified ongoing concerns regarding the impact excess wild horse populations that exceed appropriate management levels, and unauthorized feral horses have on wildlife and wildlife habitats, and

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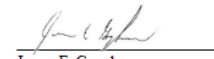
WHEREAS, the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest continues to experience impacts following the intrusion of unauthorized feral horses following the 2002 Rodeo-Chediski Fire, and removal of these unauthorized feral horses has not yet occurred,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Arizona Game and Fish Commission requests that the federal government utilize all measures available within rule or regulation and immediately initiate all efforts to remove unauthorized feral horses present on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest...."

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Commission requests that the federal government to utilize all opportunities available within rule or regulation and clearly defined boundaries to remove unauthorized feral horses present on the Heber Wild Horse Territory boundary within the Heber National Forest, and adheres to the AML identified in the Heber National Forest, and maintains a thriving natural ecological balance, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Commission requests that the federal government to continue to pursue all available strategies to remove unauthorized feral horses present on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest...."

ADOPTED on the 5th day of August 2022



James E. Goughnour
Chairman
Arizona Game and Fish Commission



...request that the federal government utilize all measures available within rule or regulation and immediately initiate all efforts to remove unauthorized feral horses present on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest...."

2017 Resolution of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES

RESOLUTION 1

Bureau of Land Management Wild Horse and Burro Management



WHEREAS, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages wild horses and burros under the authority of the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act (Act) which directs BLM to remove excess wild horses and burros from the range to sustain the health and productivity of public lands; and

WHEREAS, The National Academy of Sciences in 2013 stated "Evidence suggests that horse populations are growing by 15 to 20 percent each year, a level that is unsustainable for maintaining healthy horse populations as well as healthy ecosystems." In March 2017, BLM estimated 73,000 horses and burros on public rangelands yet the Appropriate Management Level (AML) is below 27,000 and nearly 50,000 animals are in holding facilities. The cost of BLM's Wild Horse and Burro (WHB) Program has risen from \$36.2 million in 2008 to \$80.4 million in 2017 with most spent on care of excess animals in off-range facilities; and

WHEREAS, the removal of restrictive BLM budget appropriations language will allow the WHB Program to be more effective in achieving horse and burro numbers at AML and ensure healthy rangelands and restoration of critical riparian areas and spring sources.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

- Supports the Administration's Fiscal Year 2018 budget proposal that calls for the removal of past appropriations language that restricts the BLM from using all management tools provided by the Act, as amended and acknowledges this critical step to attain "a thriving ecological balance" with healthy wildlife populations and public rangelands.
- Will collaborate with Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) and others to inform key members of Congress about the unsustainability of the BLM's current wild horse and burro management program.
- Urges the BLM to develop an action plan, using all management tools available as authorized under the Act, to remove excess horses and burros (including animals that exist outside of established herd management areas), from public rangelands as soon as possible.

Adopted in Convention
Vail, Colorado
July 11, 2017

"...Urges the BLM to develop an action plan, using all management tools available as authorized under the Act, to remove excess horses and burros (including animals that exist outside of established herd management areas), from public rangelands as soon as possible..."

2023 Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Resolution



RESOLUTION 2023-03-07

FEDERAL MANAGEMENT AND OVERSIGHT OF WILD HORSE AND BURRO POPULATIONS

WHEREAS, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (Association) represents the states, provinces, and territories of the United States and Canada, which are inhabited by over 4,500 wildlife species; and

WHEREAS, a mission of the Association is to advance collaborative, proactive, science-based fish and wildlife conservation and management across North America; and

WHEREAS, the conservation of wildlife resources is entrusted primarily to the state, provincial, and territorial fish and wildlife agencies, and the Association; and

WHEREAS, the States share management authority for species of wildlife listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and

WHEREAS, the Association's state membership encompasses the entirety of the nation's range for wild horses and burros, including Herd Management Areas (HMAs) that are spread across 32.6 million acres of 10 Western States; and

WHEREAS, the Directors of said agencies recognize the impacts that overpopulation of free-ranging wild horses and burros have on wildlife and habitats across the States; and

WHEREAS, wild horses and burros are managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) under the Wild and Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 (Act), as amended; and

WHEREAS, the Act requires that the BLM and USFS establish HMAs with appropriate management levels (AMLs), implement effective monitoring protocols that ensure a thriving ecological balance, remove wild horses and burros to maintain this balance, and, upon request, to remove wild horses and burros that stray onto private lands; and

WHEREAS, State fish and wildlife agencies continue to be extremely concerned about excess horses and burros within established herd areas and HMAs, as well as expansion outside of these areas, as populations exceed AMLs across the West and continue to expand at levels unsustainable for maintaining a thriving ecological balance, devastating vital fish and wildlife habitats and, in many cases, undermining states' ESA-related conservation efforts; and

WHEREAS, Federal agencies have increasingly been unable, under existing appropriations and current management practices, to adequately address wild horse and burro populations that exceed AMLs, or to effectively remove unauthorized, unbranded and unclaimed free roaming horses and burros, exacerbating the impacts to wildlife and habitats;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies requests that the responsible committees of Congress appropriate full and consistent funding levels for wild horse and burro management

programs at the appropriate ratio, to enable the BLM and USFS to effectively manage wild horses and burros as intended by the Act, without diversion of funds for management of fish and wildlife resources; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Association requests that the BLM and USFS utilize all measures available within their authorities to identify clear thresholds for action, and establish clearly-defined monitoring and response protocols to maintain wild horse and burro populations at or below established AMLs; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that across the United States, the Association requests that the BLM and USFS utilize all measures as authorized by the Act to remove wild horses and burros that exceed established AMLs, and remove animals that exist outside of HMAs, as soon as practicable; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that in light of the devastating impacts of wild horse and burro populations and the ongoing drought in the West, the Association requests that BLM and USFS reevaluate established AMLs and reduce AMLs across the West; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Association urges that BLM and USFS specifically utilize all measures available within rule or regulation to remove unauthorized, unbranded, and unclaimed free-roaming horses and burros from the landscape.

Resolution submitted by the Federal Public Lands Committee.

Adopted by the Association on September 27, 2023 in Calgary, Alberta.

“...requests that the responsible committees of Congress appropriate full and consistent funding levels for wild horse and burro management...”

“...requests that the BLM and USFS utilize all measures as authorized by the Act to remove wild horses and burros that exceed established AMLs, and remove animals that exist outside of HMAs, as soon as practicable...”

The concern about excess horses and burros on the landscape has not been lessened in recent years.

Damage is occurring as we speak, and there is an urgent need to reduce numbers.



THANK YOU