

PETITION FOR OREGON'S BIG SUMMIT WILD HORSES

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We, the undersigned, enjoy and appreciate the Big Summit wild horses in Ochoco National Forest of central Oregon. This small herd has existed in the area for as long as living memory. These wild horses contribute to my enjoyment of the Ochoco National Forest public lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). We are interested and affected parties in this action and we will be irreversibly harmed if the USFS proceeds with the drastic reduction of the Big Summit horse herd or destroys their natural behaviors through sterilization.

We strongly oppose the proposal to reduce the number of horses living in and around the Big Summit Wild Horse Territory (WHT). USFS continues to permit sheep grazing within the Big Summit Wild Horse Territory which is supposed to be devoted “principally” for the wild horses' welfare (1971 Wild, Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act). The Environmental Assessment is inadequate and fails to adequately address and analyze the following:

- **Reduce livestock grazing** in and around the WHT to provide habitat for wild horses as required by the 1971 Act. The EA fails to consider reducing or eliminating livestock grazing to provide the AUMs needed to accommodate the current population.
- It is well known that wild horses have **seasonal migratory behaviors based on forage availability**. The EA **must analyze** whether the current WHT boundary is in conformance with the horses' natural, lifesaving seasonal movement.
- **We appreciate wild horses specifically for their natural behaviors** – their social bonds, herd dynamics and individual personalities. Therefore, we strongly oppose any management action that would interfere with or destroy the natural behavior of wild horses which is protected by the Act. Only natural, wild behaviors differentiate wild horses from their domestic cousins. Castration, ovariectomies (spaying) and drugs/vaccines that destroy natural hormone production should not be management actions because they are not in conformance with the Act and are shown to destroy or interfere with natural wild behaviors.
- **Reducing the number of horses in this already genetically-compromised herd fails to protect these horses.** The EA fails to present any real-life evidence that adding a few horses to a herd actually increases genetic variability – this premise is entirely based on statistical calculations and has **never** been shown to be true.
- **Raise AML.** The USFS received a warning in the 2010 Forensic DNA Profiling Facility, Florida International University report which stated “*the indiscriminate removal of horses, forcing nonrandom mating among close relatives, the mustang 'gene pool has the wild horses (and burros) facing a genetic crisis...a minimum of 150-200 horses would be needed to insure genetic diversity, reproductive success and foal viability and survival..*” This report warned that “*The data gathered on the Ochoco herd support genetic inbreeding many of the [captured] ...*” This herd cannot afford to be reduced further, or suffer the cruel effects of forced inbreeding.

Sadly, USFS has done everything possible to set up this small herd for disaster instead of fulfilling the agency's mission to “protect” wild horses “as an integral part of the natural system of the public lands.” The current proposal is the latest USFS assault on this small herd. The Ochoco Land and Resource Management Plan has not been updated **since 1989** and instead of moving forward,

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this USFS proposal can only be described as a path to the destruction of this herd. The USFS (mis)management actions have created the genetic crisis facing this small herd and this EA fails to seriously consider, or take a hard look, at actions that would protect these cherished horses and enable the herd to recover from the deleterious management, including the current proposed actions, that is slowly destroying this herd of wild horses.

Date

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