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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Good morning.

I am contacting the Forest Service in opposition to the management of the Heber wild horses.

If a number of these horses are culled or rounded up, their social structures will be destroyed. Proper management would involve assessing the horses and understanding their herd dynamic. Helicopter round-ups or feed trapping may also have a negative impact on wildlife, including endangered species like the Mexican Gray Wolf. The environmental impact of the wild horses must also be evaluated against that of grazing livestock.

There are claims that the wild horses have increased substantially in number, however, the public should be provided with evidence to verify this claim. Additionally, no scientific data has been publicized with regards to the appropriate number of horses, and the number (50-104) provided is arbitrary. Even at the upper levels of this restriction, 104 horses, the herd will be below genetic viability, and their numbers will continue to decline. This makes it appear as though the Forest Service is not being transparent with their true intention, which is to manage these horses to such a sparse number, that they eventually die off all together.

A scientific approach to managing the wild horses would involve gathering data to show water usage and forage consumption utilized by the horses specifically, versus wildlife. It is no secret that cattle and other livestock grazing on public lands presents a significant concern in consumption of natural resources, which may potentially outweigh that of the wild horses. Information on grazing allotments should be carefully monitored.

In addition, a plan for protecting the wild horse herd from harassment, branding, capturing, or killing should be implemented. Several horses have been fatally shot in the past few years, and these horses should have been protected under the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971. Stronger education of forest rangers is needed, as well as working with law enforcement to report and follow through with violations of this act.

Lastly, the economic impact to the taxpayers must also be taken into consideration. Capturing and holding the horses in BLM feedlots may be more cost preventative than other methods of herd management, such as birth control methods. It makes no sense to take money from the taxpayers to round-up wild horses, only to protect the financial interests of cattle ranchers and other livestock owners. Forests and other public lands are some of the few places remaining where wildlife may still be somewhat protected by expansion of corporate, industrial, and residential growth. As a resident of Arizona, keeping these areas wild is very important to protect our state's heritage, desert landscape, and ecosystem.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Christina Tice