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Comments: The Deciding Official

The bottom of page 13 of the Draft Proposed Action for the Heber Wild Horse Territory Management Plan on impacts and alternatives says:

"The deciding official for the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Heber Wild Horse Territory Management Plan will be the forest supervisor. Given the purpose and need for action, the deciding official will select a management strategy for the Heber wild free-roaming horse herd and its habitat. The selected management actions, together with the associated management and monitoring, will guide management of the Heber Wild Horse Territory over the life of the plan."

I strongly object to allowing one person to be able to decide what the management strategy for the Heber Wild Horse Territory, the Heber wild horse herd and their habitat will be. One government official should not be in the position to make such an important and broad decision on the fate of a federally protected wild horse herd. This decision should require checks and balances with a FAIR board of people which would include people who are knowledgeable about wild horses and specifically the Heber wild horse herd. It should then be reviewed and signed off at a higher level of government.

Leaving the decision to one person opens the door for corruption. There are people who are against having the Heber wild horses in the forest and some will go to extreme measures to see that they are removed. Over three dozen of the federally protected Heber wild horses have been shot in 15 months. If a person or persons feel so much hatred for the horses that they are killing them even at the risk of facing stiff penalties if arrested and convicted then it is not outside the realm of possibility for that same person or persons or others with the same mindset to bribe or threaten a single decision maker in order to get what they want which is the horses out of the forest no matter what it takes.

The WFHBA provides for criminal penalties of up to \$2,000 and/or a year in jail for those convicted of a violation of the law. Penalties increased under the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984, as amended. Today, violation of the WFHBA is a Class A misdemeanor, and fines can run up to \$100,000 for each offense. Arizona Animal Cruelty laws and penalties would apply as well.