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Comments: For years I have been concerned with threats to our nation's wild horses and burros. The Heber Wild Horse Territory Plan must be studied with consideration of the overall population of the horses and should represent public opinion in this matter. It is important to keep political decisions that are made at the behest of commercial and livestock interests out of the plan.
I fear that this is an extinction plan which set the AML extremely low and would not maintain a self-sustaining genetically viable Wild Horse Territory. The Forest Service must adjust livestock use in the territory to give wild horse equal resources. It is well known that the claims of wild horse overpopulation are overblown and it's fact that wild horses are not starving on the range. The Forest Service needs to make every effort to return horses that have left the territory instead of removal.
Horses are social animals and will be stressed when separated from their families. The Forest Service must consider plans to provide humane fertility control for the small population they are maintaining. PZP vaccine was recommended by the NAS In 2013, and IUD's have not been proven humane or effective. Methods of fertility control are dangerous and gelding a percent of stallions can alter their behavior in an unnatural way. It takes the wild out of wild horses and destroys their natural behavior.
Finally, the Forest Service should analyze a plan that ensures the health, well being and long term viability of the wild population that is consistent with the 80% of Americans who want to see the wild horse and burros protected and humanely managed on our public lands. Wild Horses should be left to roam free on public lands and not left to languish in holding pens because there is room on the range for horses and livestock. Conflicts can be resolved by settling on fair and sustainable population numbers and implementing humane management via public/private partnerships.