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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I sit here writing this letter/commentary on the week of Earth Day, and after seeing about 20 of the Heber horses on my about monthly drive to my vacation condo in Pinetop/Lakeside, AZ.

I grew up on a cattle farm, and have seen horses, cattle and wild herd animals (i.e. deer, elk) coexist personally, and have seen them via the webcam in the Heber area.

My concern is that the proposed reduction of the herd (I hear it is estimated at 140 horses at present.), to 50-104 horses reduces the viability of the herd; specifically, if someone/people continue to target these protected animals via illegal hunting. The herd has been reduced by 19 from October 2018, to mid-2019 (of which 11 died from gunshot wounds); and again by 15 in 2020 and another 4 in January of 2021. If the herd is reduced to 50; and this streak continues, we won't have horses in a few years. The Forest Service must work harder and be extremely diligent in following all leads to continue to protect these federally protected animals from further harm. I look at the Salt River Wild Horses, and through cooperation with the local Native Americans, and a non-profit, they seem to be better managed. They do use birth control, and PZP has been proven for years, and should be the preferred method of birth control.

Finally, if removal is approved, it should be done with two guiding points. First, to make every effort to relocate horses within the Territory boundary, and secondly, only bait-trapping should be used over time to meet adoption demand and ensure no more wild horses are added to the off-range holding facilities throughout the country.