

## **Position on the Management of Wild Horses and Burros in the Western United States**

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The wild free-roaming horses and burros on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management in the Western United States are a unique population of animals protected by the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act (Public Law 92-195). This act and subsequent amendments provide for the necessary management, protection and control of these animals on public lands.

At present time, the number of wild horses and burros on the range is three times greater than the appropriate management level determined by the Bureau of Land Management. Overpopulation has created welfare risks such as starvation and dehydration due to scarce food and water supplies in some management areas. Current population control methods employed by the BLM, including the removal of excess horses from the range, adoption of gathered horses by private individuals, sex-ratio adjustments and contraceptive vaccines, have not been successful in achieving manageable population numbers.

To reduce risks to the animals because of limited resources caused by overpopulation, the AAEP believes multiple strategies are necessary for the wild horse and burro population to reach the desired level that optimizes the health of the animals on the range.

The AAEP endorses the humane management of the wild horse and burro population through a combination of the following strategies:

- A. Ongoing development and use of long-lasting, effective contraceptives.
- B. Use of permanent sterilization methods like neutering, such as spaying or castration when appropriate.
- C. Continued removals of animals from areas where the range cannot support a growing population because of the danger of starvation or dehydration or the population numbers threaten limited rangeland resources.
- D. Retraction of the current federal policy that prevents the unrestricted sale of wild horses and burros. Unrestricted sale should be an available management strategy due to its incorporation into the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burro Act by amendment in the Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2005.
- E. Continued development of new adoption strategies for animals gathered from the range, which may include collaboration with private enterprises within the horse industry, public sector and non-governmental organizations.

Additionally, the AAEP supports the BLM's existing policy that allows for the humane euthanasia of wild horses and burros for reasons related to health and welfare, including animals that are seriously ill or injured with a poor prognosis for improvement; irreversibly lame; starved with a poor prognosis for recovery; or dangerous.

While safe and effective long-lasting contraceptive methods are under development, the AAEP believes short-term and permanent sterilization methods combined with greater private-sale and adoption options will combine to protect the health and welfare of wild horses and burros.