

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

January 24, 2024

Director Tracy Stone-Manning  
Bureau of Land Management  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Director Stone-Manning,

We write today to express our serious concerns about the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) FY24 Tentative Wild Horse and Burro Gather and Fertility Control Schedule which was published on December 8, 2023. This plan calls for a massive expansion of the number of wild horses and burros set to be rounded up throughout the West. It is inconsistent with Congressional directives regarding this program, and we implore BLM to reconsider the scope of these gather operations.

In the FY24 tentative schedule, BLM has outlined a plan to gather as many as 20,942 horses in thirty-two operations conducted in New Mexico, Nevada, Wyoming, California, Arizona, Utah, Oregon, and Colorado. This is a stark increase from the 6,876 animals scheduled for roundups in BLM's FY23 tentative plan, of which 5,924 were eventually gathered. Tripling the number of animals gathered in the coming months is antithetical to BLM's directive to "humanely capture" wild free-roaming horses and burros and set them up for adoption. This is exacerbated by the use of helicopters that regularly create frightening and deadly situations for horses and burros.

Though BLM has steadily increased fertility treatment during roundups, the FY24 tentative schedule signals a drastic step back in the use of humane, cost-effective alternatives that are readily available. The continued implementation of a robust and humane fertility control strategy of reversible immunocontraceptive vaccines is critical to maintaining healthy herd populations and minimizing the need for future human intervention. The FY24 tentative plan, however, calls for fewer horses to be treated than the FY23 schedule while increasing the number of wild horses and burros set to be gathered by 14,066. The decision to disregard safe alternatives by treating just 1,320 animals demonstrates a serious disconnect between Congressional direction and BLM's actions.

The reduced rate of horses treated for fertility control and released back to the range will constrain BLM's other operations, as the twenty thousand horses set for removal will inevitably inundate the already overcrowded holding facilities used by BLM. Currently, 61,915 horses and burros are held in off-range confinement awaiting adoption, draining government resources by consuming 69% of BLM's herd management budget. Moreover, the transportation of wild horses to these facilities brings unnecessary risk, as seen with the tragic semi-truck accident on October 30, 2023, which killed seven horses en route to holding corrals in Utah. With BLM overburdened by the current holding population, any further increase of wild horses placed in captivity will waste taxpayer dollars while putting animals at risk of off-range accidents and disease. These budgetary concerns should be promptly mitigated with a concerted effort to increase fertility treatments to reduce costly removals, as such alternatives make up just one percent of BLM's budget.

The ongoing East Pershing Complex gather operation in Northern Nevada, the first of the new year, has further demonstrated persisting faults in BLM's wild horse strategy. The roundup, which began on December 28, 2023, has led to the deaths of twenty horses in less than a month.

Three of these horses were euthanized for acute conditions directly caused by the roundup process, with fatal injuries sustained from being chased down by helicopters and cowboys. Even more troubling, several horses were put down due to blindness in a single eye, a non-life-threatening condition that calls into question BLM's euthanasia policy. With several more weeks left in the operation, the East Pershing Complex roundup casts a dark shadow on the twenty-four roundups that will follow in the coming months.

We strongly urge BLM to reconsider the wide-ranging reach of the FY24 Tentative Wild Horse and Burro Gather and Fertility Control Schedule and delay implementation until BLM provides a detailed and satisfactory explanation to Congress of the plan's justifications, rationale, and impact on horses and the program's budget. This response should demonstrate how BLM's pursuit of massive gathers and removals instead of Congressionally directed "robust" humane fertility control is consistent with Congressional intent and expectations. In addition, we ask that you provide details on BLM's plans to house the increased number of horses and burros gathered in FY24, how much additional funding the agency will need to pay to feed and care for these animals, and what steps you are taking to ensure their safety throughout the gather and holding operations.

We believe such a dramatic increase in roundups ultimately undermines BLM's commitment to protecting animal welfare, and will lead to the unnecessary deaths of wild horses throughout the West. We greatly appreciate your immediate attention to this matter, and we look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Dina Titus  
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress