

Members of the Legislature:

I am writing to urge you to support SCR 4014. The mustangs are a part of our country's history. They represent the spirit of the west, and America's love for freedom.

I do not understand why it is thought that mustangs overgraze the plains. Several PBS documentaries have featured initiatives to restore our environment. One of the things related on more than one such program is the discovery that free-roaming grazing animals are essential to preserving grasslands. (For example, see the clip, "How Wildebeest Saved the Serengeti," or "Are Some Species More Important Than Others," or various others.)

If grazers are confined, they do overgraze. (Where mustangs are rounded up and kept in pens, there is no grass.) But if they are left wild, pressure from predators keeps them on the move. As they eat, they disperse grass seeds from the seed heads. Their droppings then fertilize the soil, their hooves till it in, and then they move on and leave the grass to grow. Areas where there have been grazing herds spring up to lush grass, where if there are no grazing herds, the grass dies off and it becomes a dust bowl. In the areas where grazing animals have been, the lush growth helps hold moisture in the soil, and the roots help prevent erosion from wind. The grass provides habitat for birds and small mammals, which in turn support predators. Then trees begin to grow ... there is a whole cascade of things that happen. The balance of the entire system depends on the grazers, which have been declared "keystone" species.

This summer my daughter and son-in-law are planning to take their three children on a road trip to see our beautiful America while there are still some wild lands left. I am hoping they will be able to see some mustangs in the wild when they pass through the ranges where they still roam free. Last year, their family took a trip that included several southeastern states. One of the high points of that trip was a visit to Assateague Island off the coast of Virginia, where they were fortunate to see a band of wild ponies grazing right nearby at sunrise. I know that even a glimpse of a band of mustangs would be a real thrill for them.

Please do all you can to assure that the mustangs will be able to continue to roam free. We need them to help heal our land.

Thank you.

Roberta Manter, Fayette, Maine