

As an American citizen who has a stake in the protection and preservation of the unique and cherished wild horses living freely in the Theodore Roosevelt National Park (TRNP), I am writing to strongly urge you to vote YES on SCR 4014 to support humane, scientifically recommended methods of managing these wild horses on the public lands they call home.

I strongly oppose the NPS proposal to either eradicate all 200 or so wild horses estimated to be living in the TRNP or possibly leave a mere 35-60 mustangs in the targeted area, a number far below the accepted population number for genetic viability.

The Park has consistently recognized the historic value of maintaining wild horses in the Dakotas, therefore, eradicating this unique mustang herd would deprive the public of the ability to experience the park in historical context.

I strongly support expanding Alternative A to include managing a GENETICALLY VIABLE, REPRODUCTIVE population of at least 160-200 mustangs within the park, as well as establishing an annual adoption program in partnership with wild horse advocate organizations. Any alternative involving the utter destruction of this wild horse herd must not even be considered.

The mustangs of the TRNP are cultural icons in our nation's history and Teddy Roosevelt, no doubt, experienced their presence, along with wild bison, when exploring the area in his younger days. Moreover, millions of Park visitors have viewed these unique wild horses as an integral part of the cultural heritage of the Badlands and undoubtedly bring tourist dollars to the local area.

As North Dakota's only wild horse herd, the NPS, instead of seeking to eliminate these iconic wild horses living freely in the Theodore Roosevelt National Park, must prioritize preserving this irreplaceable mustang herd for future generations.

These unique and iconic mustangs are an important part of our nation's cultural heritage and should be protected and preserved for future generations. The TRNP was created to honor President Theodore Roosevelt, who formed the US national conservation policy in the early 20th century. He visited the area and enjoyed the irreplaceable natural landscape, which included bison and wild horses exhibiting natural wild behaviors.

Myriad visitors also experience the awesome beauty of this unique landscape and especially the wild horses who call this area home and whose ancestors have freely roamed the area for generations. These majestic wild horses are integral to the scenery, native wildlife, and wilderness qualities of the Park and every effort must be made to accommodate them.

Although the horses who live here are WILD by nature, they are still oddly referred to as "livestock" and, as such, the NPS is proposing to wipe them out as if they were nothing but pests who have no right to exist on the western landscape. Denying their wildness by labeling them as "feral" to justify their removal is wrong and ignores the reality of their history. Recent research reveals that such mislabeling is scientifically unsound and must be changed to "native horse" or "reintroduced native."

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In fact, millions of Park visitors have viewed these unique wild horses as an integral part of the cultural heritage of the Badlands. These mustangs are a significant part of the historical and natural heritage of the park and the state, and are a huge tourism draw for North Dakota. Protecting them for their future survival and the economic benefit of the state must be a top priority.

Furthermore, wild equine geneticist, Gus Cothran warns that the wild equines must be managed at populations at least

150-200 adult breeders of standard reproductive age (not counting foals, yearlings or bachelors) that is necessary to protect the long-term genetic viability and the preservation of healthy, self-sustaining wild horse populations while maintaining vital bloodlines.

Additionally, any fertility manipulation of herds ruins the visitor experience of those seeking to view natural wild horse behaviors and interactions such as stallions protecting their families and mothers nursing their foals as Teddy Roosevelt must have witnessed as he pondered this scenic landscape and its wildlife which led ultimately to his CREATION of the very first National Parks.

The majority of Americans would agree that our national heritage must be preserved, including our nation's last remaining wild horses and burros. The fact that the NPS is "technically" not obligated to honor the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 like other government agencies, the NPS should still respect the public sentiment for these national treasures and do everything in its power to ensure their survival for future generations by focusing on their PRESERVATION -- not their annihilation to pander to special interests.

Although these wild horses are not protected under Federal law, they should by no means be labeled "livestock" considering they have freely roamed the badlands for centuries, and are widely believed to be descendants of Sitting Bull's horses and related to the rare Nokota breed and, as such, they have richly earned the change in designation to that of WILDLIFE. Paleontological evidence and mitochondrial DNA analysis support the fact that wild horses are a reintroduced native species to this continent.

Since NPS provides no care for these mustangs -- as the horses fend for themselves (as do bison, elk, and other wildlife) -- it makes no sense to refer to them as "livestock", "invasive", or a "non-native species". NPS cannot continue to ignore these scientific facts by arbitrarily lumping wild horses together with domestic cattle, misrepresenting them as "livestock".

An overwhelming 80% of the American people support the presence of OUR wild horses and burros on OUR public lands in reproductive, genetically viable herds.

Preserving the unique and irreplaceable wild horses of the Theodore Roosevelt National Park MUST be a cornerstone of the Park's livestock management plan, so future generations will, for years to come, be able to enjoy and treasure these symbols of freedom who are so cherished by the American People and tourists alike.

Sincerely,

Eileen Hennessy
Melrose, MA