

February 9, 2023

My name is Christa Ruppert with the Kuntz Nokota Ranch. I am here to testify in favor of SCR4014. As you may know, my father, Frank Kuntz and my late uncle, Leo Kuntz have been managing this feral herd of native horses which they carefully acquired from TRNP in the mid-70's and have bred and created a pedigree for over 40 years. They are a distinct breed, with superior health and emotional intelligence and were removed from the TRNP before the introduction of domestic lines in the 80's by park management. We have about 185 horses in our care on private land.

It is without doubt we need to appreciate the connection to the Lakota People, the Native Prairie-Land and American History. We feel that our mission in preserving this unique feral ancient breed runs parallel to the mission of TRNP and American Prairie to restore wildlife to the native prairie. The Nokota horse is the native horse of North America with immense history and regal presence.

94 Nokota horses' blood samples were gathered (with extraordinary effort and expertise by Frank and colleagues) to create a permanent biobank and pedigree registry. This will complete an in-depth study of genetic origins with the help of equine geneticist, Dr. Doug Antczak, the Baker School of Animal Health, Cornell University. The project compliments Harvard's anthropological work which strongly supports the Native Lakota narratives; and suggests the Nokota Horse ran with buffalo and lived with the 7 Lakota Sioux nations long before the Spanish "reintroduced" the horse. There is NO SPANISH MUSTANG marker in these horses. Connection to ancient lines place Nokota on the ENDANGERED SPECIES list.

Sadly we are met with resistance from TRNP on this amazing opportunity and denying their own mission and responsibilities. Fortunately the integrity of organizations like American Prairie have restored our enthusiasm to reach out to TRNP to reconsider its position. The unique Nokota horse might be erased from history without the clarity and dedication of those outside TRNP which does not speak well for an organization charged to protect history and native creatures. Frank Kuntz is 71 years old and we as a family have dedicated our lives to protecting this rare breed. It was always our hope that TRNP would reintroduce this historically correct animal.

These horses have seen everything from the Battle of Little Bighorn and some still show battle scars and unmistakable markings in Charles Russell, Remington and Sharp paintings and the like. Frank can speak endlessly on Marques de Mores who acquired these horses for his wife after the death of Sitting Bull, the revolutionary war funder, Heidicouper Family, who ranched these horses and wrote extensively on their history as well as the legends associated with the Lakota people who centered their lives around the Nokota as a horse nation.

In short, we feel the Nokota add an authenticity that old-timers and now science support as native to the Western Prairie. TRNP and American Prairie would be visited by 1000's of passionate Nokota supporters who travel to photo and celebrate our horses. It is our desire to partner with like-minded mission and provide complementary education and history.

Christa Ruppert