

Oral testimony in support of SCR 4014  
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Good morning, Committee Members,

I am Marylu Weber, President of North Dakota Badlands Horse (NDBH), a 501c3 nonprofit since 2009. I lived in ND for 57 years and began documenting TRNP horses in the 80s. I met Tom Tescher, ND rancher and rodeo cowboy who documented the horses since the 40s. We worked closely his last 10 years and I have continued his work. I volunteered for the park from 1999-2019 documenting horses and identifying them for park projects, roundups, and auctions.

Working directly with park staff, we earned their trust with hard work, and I've seen great improvements in management from chaotic helicopter roundups to quiet capture of one young horse at a time. I suggested the use of sedation in 2012; that has been the method of choice since 2015. The procedure is to dart a horse with a sedative, check all vitals, load it in a sled, and pull it to the waiting trailer. Once the horse is up and stable it can be safely driven to a small holding pasture.

For two years North Dakota Badlands Horse partnered with the park to document, photograph, and monitor the horses. When necessary to remove some younger horses to keep numbers manageable, NDBH would help capture, care for, and train horses to load and go safely through the chute system for Coggins test blood draws. Using a park-approved numerical screening tool to ensure new owners could handle the wild horse and had safe facilities, we sold them online. We loaded the horses for the new owners, providing brand inspection certificates, clear Coggins testing, and DNA ancestral reports from Texas A&M. Often park staff were not present for these tasks, all was handled by volunteers, and money earned went back into the project. I give you this background information to illustrate that having the horses in the park and managing them responsibly has been done in the past and can be done in the future. With the use of trained volunteers, it does not have to be difficult or expensive.

Much debate swirls around the horses' origin. We do know many are descendants of ranch horses from the open-range era. Tom Tescher ran horses there but also spoke of wild ones that area ranchers left when rounding up their own stock. Were they escapees from area remount operations? Did they go back to Sitting Bull's confiscated ponies? Did they go back to the 60 some untamed horses Theodore Roosevelt bought from Frederick Remington to use on his ranches? Obviously, there is no way to prove any of the stories. What we do know is that they existed in the Badlands of ND well before Theodore Roosevelt lived there and before the park existed.

North Dakota Badlands Horse and others have shared the horses on social media for years with about 1 million combined followers. People from our country and the world go just to see wild horses. They don't fly or drive to ND to see the river; they go to one of the only national parks where wild horses can easily be found. Smithsonian Magazine lists the park as the second-best place to see wild horses. They go to experience a last vestige of the old west lifestyle, cowboys, buffalo, and wild horses.

There's nothing like sitting high on a butte, a sweet ND breeze in my face, sun on my back, my once wild horse, Hawk, munching by my side and watching the wild ones far below; new foals scampering and bucking, stallions snaking harems away from marauding bachelors, the occasional fight as an old stallion defends his mares from another testing his prowess. Knowing this is how they have lived and died for well over a century in the only home they have ever known, let's keep them there!

Are there any questions? Thank you!