

I am a resident of west-central Minnesota. My husband and I enjoy the outdoors and exploring what nature has to offer. It is a way to relax and renew in this demanding, stressful world. It was this desire to explore nature that led us to Medora and Theodore Roosevelt National Park several years ago. We fell in love with the area - the history, the scenery, the people, the wildlife and especially the wild horses roaming freely in the park's south unit. To have such a smorgasbord of nature and history available for people to experience up front and personal is very exciting and fulfilling. It is what brings us back each year to spend a week taking in as much as we can while there.

The history of the area is amazing, especially knowing that a U.S. president spent time living, hunting and ranching in the area and, by his admission, that western North Dakota made him a better man. The Marquis de Mores and his family played a major role in developing the town of Medora and the surrounding area. The Medora Foundation does a remarkable job of helping visitors experience the romance and events of that era. The national park gives us a first hand look into what these great men experienced when they traveled the countryside.

I understand that the park management wants to make changes to the park by proposing to remove the wild horses.. These wild horses, many are descendants of ranch horses and Indian ponies, adapted well to the terrain and resided in the area prior to and during Roosevelt's time and continued to thrive through the years. Their ancestors played a vital role in the ranching and Native American history and the development of western North Dakota. This is their home and they make Theodore Roosevelt National Park unique. I understand that the horses were originally allowed to remain in the park because wild horses roamed the region during Theodore Roosevelt's days and the horses continued presence gives visitors a look into those ranching days. Old timers in the area referred to the wild horses as Teddy's horses.

Touring this park may be the first and only chance many visitors have to see wild horses and longhorn cattle in a natural setting. The horse herds are what draw many of us back to the Medora area. We follow them on social media, we seek them out during park visits, we know their names, we celebrate new foals and we mourn their injury and death. To see these horses roaming freely with the bison and other park animals is an awe-inspiring sight and a real life view into the area's history that makes Theodore Roosevelt National Park unique.

I am concerned about the low number of horses, 30 to 60, that is proposed by one of the park management plans that allows the herds to remain. It is not practical for a healthy herd because it does not allow for a sufficient genetic pool to prevent serious inbreeding with the resultant health issues. Since the herds have increased to around 150 to 200 horses they have been much more visible to the public. In our early trips to the park, when numbers were lower, we were lucky if we were able to see horses through our binoculars. Now we often see them near the park road for close viewing which enhances the visitors park experience. We need to preserve these wild horses but we need thoughtful, good management to maintain a viable, healthy herd. It is clear to me that the three park plans will eventually result in a goal of no horses remaining in the park.

The park management now claims that the park was established to preserve native habitat and species for future generations and not to give the public a view into the ranching lifestyle of Teddy Roosevelt's days there. The park wants to focus on "scientific management" which allows only for indigenous species and which considers the wild horses no more than weeds to be plucked out. However, the preserved Elk Horn Ranch site, the preserved Peaceful Valley Ranch site and Teddy's cabin on display testify that honoring the ranching lifestyle of that era was a part of the original park plan. The horses, longhorns, bison and other animals have coexisted well in the park since it's founding and there is no reason they can't continue to do so for future generations to enjoy.

I encourage your support for the approval of SCR 4014 to keep Teddy's horses wild and free in Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

