

Thank you for this opportunity to share my testimony in support of SCR-4014. My name is Chelsea Sorenson, hobby photographer, and park visitor to Theodore Roosevelt National Park 1 South Unit since 1990.

I've lived in western and central North Dakota all my life and am extremely knowledgeable about my local wild horse herd in Theodore Roosevelt National Park in Medora. I know each of the horses by name, which band they're in, their band members, each horse's ancestry back several generations, etc. Who do we know who can take on 130 wild horses, with sanctuaries already overflowing and inflation increasing hay prices among everything else? Who gets to choose which horses stay and which are adopted out?

Genetic viability, according to scientists like Gus Cothran and Castle McLaughlin, is 100-150 horses in a herd. It is clear that GonaCon works in reducing births and balancing herd numbers, in conjunction with small biannual gathers of 10-20 a year. Stabilizing the population is what will grant these horses their perpetual freedom.

I know each one of these horses by name, their parentage and histories, and I've met many like-minded friends who love these horses just as much, many of whom own a formerly wild TRNP horse, several more than one. We have all spent countless hours with these wild horses and with each other and none of us can imagine this national park without the horses. They are the heartbeat of the park.

The horses improve both my physical and mental health. I never tire of hiking out to them to photograph them, and the outdoors is great for my mental health. It's a good feeling to collapse in bed after a day of hiking to find the horses, solo or with friends. The park is my happy place and has been for years, a place where my soul is refreshed. I want it to stay that way, but taking away so many of the horses would leave a void in my soul. While in Medora, I also contribute to the economy of Medora and the park, by eating at restaurants, buying merchandise in stores, sleeping in hotels and camping in the park, buying lots of gas and food and drink, and sometimes going to the Pitchfork Fondue and musical. Visitor loss will be of great impact on TRNP, the city of Medora and its shops, museums, restaurants, the new Theodore Roosevelt Library to come, the State of North Dakota, and the great North Dakotan spirit overall.

If the horses are gone from TRNP, I might just turn in my season pass and go somewhere else where wild horses can be found. Therefore, I SUPPORT SCR-4014 and wish to thank Governor Burgum, our ND State Legislature Assembly members, Congressional Delegates, and the Department of Tourism for being IN SUPPORT of saving the wild horses of Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

Sincerely,

Chelsea Sorenson