

Senators, thank you for giving the public this audience. My name is Christine Kman. I am here representing Chasing Horses Wild Horse Advocates, a nonprofit organization based in Dickinson, ND that advocates for the wild horses that call Theodore Roosevelt National Park home. I am here to ask that you pass Senate Concurrent Resolution SCR 4014: A concurrent resolution urging the Secretary of the Interior and the Director of the National Park Service to modify its proposed livestock management plan, and to continue to allow for interpretative, cultural, and historical purposes a herd of longhorn steers in the North Unit of the Theodore Roosevelt National Park and the presence of a wild horse herd in the South Unit of the Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

On December 12, 2022, Theodore Roosevelt National Park announced their plans to eliminate the entire herd of wild horses from the park's boundaries. The realization of the park's announcement was very surreal. I resonated with the message coming from all across our state, our nation and our world: What would Theodore Roosevelt National Park be WITHOUT the wild horses?

Early on in the incorporation of Chasing Horses Wild Horse Advocates, our lawyer reminded me that this was not MY nonprofit. This organization belongs to the community it serves. I pride myself on being open and honest with our community of followers and I am proud of the dedication they have to this herd. We have over 100,000 people who follow us from as close as our state of North Dakota and as far away as Germany, England and Australia. Across the miles, these horses have captured the hearts of literally at least hundreds of thousands of people worldwide.

The history of these horses is well documented. Scientists have weighed in on the impacts of the proposed actions of Theodore Roosevelt National Park. Policies have been cited. Cultural and spiritual significance has been well stated.

In the moments when I found myself overwhelmed by the gravity of this moment, there always seemed to be a letter or a message of support that would come through at just the right time. Messages like "We'll do our best to try and send a small contribution to you when our Social Security checks comes through." Or messages as simple as "Please save our TRNP horses."

Messages that let me know that there was a large group of people looking to me and our board for guidance on how WE would navigate through this journey to Fight for the Spirit of the Badlands.

One by one, businesses from across our state have also stepped forward in opposition of Theodore Roosevelt National Park's announcement. State media outlets such as The Dickinson Press and the Fargo Forum have also weighed in:

From the The Dickinson Press:

We understand some of the concerns raised by the park service. We understand the challenges of preserving and interpreting the horses. We understand that the National Park Service has a

limited ability to keep livestock in any park, let alone one that isn't counted among their most visited attractions in the country.

We understand that...but.

The idea of removing these horses is not only a blow to the local economy, but it also goes against the very principles of the Park's namesake, President Theodore Roosevelt. As an advocate for conservation and the protection of America's wild spaces, it is hard to imagine that he would stand idly by while these horses are removed from the land that bears his name.

These horses are not just a tourist attraction, they are a vital part of the park's ecosystem and a symbol of the rugged spirit that defines the West. They are a reminder of the importance of preserving our natural heritage for future generations. The day that horses no longer peer out over the beautiful badlands from atop a butte, is the day that WE as citizens of the Western Edge have failed in our duty.

As area residents, it is our responsibility to speak up and take action to protect these horses and their legacy.

We must make our voices heard and let the National Park Service know that the wild horses of Theodore Roosevelt National Park are a treasured part of our community and should be protected for future generations to enjoy.

As we ponder the fate of the wild horses of Theodore Roosevelt National Park, we must ask ourselves, do we want to live in a Western Edge that no longer has these majestic creatures roaming the Badlands?

From the Fargo Forum:

Yet park officials now turn their back on the historical significance of the horses — kept in the park for decades as a “demonstration herd” depicting the “historic scene” the park honors.

Park officials argue that they don't have the authority under the park's enabling legislation or the Organic Act of 1916 — a farcical position that ignores the plain language of the law, “to conserve the scenery, natural and historic objects, and wild life in the System units and to provide for the enjoyment of the scenery, natural and historic objects, and wild life in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

Assateague Island National Seashore, a National Park Service site in Maryland, manages its horse herd as wildlife, not livestock — so obviously Theodore Roosevelt National Park can do the same.

The park is not instilling public confidence in the way it is going about its “planning” process. Even though it is considering the option of continuing its current management plan, which dates back to 1978, it has announced that it has “no basis” to keep the horses.

This is a train running down the tracks — unless those who value the horses speak out, loudly and clearly.

In keeping with the sense that Chasing Horses Wild Horse Advocates is a nonprofit organization that belongs to the community it serves; I stand before you now as a representative of Chasing Horses Wild Horse Advocates and have chosen to read highlights from some of the comment letters that were submitted to Theodore Roosevelt National Park that were shared with us by our followers. These are the messages that brought all of us here to this moment.

I want to start this testimony by stating the sincerest gratitude on behalf of wild horse lovers across the globe. The leadership and support that our North Dakota legislators have given as you stood up and advocated WITH us is something that we are sure that history will look back on favorably. Because of your help and support, recent events such as Governor Burgum's press conference along with Senator Hoeven and Senator Cramer's support became reality. North Dakota now stands ready to be a model for how state and federal agencies can work together to protect wild horses everywhere. Thank you for meeting us in this moment.

Upon renaming as Theodore Roosevelt National Park in 1978 (P.L. 95-625, title VI, §610), Congress did not further specify a new purpose. One must turn to the Congressional Reports to fully understand the intent behind creation and management of this NPS unit. In the Senate report of the 80th Congress (Calendar No. 51, Report No. 54), the Senate Committee on Public Lands lays out a detailed description behind the intent to create Theodore Roosevelt National Park. They describe the purpose as stated above, but further explained their rationale as: "It was to this area, that 25-year-old Theodore Roosevelt came in 1892... He became so attached to this scenic area and its possibilities for stock raising that he decided to remain." Further, they state: "It is deemed fitting at this time for the citizens of the State of North Dakota, through the State Historical Society of North Dakota and other organizations, to request Congress to set aside a portion of the Badlands of the Little Missouri as a national park and dedicate it to the memory of one of our most prominent citizens and former Presidents. The Badlands of North Dakota have a distinct value from a recreational, scenic, and historical viewpoint."

I moved here from Cleveland Ohio, lived in Dickinson for 11 yrs. and fell in love with Medora. My husband and I loved going on daytrips to drive through Theodore Roosevelt National Park, and would go as often as we could. One of the main attractions of the park are the horses. To be able to see them running wild and free is just something extraordinary that you don't always get to experience. I fell in love with them immediately and started following the family bands online. To have that history and knowledge is awesome. My husband and I even love Medora so much we got married there. All of my family traveled mainly from Ohio to

attend. It was the first time they'd ever seen anything like it before, and guess what their favorite part was... the wild horses.

the NPS has always been ambivalent about the horses. On several occasions in the past, the park considered eliminating the horses, but refrained because of public opposition. Reluctant to commit resources towards their management, the park has conducted virtually no 2 scientific studies to understand their environmental impacts, relationship with other species, or genetic health. Instead, successive superintendents have pursued diverse management goals. Because of this long neglect, the announcement of a management plan was considered a welcome development by many advocates and fans of the horses.

Many people welcomed the park's proposal for a Livestock Management Plan and the opportunity to participate in the process. The park proposed a series of wide-ranging alternatives and presented them by emphasizing the need for scientific management and "best practices," balancing priorities and inviting "public engagement." The original newsletter issued by the park to announce their plans was even addressed to "Friends." However, it soon became clear that this entire process was disingenuous and undertaken only to satisfy a bureaucratic "public engagement" mandate.

Suddenly past references to "wild horses" and "feral horses" have been replaced by a firm injunction that the horses are "livestock." Suddenly after 75 years the park has discovered that "livestock" are not permitted in any National Park-although in recent years at least two other NPS units have intentionally incorporated wild horses into their missions because they are viewed as contributing to an historic scene. All references to "history" have disappeared, and the park has subtly revised several key documents, adding language stating that only native wildlife are allowed in the park.

I cannot support any of the three final alternatives, and I am deeply concerned about the process that has landed us here. It is abundantly clear that the NPS and THRO initiated the ostensible process of developing a Livestock Management Plan having pre-determined their desired outcome, which is the elimination of the herd. They have been deliberately deceptive, while offering no justifications for their own decision.

I would also like the wild horses to stay at TRNP the bison and elk are no big deal seeing how you can see them for FREE at White Horse Hill south of Devils Lake,ND now the horses on the other hand is a different story we make several trips to TRNP a year just for the horses last year we seen something that was the best experience we could have ever had there. There were at least 30 horses all running in fact ran across the road in front of us what a beautiful site to see my wife was so excited . So let me put it this way if the horses are removed from TRNP WE WILL NOT GO BACK TO TRNP plain and simple and there are alot of people that think the same way!!!!!!

Are wild horses truly “wild,” as an indigenous species in North America, or are they “feral weeds”—barnyard escapees, far removed genetically from their prehistoric ancestors? The question at hand is, therefore, whether or not modern horses, *Equus caballus*, should be considered native wildlife.

The non-native, feral, and exotic designations given by agencies are not merely reflections of their failure to understand modern science but also a reflection of their desire to preserve old ways of thinking to keep alive the conflict between a species (wild horses), with no economic value anymore (by law), and the economic value of commercial livestock.

Native status for wild horses would place these animals, under law, within a new category for management considerations. As a form of wildlife, embedded with wildness, ancient behavioral patterns, and the morphology and biology of a sensitive prey species, they may finally be released from the “livestock-gone-loose” appellation.

If the NPS wants to call wild horses livestock, then it needs to call bison and elk livestock as well. The NPS needs to drop the label of “livestock” on the wild horses in the TRNP as they are not being bred for home use or for profit.

FERAL VERSUS WILD: The difference between feral and wild is the following: Wild means the animal is native living in a wild state. Feral is non-native to an area living first in a domestic state and then turned out to be wild. The wild horses of Theodore Roosevelt Park are native to N America and to that area compared to bison and elk. History wants to tell us they were used by Sitting Bull but were they wild captured then to be used for transport or were they used for transport and then turned out. The NPS managing TRNP today need to change the verbiage used in their scoping letter as it is incorrect and it is biased resulting in attempts at devaluation and exclusion of its wild horses, an action witnessed all too frequently today in the interfacing with minorities.

I currently live in Pennsylvania. I first visited the wild horses in the summer of 2019. That’s when I fell in love... with the horses... with the land... with Medora... with North Dakota! I am finally able to visit again this summer and I am bringing my husband and two small children. I am eager to share the wild horses and TRNP with them! I was devastated to hear of your plans to remove the horses from the park. I can’t bear the thought of my family not being able to experience what I did when I visited in 2019. PLEASE do not remove the horses from the park. There is ALWAYS another way... a BETTER way!

In response to your information expressed during your TRNP Livestock Plan, I would like to make comment and have included current scientific data to review to reevaluate TRNP

decision to NOT remove the horses from TRNP.

Facts: T. Roosevelt saw in his first historic visit in 1883, when the frontier was fast disappearing, native horses thriving on the land. Understanding the script presented of the “mission “ of the park is to follow guidelines assumed to be Teddy’s vision when establishing the park for Native Wildlife Conservation System, in which your assumptions excluded the horse. Although, I suspect, since the horses were present prior to 1947 when the park system was first established would logically include the horse. Please refer to the documents to confirm the horse is Native and part of the wildlife Roosevelt saw.

In that Sept 2022 NPS on TRNP “Horse Background and History” states: “Their presence represents Theodore Roosevelt’s experiences here during the open-range ranching era. By the late 1800s European settlement of the plains had reached the Dakotas.”. Goes on to say “In 1970, a change of park policy recognized the horse as part of the historical setting. New policies were written and enacted to manage the horses as a historic demonstration herd”. When did that policy change? Why now? According to 36 CFR 2.6, (cited in Jan 12th meeting) current policy (a) states: “The running-at-large, herding, driving across, allowing on, pasturing or grazing of livestock of any kind in a park area or the use of a park area for agricultural purposes is prohibited, except: ... (3) As designated, when conducted as a necessary and integral part of a recreational activity or required in order to maintain a historic scene.”. The wild horses of TRNP do that and have since the parks inception when fenced in over 75 years ago. That I have enjoyed since a child as my granddaughter does now and I continue to.

Please don’t eliminate the wild horse herd. There are better ways to manage them and many organizations and volunteers who would be willing to help. The wild horses are an American icon embodying freedom, toughness, ability to survive despite all obstacles and strong family bonds. We need more of this in our fractured society. The wild horses are a tourist attraction and can be utilized to promote all the great things our parks are supposed to represent. Come up with an alternative plan and find a better way.

One of the most profound comments from one of our followers actually came in the form of another alternative to consider.

At a minimum, if the horses are unwisely removed from TRNP, NPS alternative management plans should provide for mitigation of the harm from extermination of the herds. Please understand, this is not meant to be sarcastic, although it is plainly critical. Minimally, the mitigation of harm should include producing a permanent exhibit and video recording commemorating the rich multi cultural tradition of free-roaming horse herds on the Northern Plains. As a way of educating future generations about the tragic effects of bureaucratic management by the National Park Service in the brief period 1978-2023, a permanent bronze plaque could be installed overlooking Cedar Valley, or another setting in which we

have observed the horses, informing future generations of the consequences of irresponsible neglect of a living heritage resource.

The plaque might read, “Had you stood in this spot anytime from 1880 to 2020 you could have experienced iconic free roaming herds of naturalized horses that were the product of Native American and Euro-American ranchers and cowboys. In your experience of Theodore Roosevelt National Park, consider the reasons and rationale for why this experience no longer exists. Then, the visitor should travel to the reservation lands of the MHA Nation near Mandaree and Twin Buttes, or the habitat of free roaming Nokota horses near Linton, ND to experience the equine heritage that no longer exists here (within the park).

There have also been a ton of Theodore Roosevelt quotes thrown around over the last couple of months. This one in particular has stuck with me:

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”

At a recent meeting held by the Dickinson Chamber of Commerce, Attorney General Drew Wrigley said, “Yes, this is a national park, but it is under the stewardship of the people of North Dakota.” That line has stood strongly with me throughout this process. Our national parks belong to the people. Theodore Roosevelt National Park specifically falls under the stewardship of all of us in this room; all of us in the state. We have an obligation to protect this park and all of the resources it currently offers for future generations. Thank you again for meeting us in this moment; for stepping into the arena with us and for being a unified voice with us for the wild horses in Theodore Roosevelt National Park.