

TESTIMONY OF

**Sara Otte Coleman, Director Tourism and Marketing Division
ND Department of Commerce**

Good morning, Chairman Patten and members of the committee, I am Sara Otte Coleman, Director of the Tourism and Marketing Division for the North Dakota Department of Commerce. I am here today in support of SCR 4014 which urges the Secretary of the Interior and the Director of the National Park Service to reconsider its proposed plan to eliminate livestock in Theodore Roosevelt National Park and develop a management plan that allows the wild horse to remain in the south unit as they have since the park opened.

Theodore Roosevelt National Park is a top location for leisure travelers visiting North Dakota. The park has seen an average of 700,000 visitors over the last 5 years. Our research has shown that visiting a national or state park is the top motivator of marketable trips to North Dakota. We love to tout the uncrowded adventure visitors can enjoy in all three units of Theodore Roosevelt National Park. Based on the outpouring of comments our office has received, we believe park visitors highly value seeing the horses as part of their park experience.

The iconic wild horses found in Theodore Roosevelt National Park make this experience unique. No other national park in our region can offer this experience. Watchable wildlife motivates travel and the opportunity to see horses, bison, elk, mule deer, pronghorn and prairie dogs cohabitating within a preserved natural landscape is one of the joys of visiting Theodore Roosevelt National Park. The horses really set us apart from other national parks in the region.

These horses capture the attention of the media and influencers. In 2022, the Wild Horses in Theodore Roosevelt National Park have been featured in 194 articles reaching 501 million. These stories have an advertising equivalency of \$4.6 million.

Sara Broers, travel writer, CEO of Travel with Sara, and Co-owner of the Midwest Travel Network says, "The wild horses are the magic of Theodore Roosevelt National Park and what makes the park unique. North Dakota, Medora, and the park will miss out on thousands of visitors each year without them. If the national park system wants to keep Theodore Roosevelt National Park alive and thriving the horses need to be a part of it."

- #1 on Midwest Living's list for photo ops in TRNP is Wild Horses: "Perhaps the most magical part of Theodore Roosevelt National Park is the free-roaming horses, found only in the South Unit." <https://www.midwestliving.com/travel/north-dakota/9-cant-miss-photo-ops-theodore-roosevelt-national-park/>
- Quirky Travel Guy, Scott Shetler: "The Theodore Roosevelt National Park wild horse are among the biggest attractions for tourism in this famed North Dakota park." <https://quirkytravelguy.com/roosevelt-national-park-animals-wildlife-horses/>

- The Greatest Road Trip: "Theodore Roosevelt National Park is one of the few parks that is home to wild horses, another easy-to-spot species, offering a glimpse of what early visitors to America's wildest areas might have seen when horses roamed across the entire western half of the country."
<http://www.thegreatestroadtrip.com/theodore-roosevelt-national-park>
- Made #4 on the top 10 list for 10 Traveling Feet - <https://10travelingfeet.com/10-great-things-to-do-in-theodore-roosevelt-national-park-south-unit/>
- According to Wandering Rose Travels, "The most interesting sightings at Theodore Roosevelt were wild horses."
<https://www.wanderingrosetravels.com/destinations/united-states/five-reasons-visit-theodore-roosevelt-national-park/>

Tourism is key to growing North Dakota's economy. Visitors to Billings County spent \$16 million in 2021. The opening of the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library will create new visitors to the area and the Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

Horses have been present in the park since its founding. Generations of travelers have visited the park and have enjoyed free roaming bands of horses. Removal of the horses eliminate a feature of the park guests are accustomed to seeing and a much-loved species of the North Dakota badlands. Many of the comments our office has been receiving are from visitors who frequently make return trips to the park to view the horses and have been coming for many years.

Thank you for your focus on this important issue.