

Birgit Pruess, Ph.D.
3696 Harrison St. S
Fargo, ND

February 1, 2025

RE: SCR4006

Dear members of the 69th Legislative Assembly of North Dakota,

I am a resident of Fargo, ND. Please, accept the below as my testimony IN enthusiastic FAVOR of SCR4006, “A concurrent resolution urging Congress to establish federal protections for the wild horse herd at Theodore Roosevelt National Park.”

The horses enjoy the support of over 100,000 fans, including the entire 68th Legislative Assembly, former Governor now Secretary of the Interior Burgum, Senator Hoeven, all five of our tribal nations, and many others. Not to forget about myself. Two years ago, our State Legislature voted unanimously in support of a resolution to save our horses. In April 2024, Senator Hoeven got federal support for our horses. We all thought the situation had improved at that time. However, there was a helicopter round up in October where almost all horses were captured and the mares were hand administered another shot of Gonacon, which is used for birth control. 15 mares were outfitted with collars, one mare died shortly after being released. Data were provided to the public, though in a shape that I as a scientist can only consider sloppy (or deliberately misleading). All mares have been treated with Gonacon by now, most of them many times. Though some mares seem resistant to the drug and keep reproducing, which balances the gene pool in favor of their genes and reduces genetic diversity. By now, we are faced with a herd that is mostly sterile, though it is currently not known whether at least some of the mares could come back to fertility if taken off Gonacon. Five mares were taken off Gonacon and we will see what happens to them. This method of birth control was researched in TRNP for some 12 years, but the aggressive use that is being done right now was never covered by the research study.

The collars were unnecessary for the collection of location data for the horses. There are thousands of horse fans visiting the park. Everybody who has access to Facebook knows where the horses are and what the drivers are behind their movements. The collars are uncomfortable, it is not known whether this discomfort may change the behaviour of the horses, and there is a potential for injury to the horse. Helped by one or the other out of state non-profit, TRNP is still doing what they can to get rid of the horses.

If we are to keep 200 horses in the park, it is necessary to have a genetically viable herd and I doubt we have that right now. However, we should do what we can to keep these horses and hope a good number of them will return to fertility. It is obvious to me that TRNP is not working towards maintaining a genetically viable herd without federal ‘encouragement’. For this reason, I support this resolution to urge Congress to establish federal protection for the wild horse herd in TRNP.

I highly recommend a DO PASS vote.

As in all my testimonies, I much appreciate the hard work and dedication that each member of my state legislative assembly puts into our state. Thank you.

Sincerely and respectfully Birgit Pruess,
Ph.D.