

Testimony in Support of SCR4006
2/4/2025

To the Sixty-Ninth Legislative Assembly of North Dakota:

My name is Sabina Louise Pierce, and I am a National Geographic Explorer, photographer and storyteller working on a project on the North Dakota Native American Nokota Horse

I am writing regarding SCR4006, a resolution urging the U.S. Congress to establish federal protection for the wild horses of Theodore Roosevelt National Park. I have made many trips out to your beautiful state and have spent much time with the TRNP wild horses as they are the origins of the Nokota Horse. These horses are rich in history and cultural connections with your state along with being the last herd of wild horses in it too.

I believe they need Federal protection to preserve this historic wild horse herd in the Little Missouri Badlands, where they have been present since at least the late nineteenth century. These horses relate to North Dakota's heritage, originating from both ranch and Native American herds. Theodore Roosevelt and other open-range ranchers documented their presence, and they have been a distinctive attraction since the park's establishment. They attract visitors from across the state and beyond, contributing to tourism in Medora and gaining a dedicated global following on social media.

Even though they one of the main draws attracting visitors, and are rich historical and cultural significance, the National Park Service has considered eliminating the herd over the past sixty years. The most recent attempt came through an Environmental Assessment (EA) process in 2022, ending this past year. Many North Dakotans opposed the removal of the horses, and the decision was only halted due to the intervention of influential Senator Hoeven. While the park has since abandoned the EA plan, they have not made a long-term commitment to preserving the herd. They continue to use of the immunosuppressant GonaCon on mares as a strategy of gradual reduction through eventual sterilization and eventual elimination with the horses aging away.

There is concern that the National Park Service may not voluntarily commit to maintaining the horses or ensuring their long-term health and viability. Local and regional NPS staff have expressed opposition even this year.

Passing this resolution could help secure lasting protection for the wild horses, ensuring they remain a part of North Dakota's history and landscape.

Sincerely,

Sabina Pierce
National Geographic Society Explorer