

Testimony in Support of SCR4006
January 31, 2025

To the Sixty Ninth Legislative Assembly of North Dakota:

I write in support of SCR4006, a resolution requesting the legislature to urge the U.S. Congress to devise and impose federal protection for the wild horses in Theodore Roosevelt National Park. I studied the horses for the National Park Service (NPS) between 1987-1990, compiling a lengthy cultural history of the herd and its management by the NPS.

Federal protection is necessary to ensure that this historic wild horse herd remains in the Little Missouri Badlands, where wild horses have existed since at least the late nineteenth century. The horses embody the history of North Dakota, since they originated from both ranch and Native American herds. Theodore Roosevelt and other open-range ranchers described and wrote about their presence, and the horses have been a unique and popular attraction since the establishment of the national park honoring the twenty-sixth president. They draw both North Dakotans and out of state tourists to the park and the Medora area and are now followed on social media by people around the world.

Despite their popularity and significance, Theodore Roosevelt National Park has sought to eliminate the herd several times during the past sixty years. However, they were kept as a “historic demonstration herd” that evoked Roosevelt and North Dakota’s open range ranching era. In 2022, the park announced that Roosevelt’s ranching career was no longer part of their mission and began an Environmental Assessment (EA) process to remove the resident horses and longhorn cattle. Because North Dakota state officials and thousands of residents opposed the removal of the horses, Senator Hoeven intervened, and the EA was aborted.

Unfortunately, I have no confidence that the National Park Service will voluntarily retain the horses and manage them to ensure their long-term health and viability. The park has not made a public commitment to keeping the herd forever, and their continuing efforts to sterilize the mares by using Gona Con, an immunosuppressant, suggests that they have simply found a new strategy for eliminating the herd. Put bluntly, I believe that to be their intention.

Only federal protection will secure their future. Please pass this resolution to ensure that the wild horses remain part of North Dakota’s history and landscape for coming generations.

Thank you for your consideration,

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