

Testimony in Support of SB 2331: Establishing a Wild Horse Working Group

Good morning,

My name is Judith Worrall, and I am here today as a concerned citizen and advocate for North Dakota's natural heritage. I respectfully urge our state legislators to support SB 2331, a bill that calls for the formation of a state-led working group dedicated to the long-term management and protection of our wild horses. This initiative is both timely and critical for preserving a unique element of North Dakota's landscape.

Proven Success and Data-Driven Impact

The model pioneered in Colorado, led by the American Wild Horse Campaign (AWHC), has demonstrated that state-level involvement in wild horse management not only stabilizes the population but also creates a win-win scenario for both ecological balance and local economies. In Colorado, the implementation of a coordinated, state-led strategy has led to:

- **Population Stability:** Scientific assessments indicate that structured management plans have helped maintain healthy, sustainable wild horse populations, reducing the risk of overgrazing and habitat degradation.
- **Economic Benefits:** Studies have shown that wild horse sightings contribute significantly to local tourism. In Colorado, regions with active wild horse programs have experienced up to a 15% increase in park visitation, translating into substantial economic boosts for surrounding communities.

Ecological and Cultural Importance

Wild horses are an integral part of North Dakota's natural and cultural fabric. Data from regional ecological studies reveal that:

- **Biodiversity Preservation:** Wild horses naturally manage vegetation, which in turn supports native plant and animal species. Their grazing habits help prevent the proliferation of invasive species and reduce wildfire risks by maintaining healthier grasslands.
- **Cultural Heritage:** Surveys consistently show that over 80% of park visitors regard wild horses as a highlight of their experience. Their presence not only enhances the beauty and uniqueness of our natural landscapes but also deepens public engagement with conservation efforts.

A Collaborative Approach for Sustainable Future

SB 2331 is more than just legislation—it is a strategic partnership among the state, the park, and various interest groups. This collaborative model ensures that management decisions are

based on robust scientific data, stakeholder input, and proven practices from other successful state initiatives like Colorado's. By establishing a dedicated working group, North Dakota can:

- **Facilitate Informed Decision-Making:** Bring together experts, local stakeholders, and conservationists to create adaptive management strategies that address current challenges and future uncertainties.
- **Ensure Long-Term Protection:** Develop a proactive plan that secures the future of wild horses while balancing ecological health and economic interests.

Conclusion

The data is clear: implementing a state-led working group through SB 2331 will protect an irreplaceable symbol of North Dakota's heritage while promoting ecological balance and economic prosperity. I strongly support this bill and encourage our legislators to take action that honors both our natural legacy and the well-being of our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Judith Worrall