

To the Honorable Members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee:

I write today in strong support of SB 2331, which seeks to establish a North Dakota Wild Horse Working Group to ensure the long-term management and protection of the historic wild horses of Theodore Roosevelt National Park. These horses are a vital part of North Dakota's heritage, embodying both the legacy of Theodore Roosevelt and the untamed spirit of the American West. Their presence in the park is significant not only from a historical and ecological perspective but also in terms of tourism and economic benefits to local communities. This bill presents a crucial opportunity for the state to take a leadership role in the humane and sustainable management of these horses through collaboration among policymakers, conservationists, and local stakeholders.

The wild horses of Theodore Roosevelt National Park are a living tribute to our 26th president, whose deep connection to North Dakota shaped his vision for conservation. Roosevelt's experiences in the Badlands played a defining role in his environmental policies, ultimately leading to the creation of the national parks system. Preserving this herd within the park that bears his name is a meaningful way to honor his legacy and commitment to protecting America's natural resources. Allowing these horses to remain in the park ensures that future generations can experience a piece of history that reflects Roosevelt's conservation ethos.

Unlike other wild horse herds in the United States, the Theodore Roosevelt National Park horses lack federal protection under the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act. This means they can be removed at any time without the legal safeguards afforded to other wild horse populations. The absence of federal protection makes the establishment of a state-led working group all the more critical. Without structured oversight and a commitment to science-based conservation, the fate of these horses remains uncertain. SB 2331 provides a necessary framework to ensure that decisions about their future are made transparently and with input from the public and experts alike.

Beyond their historical and ecological value, these wild horses contribute significantly to North Dakota's economy. Theodore Roosevelt National Park is one of the state's most visited destinations, drawing tourists from across the country who come, in part, to see the wild horses. Medora and surrounding communities benefit greatly from the revenue generated by visitors who spend money on lodging, dining, and local businesses. The removal of these horses would not only be a cultural and environmental loss but would also have economic consequences for North Dakota. Ensuring their continued presence supports tourism and helps sustain the local economy.

Public support for protecting the Theodore Roosevelt National Park wild horses is overwhelming. Thousands of North Dakotans, along with advocates from across the country, have expressed their desire to see these horses remain in the park. Establishing a state working group ensures that this public interest is reflected in decision-making and that conservation

efforts are guided by science, transparency, and collaboration. A structured approach to management, rather than abrupt removals, will help build consensus and ensure the best possible outcome for both the horses and the communities they impact.

SB 2331 offers North Dakota the opportunity to implement a model of humane wild horse conservation that has already seen success in states like Colorado. By bringing together state officials, wildlife experts, advocates, and local stakeholders, the proposed working group will create a collaborative, science-based approach to managing the herd. This model prioritizes humane conservation strategies, prevents unnecessary removals, and provides long-term oversight to ensure the responsible stewardship of these iconic animals.

Passing SB 2331 is a necessary step toward securing the future of North Dakota's wild horses. It reflects a commitment to Roosevelt's conservation legacy, acknowledges the significant economic and cultural value of these animals, and establishes a proactive approach to their management. I urge the committee to support this important legislation and help ensure that the wild horses of Theodore Roosevelt National Park remain a cherished part of North Dakota's landscape for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.