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NEWS RELEASE

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Arizona Game and Fish director addresses House panel on proposed changes to free-roaming horse and burro management

Advises that law must balance horse and burro concerns with wildlife and ecosystem considerations

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Arizona Game and Fish Department Director Larry Voyles today told a congressional committee that a proposed bill that would change how free-roaming horses and burros are managed could result in adverse impacts to wildlife and habitat, as well as to the horses and burros the legislation seeks to further protect, and he offered several recommendations on ensuring a viable future for each.

Testifying on behalf of the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA), Voyles told the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands that some aspects of the legislation, H.R. 1018, could alter the ecological balance of the habitat on which wildlife and horses and burros depend for their existence.

Acknowledging the challenges the subcommittee faces in considering both the human concerns for free-roaming horses and burros and concerns for healthy wildlife populations and rangelands in the western states, Voyles offered several recommendations:

1. Continue to limit free-roaming horse and burro herds to the areas where they were found upon enactment of the 1971 act.
2. Make law and policy drive refinement of methods (such as techniques modeled after wildlife population census studies) to accurately assess free-roaming horse and burro populations and accurately set "appropriate management levels" (AMLs) for horse and burro herds.
3. Federal agencies should continue to use AMLs as target numbers for managing free-roaming horse and burro herds.
4. Law and policy should facilitate research into innovative tools for herd management, including feasible and efficient removal and fertility control, as well as continued usage of practical tools such as helicopters for inventory, roundup and removal efforts, where dictated by habitat conditions or management targets.
5. Congress must appropriate funds sufficient for the management of free-roaming horse and burro herds within AMLs and the land's capacity to support them, as one component of diverse and thriving ecosystems.

"If we fail to manage the balance between free-roaming horses and burros and the capacity of the land to support them and the wildlife that depend on those lands, then the laws of nature will prevail and we will fail as stewards of all three: land, wildlife, and horses and burros," said Voyles.

H.R. 1018 would amend the 1971 Wild Free-roaming Horses and Burros Act. Among other provisions, it would remove the limitations on areas where horses and burros can roam, require the creation of sanctuaries for these animals, bolster the Bureau of Land Management's horse and burro adoption program, and change the circumstances and methods by which free-roaming horses and burros could be removed.

Voyles was one of several experts who provided testimony before the subcommittee on the proposed legislation.

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