

July 1, 1974

The Honorable Henry M. Jackson, Chairman,
Interior and Insular Affairs Committee of the Senate,
Senate Office Building,
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Jackson:

I thank you and your colleagues in the Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee for holding the Oversight Hearing concerning enforcement, or lack of enforcement, of P. 92-195, on June 26th. I was there, with counsel for this organization. We did not have witness transcripts as you suggested in your letter which came after that date, and I am sure you are aware of our position, I am hoping that this letter can be made a part of the record of the hearing.

Wild horse and burro population explosion has been much of the news lately, as has been the assertion of Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, and ranchers that these animals should be controlled with the use of airplanes and mechanized vehicles with gas oil and DDT.

Both of these allegations surfaced in the report to Congress by the Secretary of Interior and Agriculture and in the report of the Department of the Interior at the Oversight Hearing. Reference is also made in the report to the amendment to P. 92-195 proposed by the Interior Department: (1) To curtail the use of aircraft and mechanized equipment to manage wild herds and burros; and (2) To sell or donate excess animals to individuals or organizations. In regard to this latter, we control over disposition of the animals after transfer to the world be retained, leaving the owner free to dispose of them as he or she wishes, including sale for slaughter for commercial products. I opposed both of these recommendations made by the National Advisory Board and a minority report is on file with both Secretaries, with your office, and with a number of other members of Congress who have been involved in this effort to behalf of wild horses and burros.

Charges of extreme population increases are not based upon any empirical research or reliable studies and are premature, speculative and highly prejudicial. They reflect an insidious campaign to discredit those who support protection, management and control of these animals that have been ruthlessly and relentlessly captured and removed from public lands because, in the words of those who use and abuse the ranges for personal financial gain, "they are of neither edible nor trophy value".

'Population Explosion' first made headlines when an article appeared in the Los Angeles Times of March 3, 1974. Recognizing it as a tool that could be

The Honorable Henry M. Jackson
July 1, 1974
Page Two

effectively used against protection of the animals, I traced the statement to its source and it turned out to be a BLM official who readily admitted to giving the reporter that information, then added "I made a statement of 20% increase and I was wrong." He went on to explain to me that it was a computed percentage arrived at on this basis: "Starting with equally sexed animals, you compute an optimum population potential. Assume they are of totally even age structure, from 1 to 20 years, and they start breeding at two years of age, produce first foal at three, stop producing at 17, live three more years after that. No death loss; no other problems. Every foal that is born lives and every adult horse also lives out its full span. You will come up with 41%. Divide by two and you come up with 20%."

In their report to Congress, the Secretaries point out that more horses and burros are being found on the national resource lands than first estimated. This is difficult for me to believe. In light of the zealous and unremitting efforts of ranchers and land management agencies under pressure from domestic livestock operators due for the most part to livestock over-use, it appears unlikely that even the most remote and inaccessible areas would have escaped minute scrutiny to legitimize a claim of over-population in their bitter opposition to passage of the Wild Horse and Burro Act of 1971.

With the BLM and Forest service now responsible for the animals, and keeping in mind charges of population explosion since 1971 and inability to manage and control without aircraft, two possibilities become apparent:

1. Either the law enacted by Congress in 1959 to prohibit the use of airplanes and mechanized vehicles was not enforced, thereby resulting in the harvest of the animals to a point where the population (prior to 1971) was not considered to be a valid basis for opposition to enactment of the 1971 law;

OR

2. The population explosion "alarm", having no basis in research but rather the result of a computation based upon a number of assumptions, was conjured up to provide ammunition for further attack upon the right of these animals to the use of our public lands . . . and upon our right to insure that use for them.

It was quite evident at the hearing that a number of the Senators were not convinced of the necessity for amending the Act as recommended by the Interior Department, and I was most interested to hear that the Forest Service has noted no appreciable increase in the numbers of wild horses and burros on land administered by it.

Velma B. Johnston (Mrs. Charles C.)
Wild Horse Annie