

July xx, 2010

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

Recent media accounts have documented still more deaths of wild horses during Bureau of Land Management (BLM) roundups. Just this month, 12 horses, including three foals, died during the Tuscarora Complex roundup in northeastern Nevada as a result of deeply flawed methods. This tragedy was only the most recent in a string of reports of wild horses dying during BLM roundups this year.

We are concerned by the inability of your agency to acknowledge these disturbing outcomes, change what seems to be deeply flawed policy, and better manage the gathers so as to prevent the unnecessary suffering and death of these federally protected animals.

Specifically, on Saturday, July 10, with temperatures hovering near 100 degrees, the BLM, in a time-span of two and half hours, captured and corralled more than 228 wild horses after running them more than 8 miles. During this time, public observation of BLM activities was prohibited. This ill-advised plan resulted in the deaths of 12 protected American Mustangs, most due to water intoxication; three of the dead were foals less than six months old. By the time the roundup was halted, 17 horses had died.

While we applaud the speed with which you temporarily halted the Tuscarora roundup after these deaths, the roundup has now resumed. Apparently, BLM continues to bar public observers, despite a court order affirming the right to "reasonable access." So far, 410 more horses have been gathered and, according to BLM's own account, the death toll has risen to 21.

The BLM is repeating the mistakes made during the deadly round up in the Calico Mountain Complex last winter. That roundup resulted in the deaths of over 105 horses, along with the stress-induced late term abortions of at least 40 mares.

Given this pattern, and the continued threat of death and suffering to these animals, we request that the Tuscarora Complex roundup be suspended, along with any pending gathers, until the agency demonstrates that it has addressed the failings of the current program and can ensure the safety and well-being of the animals you are charged with protecting.

Specifically, the BLM must account for temperature extremes and the impacts of stampeding young, elderly or injured animals across long distances when planning roundups. The BLM needs to ensure transparency by allowing members of the public to observe agency activities.

Further, we remain concerned that roundups are conducted at great expense to the taxpayer.

As we have pointed out in the past, BLM's aggressive use of roundups has resulted in unsustainable increases in the number of horses in holding facilities (now at 38,000) and continues to undermine the BLM's overall budget. Unfortunately, the frequency of roundups has only increased under this administration.

To address these and other flaws, we recommend an independent analysis of the National Wild Horse and Burro program, conducted by the National Academy of Sciences. This analysis will provide a clear determination of the most accurate, science-based methodologies to estimate wild horse and burro populations, provide an assessment of Appropriate Management Levels based on the goal of maintaining sustainable herds and provide an assessment of practical, effective, non-lethal and publicly acceptable management alternatives to current BLM policies.

We strongly urge you to refrain from any further action until a clear plan is in place to sustainably manage and protect our wild herds. Only then can we move forward with a more informed, open and deliberate process, based on input from all who are concerned with the health, well being, and conservation of this animal which embodies the spirit of our American West.

cc:

Mr. Bob Abbey, Director, Bureau of Land Management