

Wild horses & burros get partial good news in the current Interior Appropriations bill.

The Fiscal Year 2019 Interior Appropriations bill approved unanimously by the Senate Appropriations Committee on June 14 would keep in place prohibitions against killing healthy wild horses and burros or selling them for slaughter.

“We appreciate that Senate Appropriators are listening to their constituents, who expect America’s wild horses and burros to be protected in keeping with the spirit of the law,” said Neda DeMayo, president of Return to Freedom Wild Horse Conservation. “We will remain vigilant against policies and practices that would cause wild horses and burros to suffer — directly or through third-party sales — including a needless push to perform dangerous, costly and unproven field sterilization surgeries on wild mares and jennys.

“At the same, we’re ready to roll up our sleeves and continue meeting with government staff and other stakeholders to move wild horse management in the a humane, fiscally responsible direction utilizing politically viable solutions, as the Senate has requested, including safe, proven fertility control vaccines.”

The Senate bill posted late on the night of June 14 does not include language like that in an amendment to the House’s FY19 Interior bill, approved by its Appropriations Committee, which would grant the Secretary of the Interior wide leeway to order the use of dangerous sterilization surgeries on wild horses and burros.

The Senate bill also includes a \$5.6 million increase for the Wild Horse & Burro Program budget “as an investment to implement a multiple-strategy approach within its current authorities that reduces the number of animals on the range and held off the range,” the Appropriations Committee added in guiding report language. The committee stressed that it “remained concerned that a politically viable solution remains to be agreed upon while the animal population continues to grow.”

On June 6, the House Appropriations Committee passed, on a voice vote, the following

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amendment to its Interior Appropriations bill: "...The Secretary of the Interior may hereafter manage any group of wild horses or burros as a non-reproducing or single-sex herd, in whole or in part, including through sterilization."

This amendment would allow BLM to make any herd a non-reproducing one by performing field surgeries that threaten the lives of individual mares and the viability of entire herds for the benefit of special interests.

The House amendment is made all the more concerning in light of an effort by the Interior Department to streamline the National Environmental Policy Act in ways that could undermine government transparency and public involvement in wild horse and burro management. In a BLM response to a review of NEPA, the agency listed under wishes for future categorical exclusions wild horse roundups and fertility control programs.

Field sterilization surgeries, which Return to Freedom strongly opposes, were also included by the BLM in a recent report to Congress along with other inhumane options similarly unlikely to be politically viable – including shipping captive wild horses and burros overseas for use as prey animals for big cats. Pursuing such unpopular proposals would only serve to further delay a long-overdue move toward a sustainable and humane long-term plan to manage our nation's wild horses and burros on their rightful ranges.

In 2007, BLM stood within 1,071 animals of its own population goal, yet, since then, the agency has failed to invest more than 3.94% of its annual wild horse program budget allocation on fertility control or other humane, on-range management tools and practices, even as the cost of roundups and holding facilities to taxpayers – and to the animals themselves – keeps climbing.

BLM's failure to adequately implement the safe, proven fertility control vaccine PZP has resulted in 46,431 wild horses and burros warehoused in government holding facilities, costing taxpayers about \$47.5 million annually to house, feed and care for them in 2017. About four of every 10 wild horses and burros under BLM management now lives in a corral or on a leased pasture.

Return to Freedom's American Wild Horse Sanctuary in Lompoc was the fourth among what are now many projects, on and off the range, using fertility control on wild horses with great success. RTF has used the vaccine PZP for 20 years with an efficacy rate of 91-98%. A

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non-hormonal vaccine, it has minimal effects on behavior.

Press release provided by Return To Freedom. For more information, including the advocacy group's recommended actions to support responsible wild horse management, visit www.returntofreedom.org

The Gallop welcomes news, tips and photos. Contact Kim F. Miller at kimfmiller1@mac.com or 949-644-2165.