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August 28, 2009

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Bob Abbey
Director
Bureau of Land Management
1849 C Street, NW, Rm. 5665
Washington, D.C. 20240

Re: Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Round-up

Dear Director Abbey:

I write to you today regarding the proposal to remove wild horses from the Pryor Mountain Range in Montana in September pursuant to Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-MT-C010-2009-35-EA. The proposed action would remove approximately 75 members of an existing herd of 190 horses in the Pryor Mountains due to what the BLM claims to be an excess of horses on the range and conflicts with other multiple uses on National Forest outside the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range.

Last December, Chairman Nick J. Rahall, II and I wrote to your predecessor regarding deficiencies in the agency's Wild Horse and Burro Program, however, to date, the fundamental and profound problems in the program have not been corrected. I therefore urge you to suspend action on the proposed Pryor Mountain gather, as well as suspending all other gathers, until such time as the agency can demonstrate that it has fixed the many failings of the current program including resolving, in a humane and transparent manner, the matter of the tens of thousands of captive horses currently under its care.

I specifically call to your attention the Government Accountability Office (GAO) report from late last year, entitled "*Bureau of Land Management Effective Long-Term Options Needed to Manage Unadoptable Wild Horses*" (GAO-09-77) which outlined critical failings of the program, such as:

- 1) due to the use of outdated methodology, the BLM lacks the necessary data to determine the number of wild horses the range can support;
- 2) aggressive, poorly-managed removals are still the BLM's primary method for managing horses and as a result, BLM has more horses in holding facilities than in the wild;
- 3) the BLM does not have a long-range plan in place for the care or adoption of the tens of thousands of horses currently in captivity;
- 4) the agency's use of taxpayer dollars in this program is irresponsible as more than two-thirds of the program's budget goes to manage horses in holding facilities that perhaps never should have been rounded up in the first place; and

- 5) the BLM has not formally considered other possible solutions, such as contraception, sanctuaries, or aggressive adoptions programs, to deal with the current number of wild horses in long-term holding, other than one pilot project in Wyoming.

As in prior examples outlined in the GAO report, the decision to round-up the Pryor Mountain herd does not appear to be based upon the statutory goal of "achieving a thriving ecological balance" nor fiscally responsible management practices. The agency has systematically removed entire herds of horses from public lands where they belong by law in order to benefit private livestock interests at a cost to taxpayers of more than \$21 million in 2007. Making matters worse, over 19 million acres, on which wild horses and burros roamed at the time of the passage of the 1971 Act, are no longer available. The BLM has yet to provide adequate justification for this loss of range for wild horses and burros.

Furthermore, continuing to carry out round-ups under the current management regime, when the Bureau already has more horses than it can reasonably afford to care for, or adopt to private citizens, is irresponsible fiscal management and unconscionable from a humane standpoint.

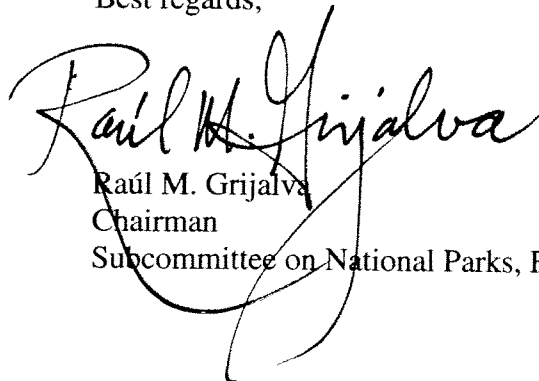
Wild horse round-ups are hardly benign affairs. The use of helicopters and other methods create extreme stress, and likely will result in injury or death to some animals. In particular, I am informed of the presence of newly born foals that may be killed by gathering of the Pryor Mountain herd at this time.

In prior correspondence with the BLM, my colleagues and I have urged the agency to correct the many failings pointed out in the GAO's report, however, I am not assured at this time that the agency is taking the necessary steps to do so. I believe the BLM needs to step back and take a hard look at the findings and recommendations of the GAO's thorough report and begin a thoughtful deliberation that includes exploring new options in managing wild horses and burros, instead of blindly continuing practices that have clearly been shown to be inappropriate and fiscally irresponsible.

I encourage the BLM to suspend all round-ups until the agency has adequately demonstrated to the American people and to Congress that it has addressed the outstanding problems and updated its program to reflect 21st century values, ensuring that wild horses and burros will always have a home on the range of our public lands.

If you would like to speak to me about the concerns I have raised, please do not hesitate to call.

Best regards,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands