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## Bob Abbey: The BLM shares wild-horse advocates' goal

A small, but vocal, group of wild horse advocates has sparked some very emotional responses to the Bureau of Land Management's plan to remove excess wild horses from overpopulated herds on drought-stricken public rangelands. Often lost in the rhetoric is the fact that we essentially share the same goal, preserving healthy wild horse herds on healthy Western rangelands as a legacy for the American people.

So why not, as our critics have proposed, stop the roundups and leave the wild horses and burros alone?

Simply put, the range could not withstand the resulting impacts. Wild horse and burro herds, which have virtually no natural predators, grow at a rate of about 20 percent a year, which means herds can double in size every four years. Currently, the free-roaming population of 37,000 horses and burros on Western rangelands exceeds by more than 10,000 the number that the BLM has determined can exist in balance with other public rangeland resources.

Congress envisioned horse overpopulation issues and thus mandated the removal of excess wild horses and burros from the range in the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act. The act requires the interior secretary to determine whether and where overpopulated herds exist and, on making that finding, to immediately remove excess animals from the range so as to achieve appropriate management levels.

That is why we are gathering excess wild horses in the Calico Complex in Northern Nevada over the next few weeks. In Calico and across the West, wild horses are removed not to make room for more cattle grazing but to ensure or restore ecological balance. Keep in mind that wild horses and cattle are not the only animals that depend on the range. The BLM manages rangeland habitat for a variety of wildlife, including elk, deer, sage-grouse and migratory birds; the agency also protects threatened and endangered species.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and I have proposed a forward-looking plan that would benefit the horses, the public rangelands and the American taxpayer. It includes humanely caring for excess horses in new preserves, especially on the productive grasslands of the Midwest and East, while applying fertility control to slow growth rates of wild horse herds remaining on Western public rangelands. (Details are at [www.blm.gov](http://www.blm.gov).)

By moving in this direction, we will promote the health and well-being of America's wild horses and burros, protect public rangelands and provide Americans with a well-run, cost-effective program. But to get there, we will need to continue removing excess wild horses from the public rangelands in areas where the land can no longer support them.

Robert Abbey is director of the Bureau of Land Management. He served as the BLM's Nevada state director from 1997 to 2005.