

# Newsletter

*WHE Wild Word, June 2025*



# Resolve

## *Letter from our founder*



I first met this little man 15 weeks ago. Only a day or two old, he was a wobbly fuzzball that spent most of his time sleeping while mom grazed very close by.

He is learning the ways of the herd and becoming more curious about his environment. He is not a reckless or carefree little man. He is a real “thinker” that surveys his surroundings and interacts cautiously, but surely, with the rest of his band.

*What does his future hold?*

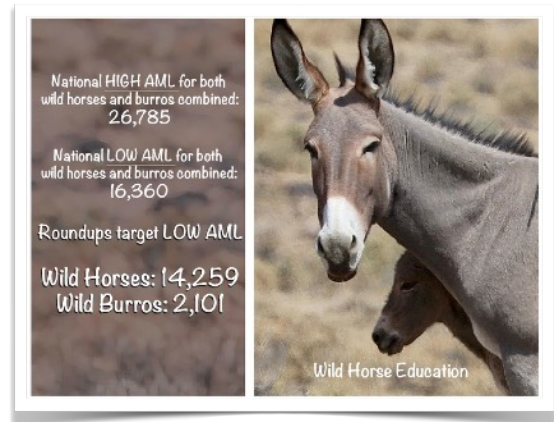
The herd he is part of, just like so many others, is facing an explosion of mining expansion, recreation and livestock (both cattle and sheep in the name of “outcome based grazing” and “year round targeted grazing” for fire fuels). If you track the population numbers of herds of wild horses you can see clearly that both the size and frequency of fire is reduced as the herd grows and increases after mass removals. In court last year we were able to get a roundup plan voided in large part due to the the failure of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to analyze the impact of removing large numbers of wild horses on fire fuels.

But agencies tasked with management know that in order to remain “politically correct,” they need to do what they planned to do, get the horses off, and will say and do whatever they need to in order to keep political peace. The historic rut in how BLM operates runs really deep and the agency simply cannot get their wheels out of the tracks. *So now we need to go back to court* as BLM pushes the same narrative (by simply giving it a new name) without science, data or actual analysis.

*We must maintain resolve in our journey for justice.*

AML has never stood for “Appropriate Management Level.” The number of wild horses and burros on the range was largely set through agreements where a permittee would tell BLM the approximate number of wild horses that were “usual” in their allotments or how many they would

tolerate. The sum of those numbers is how “interim” AMLs were set and stuck. That is why the total for the National AML is nearly the same as the number Congress declared “fast disappearing” when the Act passed. The maximum “Allowed Management Level” of today is only 26,785 wild horses and burros (combined). The target goal is low AML of 16,306 wild horses and burros (combined), far lower than the number “fast-disappearing” in 1971.



This is politics. This is not data-based, logical, moral, ethical. Our wild horses and burros have never gotten a fair shake and have always been a “throw away card” in political poker. Even the artificial boundary lines of today were a political construct created in the debate to pass the 1971 Act; without the addition of boundary lines that limited where wild horses and burros could legally exist, the law would not have passed.

Of course, politics requires an adherence to claims that the program is in “crisis” year after year, but never taking steps to do any real reform of the rotten and fictional foundation.

So far, 2025 is proving to be a year that will truly test our resolve as advocates.

*The Presidential Budget Request for fiscal year 2026 has just thrown the exact same strong-arm tactic used in 2017: The budget gutted by nearly 30% and the prohibition against killing healthy horses and burros and selling them without limits (slaughter) removed. A tactic used to gain traction to obtain the big corporate agreement most of you know by the name “Path Forward” in 2017. An agreement to reach AML and increase fertility control to maintain*

AML. That agreement gave away any fight to rectify the broken framework and just run mach-5 down the deteriorating old tracks without even obtaining a commitment to complete the Rulemaking process for a concise and enforceable welfare policy. There is a long way to go from the President's proposal, drafts in both House and Senate, before a final bill is written. *The final result of the 2017 budget debate needs to be noted: In the end, the prohibitions against killing healthy wild horses/burros or selling without limits (slaughter) were added back into the final spending bill by Congress and an initial increase in funding of \$21 million was added.*

*The budget debate is not about saving money, it is about using the budget as a way to fast-track agendas that would take too long to implement through other channels.*

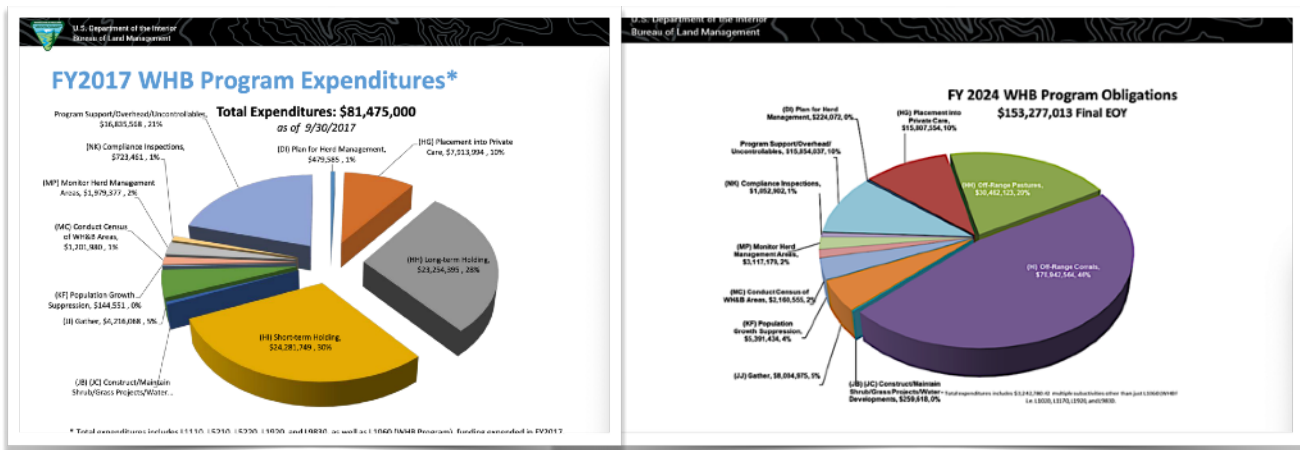
Think about the way Senator Conrad Burns (R-MT) snuck the provision to allow sales of wild horses and burros to slaughter as a stealth amendment in the budget debate in 2004. If he tried to do it openly, as a stand alone bill, it never would have passed. In fact, as soon as it was passed in the bill the public was outraged and the provision has been defunded in every single budget bill since, except perhaps this year.

Creating a new US Wildland Fire Service (that does not directly fight fires), giving it a budget of \$175 million to decimate forested areas for "fuel breaks" that will increase grasses while putting out more domestic livestock (and even a way to transfer funding to remove wild horses) is not "saving money. Any assertion that there is no money to house captive wild horses is absurd as funding is simply shifted to fast-track agendas outside established agencies. *This is politics to push an agenda that might fail if it went through any other process.*

Every year since 2018, the year of the agreement with big corporate, more and more money has been tossed at achieving the goal: getting to AML and keeping the numbers low. In July of 2024 alone, more wild horses and burros were removed from the range than were removed in the entire year of 2013, the entire year of 2014, the entire year of 2015.



*If the debate were ever truly about saving money, finding a path toward fiscal responsibility and responsibilities to the law and public resources, there would be a concerted effort to gain a real science-based review and transparent fiscal accounting. But there isn't.*



Every year since this politically based plan began it has used more and more taxpayer money. The disastrous plan, first incorporated into the BLM report to Congress in 2018, nearly doubled the expense of the program without fixing one single thing that was actually broken.

A phrase you will hear a lot in the coming days will sound something like: “We know it is simply horrible to even think about killing horses, but OMG the crisis is so bad and there really are no alternatives!” Then they will ask you for an “alternative.”

The word “alternative” indicates possibilities of choice. There are dozens of different choices that could be made. But only if making a different choice is the objective.

The word “alternative” used in this context implies that the problem has actually been identified and some risk/benefit analysis is being discussed. Just like the side effects of medication a doctor prescribes *after doing a lot of testing to identify an illness*, a risk/benefit assessment is done before a patient swallows the first pill.

If this debate was truly about finding a way to fix a broken program and save money, we would have a pause on removals (that are adding more wild horses and burros into the system of holding) and give the program a really hard look. Only after clearly and concisely identifying problems in the multiple layers of the program could *valid* “alternatives” be identified and discussed.

A review commissioned by BLM from the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) and an accounting review done by one of the various government oversight bodies (GAO, OIG) would be the place to start. But oversight offices are being gutted and “science” is now among the ranks of the growing unemployment line.

For anyone to throw killing wild horses in holding (outright or through sales to slaughter) as an “option,” without any actual willingness to prove that such a loathsome undertaking is truly warranted, is outrageous. Is this simply a tactic to push another agenda like privatization of the program or giving away most of the acreage our wild ones use (to push a narrative of gratitude when the public is “allowed” to maintain a handful of herds)? My mind scrambles to find sense in the insane thought as my mind envisions a realty where wild horses in holding are pushed into a chute and killed one after the other and hears the sounds of distress.

Then someone asks “what is the alternative?” And I want to reply “The alternative to insane is sanity.” *Does that make me unreasonable?*

Your lawmakers need to hear from you. Your voice must be heard loud and clear. Killing tens of thousands of wild horses and burros is not “ok.” It is not an “alternative,” it is an abomination. It is not a “bargaining chip,” it is a bully tactic rooted in historic resentment over federal jurisdiction.

We also must maintain our engagement in active planning (roundups, habitat loss). We must continue to take a stand in the courts. We must not become despondent or vulnerable to distraction. Together, we must maintain the best defense possible.

*The days ahead will test our resolve. We cannot falter.*

*Laura Leigh, President and Founder*

# News and Action



Every day our team is engaged in documenting, research, crafting comments, litigation and outreach.

Our outreach includes lawmakers.

The most important outreach we do is to you, the public.

Since our inception, WHE has been a frontline reporting organization many of you rely on. Not only for our in-depth coverage of roundups, but for our investigative work that follows our wild ones into holding. You rely on us for notifications on planning and how to engage.

One of the most important actions you can take is to contact your lawmakers to ensure that the prohibition against killing healthy wild horses and burros and/or selling them without limits (direct to slaughter) are put into the final budget bill. [Take Action HERE.](#)



### **Tools in the toolbox**

Article discusses various subjects where the program could save money and create reasonable reform.

A fast action item is included to send to your lawmakers asking for a pause in the program and a review.

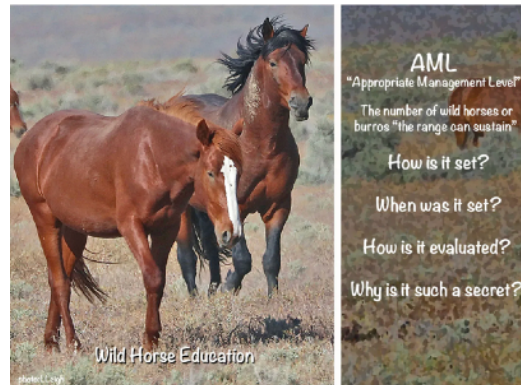
There are many “tools in the toolbox” BLM has never used that are far more reasonable than killing tens of thousands of wild horses and burros.

[See more HERE.](#)

### **Bottom Line, AML**

Appropriate Management Level or “AML” is more appropriately referenced as “Allowed Management Level.”

For the vast majority of herds in the U.S. the numbers allowed on the range were set based on the numbers on the range at the time the 1971 Act passed. No recovery number was set to determine how many wild horses represented a recovered population from the number Congress declared “fast disappearing.”



Today the goal to “get to AML” is about 10,000 less than were estimated in 1971.

There is nothing “appropriate” about AML.

[See more HERE.](#)



### **Open Comment Periods where there is active litigation**

### **Comments on the draft Blue Wing Complex Herd Management Area Plan (HMAP) are due June 4.** BLM is

crafting an HMAP in an attempt to comply with a court order. However, BLM is repeating the pattern that is already in front of the court for another herd.

**Comments for Scoping, the first step in crafting the HMAP (that is overdue by over 40 years) at Silver King is open. Comments are due June 23.** There is active legal action by WHE, WildLands Defense, Western Watersheds Project and more involving a massive grazing decision finalized and challenged in 2022. This massive case has not been adjudicated. One of the issues we have brought to the attention of the courts is that without an HMAP, there is no way to even discuss mitigation of the impact of the multiple changes to the landscape in the grazing decision for wild horses.

[You can find additional information, including sample comments and how to make them, by clicking HERE.](#)

### **Litigation**

WHE has a number of active cases in the courts now addressing issues that range from failures in management planning to addressing the various issues surrounding abuse and neglect at roundups and in holding facilities.



Our most recent filing involves the genetically unique and fragile herd that lives within the Carter HMA and the far removed wild horses at Buckhorn and Coppersmith that trace their historically significant history back to Cavalry remounts. BLM lumped these herds that are separated by geography and fence lines, and a past that could not be more different, into one removal plan that threatens the genetic stability of all of them.

[See more HERE](#)



We all need a break at some point from the technicalities of the work involved in advocacy.

WHE volunteer Tammi Adams wrote a piece about the Asana, defined in yoga sutras as a “steady and comfortable posture,” she finds in the wild. Her work as a central member of our NEPA team (the team that writes comments and appeals) involves a lot of heavy-lifting. Time in nature creates the place from which she find her balance and some peace.

[You can read her entire essay HERE](#)



LLeigh Wild Horse Education

All of us are united in our deep and abiding love we feel for our wild ones and the quest to find justice for these amazing beings.

Together we have changed policy, won amazing legal precedents and exposed injustice from roundups and deep into management practices.

On schedule this summer are court hearings, legal briefings, reports and outreach with members of Congress.

Our team is also gearing up to document the grueling summer roundup schedule and report back to you. The schedule includes the zeroing out treasured herds in Wyoming and hitting the unique Kiger and Riddle herds in Oregon with a large-scale removal.

We want to express our deep gratitude to all of you that support the work of Wild Horse Education (WHE). This work can be frustrating and more than heartbreaking at times. However, this work is necessary and provides a vital service. We can think of no greater honor than to have the privilege of working to protect and preserve a true American treasure for future generations.

Everything we do is only possible because of your support.

We step forward with purpose and gratitude.

Onward.

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You can support the work of WHE by making a contribution through our website or by [clicking HERE](#).

Visit our main website at [WildHorseEducation.org](http://WildHorseEducation.org)

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