



The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA)
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President Ron Sparks, Commissioner, Alabama Department of Agriculture & Industries

July 17, 2009

OPPOSE H.R. 1018 – RESTORE OUR AMERICAN MUSTANGS ACT

Dear Representative,

Later today the House is scheduled to vote on the Restore Our American Mustangs Act (H.R. 1018). The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) is very concerned with the legislation because it contains changes to current law that pose significant risks to the health of domestic livestock populations, jeopardize the integrity of our natural resources, and threaten the viability of our rural communities. Because of this, we urge you to oppose H.R. 1018.

NASDA is a nonprofit, nonpartisan association that represents the commissioners, secretaries, and directors of the state departments of agriculture in all fifty states and four U.S. territories. As regulators of significant aspects of our nation's agriculture industry, NASDA members are actively involved in ensuring the safety of an abundant food supply, protection of animal and plant health and our environment, as well as promoting the vitality of our rural communities.

H.R. 1018 would dramatically expand the land available for wild horses and free roaming burros by almost 19 million acres and severely limit the population control tools available to federal wildlife managers.

Provisions of the legislation limiting population control tools could have serious impacts on the health of wild horse populations. Because wildlife managers would be restricted on the way in which they can control herds of wild horses for diseases, these diseases will be able to travel rapidly through the herds. Furthermore, because this legislation extends the habitat of these animals, domestic livestock will have increased interactions with these herds and face increased threats of disease. For example, the disease Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) is an infection that could spread rapidly among a susceptible wild horse population and be easily spread from wild horses to domestic livestock, with devastating consequences. The U.S. horse industry currently spends millions each year to test and control this disease.

We are also concerned about the implications this legislation will have on our natural resources, particularly rangeland health and scarce water resources. By expanding the areas in which wild horses and burros are allowed—and by restricting methods by which these populations can be controlled—ecosystems will be subjected to further stress. This is particularly concerning in the American West where these herds will compete with domestic livestock, endangered species, and other native species for water resources.

Finally, all of the aforementioned impacts of this legislation will have the added consequence of impacting the vitality of our rural communities. Rural communities in the expansive areas of the American West are dependent upon ranching for their economic vitality. Disease, negative impacts on natural resources, and a loss of forage for domestic livestock could be disastrous for these ranchers and the rural communities they support.

We respectfully request you oppose H.R. 1018 when it comes up for a vote today.

Sincerely,

Stephen Haterius

Executive Director, National Association of State Departments of Agriculture