

BLM and USFS livestock grazing stats:

Examining key data in the debate over wild horses on western public lands



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“Too many wild horses overgrazing and damaging western public rangelands”... “pushing cattle off the land”... “needing to be removed”...

Most media coverage of wild horses shares this storyline, citing rising population estimates from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which, together with the US Forest Service (USFS), oversees 251 million acres of public lands for grazing (mostly cattle) and other “multiple uses.”

But 2014 BLM and USFS livestock grazing receipts (\$17.1 million) tell a different story: the equivalent of 2.1 million cattle outnumbering 56,656 federally protected wild horses and burros (WHB) by 37:1. These privately owned livestock are allocated 97 percent of western forage on all 251 million acres. This is compared to 3 percent allocated to 56,656 wild horses and burros occupying just 29.4 million acres.

Studies also show cattle, not horses, as the focus of considerable research on domestic overgrazing and a major cause of global climate change.

This analysis will present select 2014 grazing data from the BLM and USFS web sites, published reports and correspondence. Also included is a small sample of recent studies on livestock grazing’s impact on public lands missing from the present debate.

It’s critical to understand how many cattle vs. WHB exist on public lands; how many millions of acres they each graze; how much forage they’re each allotted. It’s equally important to acknowledge the abundance of research on cattle’s impact on biodiversity and wildlife and the corresponding scarcity of research regarding wild horses. This information is foundational to an understanding of the issue.

But it’s a *starting point*, not just for correcting false coverage, but for establishing common facts from which to go forward and address larger, interconnected and pressing public policy issues — not simply debate various narratives and opinions.

BLM and USFS Data

What 2014 grazing receipts and population estimates show about livestock usage vs. wild horses

Statistical sources used

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

National

Updated Oct. 6, 2013
Contact: Tom Gandy, BLM Public Affairs (202) 933-1402

New Video Clips

- [Public Use of Recreational Lands and Areas](#)
- [Wild Horses and Burros](#)

Fact Sheet on the BLM's Management of Livestock Grazing

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

National

Updated Oct. 6, 2013
Contact: Tom Gandy, BLM Public Affairs (202) 933-1402

Wild Horse and Burro Quick Facts

Updated as of Oct. 16, 2013

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Date: Mon, 21 Apr 2014 13:05:42 -0700
Subject: Public Use of Recreational Lands

From: "Reichold, Zachary" (Senior Wild Horse and Burro Specialist, USFS)

I am sorry it has taken so long for me to get back to you. Below are the answers to your questions:

"1) Is the Herd Management Area, what is the actual allocation (AUMA) for wild horses and for cattle/ livestock?"

Active livestock AUMA authorized in HMA is 1,276,000

This estimate is based on the following information:

1. This data is a reflection of what is currently entered into GIS and may not reflect recent changes in allotment adjustments, etc. GIS may still be correcting errors in GIS as well as making adjustments in permitted use.
2. Active livestock AUMA are the authorized Active AUMA and do not include Historical Use. There are NOT Active Use AUMA or Total Permitted Use AUMA.
3. Livestock grazing use is authorized on an allotment wide basis.
4. Livestock grazing capacity has not been established for the portion of the HMA or HA within an allotment. Livestock carrying capacity by allotment has been established based on forage availability, production, establishment of standards and multiple use objectives on an allotment basis.
5. For purposes of allocating use, we often proportion the use with the acres. If a HA has a 1,000 acre allotment with 100 AUMA allocated livestock grazing use, and if there are 500 ac of this allotment in an HMA, then 50 active AUMA are presented to be used within the HMA.

Forage allocated to wild horses and burros is 320,124 AUM

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Rangelands

Rangelands in the United States are diverse lands. They are the open spaces of Florida to the desert shrub deserts of Wyoming. They include the high mountain meadows of Utah to the short forest of California.

Rangeland Area

The United States has about 770 million acres of rangelands. Private individuals own more than half of the Nation's rangelands. The Federal government manages 43 percent of the rangelands. State and local governments manage the remainder.

Rangeland Values

Rangelands are multipurpose lands that provide a variety of products and services. Rangeland products include forage for grazing and browsing animals, wildlife habitat, water, minerals, timber, recreational opportunities, some wood products, and plant and animal species. They are important open spaces. Rangelands produce intangible products such as scenic beauty and wilderness, satisfying important societal values. They are often as economically important as the more tangible commodities.

History

The Forest Service has undergone many changes in its management of rangelands. In the early 1800s, few people understood public domain lands except the hunting of game and sheep raising. The rangeland area was managed as unimproved and undeveloped. Congress passed the Range Act in 1879 to establish the Forest Service as the primary agency. By 1890 to 1907, the Forest Service had established its system of range regulation. This included permits, range and animal control, grazing seasons, allotments, and range fees. The system has served as a pattern for other agencies concerned with resource protection and the pursuit of society's goals. The [Range Regulation](#) web page provides more information about the history, regulations and policies directing Forest Service rangeland management.

Current Direction

Today, the Forest Service concentrates its efforts on managing the vegetation resources across the range to meet the multiple resource needs. Rangeland management activities are necessary to provide such things as: improved and sustained range health, wildlife habitat, water, minerals, timber, recreational opportunities, some wood products, and plant and animal species. They are important open spaces. Rangelands produce intangible products such as scenic beauty and wilderness, satisfying important societal values. They are often as economically important as the more tangible commodities.

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United States
Department of
Agriculture
Forest Service
Range Management

April 2015

Grazing Statistical Summary
FY2014

Fiscal Year 2016 Budget Overview

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U.S. Forest Service Wild Horse Burro Territory Status 2014

	ACTIVE	HORSE	13,763	13,128	635
N/A					
DEVIL'S GARDEN PLATEAU	ACTIVE	HORSE	232,521	224,889	7,632
N/A	ACTIVE	BURRO	28,930	28,930	0
MURDERERS CREEK	ACTIVE	HORSE	143,206	73,545	69,661
N/A	ACTIVE	HORSE	27,309	27,069	
			6,117,996	2,530,851	3,587,145

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- 1 US Dept. of the Interior, BLM Fact Sheet: Management of Livestock Grazing www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/grazing.htm
- 2 US Dept. of the Interior, BLM Wild Horses and Burros Program: Quick Facts www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/whbprogram/history_and_facts/quick_facts.html
- 3 E-mail from senior BLM WHB specialist Zach Reichold www.scribd.com/fullscreen/233249122?access_key=key-jl1GqIE8TuzUXE659mtC&allow_share=true&escape=false&view_mode=scroll
- 4 US Forest Service Rangelands www.fs.fed.us/rangelands/whoware/
- 5 USDA Forest Service Range Management Grazing Statistical Summary FY2014 <http://www.fs.fed.us/rangelands/ftp/docs/GrazingStatisticalSummaryFY2014.pdf>
- 6 USDA Forest Service Fiscal Year 2016 Budget Overview <http://www.fs.fed.us/sites/default/files/media/2015/07/fy2016-budget-overview-update.pdf>
- 7 USFS Wild Horse Burro Territory Status 2014 <http://dailypitchfork.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/USFS-WHBT-2014-All-Regions.pdf>
(Excel spread sheet provided in 2014 by Tom Frolli of USFS)



In 2014, cattle outnumbered wild horses by 37:1 on BLM and USFS western Public Rangelands



Photography: BLM

	<i>BLM territory:</i>	<i>USFS territory:</i>	<i>Combined BLM & USFS:</i>
<u>Cattle:</u>	1.5 million	617,284	2.1 million
<u>Wild horses and burros:</u>	49,209	7,447	56,656
<u>Ratio cattle vs. wild horses and burros:</u>	30:1	83:1	37:1



An estimated 56,656 wild horses and burros grazed BLM and USFS rangelands in 2014

On-range Population Estimate as of March 1, 2015

As required under the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971, the BLM conducts an annual population inventory to estimate the number of wild horses and burros roaming BLM-managed lands in the West. (Click here to learn more) As of March 1, 2015, the BLM estimates the wild horse population at 58,150, an increase over the 2014 estimate of 49,209.

U.S. Forest Service Wild Horse Burro Territory Status 2014

Region	Status	Species	Count	Total	Other
N/A	ACTIVE	HORSE	13,763	13,128	635
DEVIL'S GARDEN PLATEAU	ACTIVE	HORSE	232		
N/A	ACTIVE	BURRO	28,5		
MURDERERS CREEK	ACTIVE	HORSE	143		
N/A	ACTIVE	HORSE	27,6		6,11

Total Territories @ 53
 Active WHBT @ 34
 Inactive WHBT @ 19
 Horse total @ 6539
 Burro total @ 908
 JMAs @ 23



BLM estimate: 49,209²

USFS estimate: 7,447⁷

BLM & USFS: 56,656

Understanding the data: The BLM and USFS report WHB estimates differently. The BLM does it on its web site (the 2015 WHB number, 58,150, was published in March). The USFS provides a spread sheet. The one (at left) was emailed by Tom Frolli of USFS to Suzanne Roy, Director of American Wild Horse Preservation, an advocacy group. But the estimates provided by each agency are comparable to each other.

Sources:

² US Dept. of the Interior, BLM Wild Horses and Burros Program: Quick Facts www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/whbprogram/history_and_facts/quick_facts.html

⁷ USFS Wild Horse Burro Territory Status 2014 from Tom Frolli of USFS <http://dailypitchfork.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/USFS-WHBT-2014-All-Regions.pdf>



An estimated 2.1 million cattle grazed BLM and USFS western public rangelands in 2014



Photography: BLM

Reported by BLM & USFS: *Average yearly animal unit equivalent:* *Average yearly livestock equivalent:*

<u>Actual grazing receipts:</u>		<u>Rancher-reported animal units:</u>		<u>Rancher-reported cows + calves:</u>
\$17.1 million	=	1.05 million	=	2.1 million
<i>Divide by \$1.35, then by 12 mos.</i>		<i>Multiply by 2</i>		
<u>Authorized animal unit months:</u>		<u>Authorized animal units:</u>		<u>Authorized cows + calves:</u>
15.0 million	=	1.3 million	=	2.6 million
<i>Divide by 12 mos.</i>		<i>Multiply by 2</i>		



An estimated 1.5 million cattle grazed BLM western public rangelands in 2014

Expenditures and Collections

In Fiscal Year 2014, the BLM was allocated **\$79.9 million** for its livestock management program. Of that figure, the agency spends approximately 10 percent on livestock grazing administration. The other activities as weed management, rangeland monitoring and administration, planning, water development, vegetation management, and grazing fee collection. **In 2014, the BLM collected \$12.1 million in grazing fees** (see table below). The receipts from the grazing fee are used to offset the cost of the grazing program.

Federal Grazing Fee

The Federal grazing fee, which applies to Federal land administered by the U.S. Forest Service, is adjusted annually and is calculated based on the Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978. Under this formula, the grazing fee for 2015 is \$1.69 per AUM. **The 2014 fee of \$1.35.**

Number of Livestock on BLM-managed Lands

The Bureau does not make an annual national "count" of the livestock that graze on BLM-managed lands because the actual number of livestock grazing on public lands on any single day varies throughout the year and livestock are often moved from one grazing allotment to another. So an aggregate head count would provide very little information on overall livestock use. Instead, the BLM compiles information on the number of AUMs used each year, which takes into account both the number of animals and the amount of time they graze. **The amount authorized for grazing has declined from 18.2 million AUMs in 2013 to 8.4 million AUMs in 2014.**

Source:

www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/grazing.htm

Reported by BLM: *Average yearly animal unit equivalent:* *Average yearly livestock equivalent:*

Actual grazing receipts:
\$12.1 million¹
Divide by \$1.35², then by 12 mos.

Rancher-reported animal units:
747,000
Multiply by 2

Rancher-reported cows + calves:
1.5 million

Authorized animal unit months:
8.4 million³
Divide by 12 mos.

Authorized animal units:
700,000
Multiply by 2

Authorized cows + calves:
1.4 million

Understanding the data: The BLM’s Rangeland Administration System (RAS) tracks public grazing allotments, permits and livestock use. But the BLM website doesn’t publish yearly livestock totals (the way it publishes yearly WHB estimates). These can be calculated, however, from **year-end grazing receipts** (published the following quarter on the BLM web site).

Grazing receipts are based on the number of animal units (defined as a cow/calf pair or five sheep or one horse) ranchers *report* they grazed over the previous 12 months multiplied by \$1.35 (the 2014 grazing fee per AUM—animal unit month). The 1.5 million figure above is the annual cattle equivalent of 747,000 animal units (to get sheep equivalent, multiply AUs x 5). This figure should be considered a baseline, however, as it doesn’t reflect trespass grazing, undercounting and nonpayment of grazing fees.

Authorized AUMs (animal unit months), by comparison, represent the amount of livestock grazing the BLM assigns to ranchers for the upcoming grazing year. It’s what the BLM deems appropriate, given rangeland conditions. But it’s not indicative of what ranchers actually *do*.



An estimated 617,284 cattle grazed USFS western public rangelands in 2014

Grazing Management	
National Forest Fund (NFF) Receipts	4,820
Grasslands and Land Utilization Projects (LUP)	159
Mandatory Transfers from NFF & Grasslands & LUP's:	
Range Betterment Fund (50 Percent Grazing)	-2,410
Acquisition of Lands for National Forests, Special Acts ^{1/}	-30
Ten-Percent Roads and Trails Fund ^{1/}	-700
Total Grazing Management Receipts	4,979

p.D-1

TOTAL	
NUMBER	HMS AUMS
2,145,542	8,374,111 8,147,702
2,020,792	6,687,150 6,633,231
7,754	4,588 3,590
2,028,546	6,691,738 6,636,821

p.7

Reported by USFS: Average yearly animal unit equivalent: Average yearly livestock equivalent:

Actual grazing receipts:
\$5.0 million⁶
Divide by \$1.35, then by 12 mos.

Rancher-reported animal units:
308,642
Multiply by 2

Rancher-reported cows + calves:
617,284

= =

Authorized animal unit Months:
6.6 million⁵
Divide by 12 mos.

Authorized animal units:
550,000
Multiply by 2

Authorized cows + calves:
1.1 million

= =

Understanding the data: The FSUS, like the BLM, doesn't publicize livestock totals, but these can also be calculated from **year-end grazing receipts** reported in the FSUS FY2016 Budget Overview, and **authorized AUMS** reported in the FY2014 Grazing Statistical Summary.

Sources:

⁵ USDA Forest Service Range Management Grazing Statistical Summary FY2014 <http://www.fs.fed.us/rangelands/ftp/docs/GrazingStatisticalSummaryFY2014.pdf>

⁶ USDA Forest Service Fiscal Year 2016 Budget Overview <http://www.fs.fed.us/sites/default/files/media/2015/07/fy2016-budget-overview-update.pdf>



Cattle are allocated 97% of forage on BLM and USFS public land; wild horses are allocated just 3%

Grazing on Public Lands

The Bureau of Land Management, which administers grazing on public lands, manages livestock grazing on 155 million acres of public land.

The United States Department of Agriculture, administered by the National Range and Wild Horse Conservation Districts, manages half of this acreage, 96 million acres, is rangelands.

Wild Horse and Burro Acreage

Under the Wild Horse and Burro Act, these animals were found roaming across public lands. Today, the BLM manages 31.6 million acres of Wild Horse and Burro Management Areas (HMAAs), that comprise 31.6 million acres. (For an example see Myth #4 on the Myths and Facts page.) Under the 1971 Act, wild horses and burros were not found roaming when the law was passed.

Wild Horse and Burro Management Areas (HMAAs)	179
	31.6 million acres
	26.9 million acres

U.S. Forest Service Wild Horse Burro Territory Status 2014

Category	Species	Count	Total	Percentage
ACTIVE	HORSE	13,763	13,128	6%
ACTIVE	HORSE	232,521	224,889	7%
ACTIVE	BURRO	28,930	2,530,851	10%
ACTIVE	HORSE	143,206	73,545	6%

1) In the Herd Management Areas, what is the actual allocation (AUMs) for wild horses and for cattle/livestock?

Active livestock AUMs authorized in HMAAs is 1,076,000

Forage allocated to wild horses and burros is 320,124 AUMs.

Cattle-only present:

BLM acres:
128.1 million

USFS acres:
93.5 million

BLM & USFS acres:
221.6 million (88%)

AUM Forage Allocation:
100% cattle
0% WHB

Cattle + WHB present:

BLM acres:
26.9 million²

USFS acres:
2.5 million⁷

BLM & USFS acres:
29.4 million (12%)

AUM Forage Allocation:
77% cattle³
23% WHB

Total cattle + WHB present:

BLM acres:
155 million¹

USFS acres:
96 million⁴

BLM & USFS acres:
251 million

AUM Forage Allocation:
97% cattle
3% WHB

Sources:

¹ US DOI, BLM Fact Sheet: Livestock Grazing www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/grazing.htm

² US DOI, BLM Wild Horses and Burros Program: Quick Facts www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/whbprogram/history_and_facts/quick_facts.html

³ E-mail from senior BLM WHB specialist Zach Reichold www.scribd.com/fullscreen/233249122?access_key=key-jl1GqIE8TuzUXE659mtC&allow_share=true&escape=false&view_mode=scroll

⁴ US Forest Service Rangelands www.fs.fed.us/rangelands/whoware/

⁷ USFS Wild Horse Burro Territory Status 2014 from Tom Frolli of USFS <http://dailypitchfork.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/USFS-WHBT-2014-All-Regions.pdf>

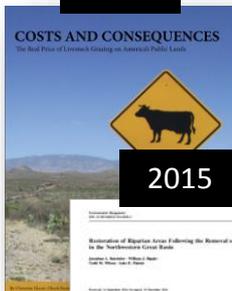
Studies on Livestock Grazing

The impact of commercial livestock production on western public range and forest preserve has been studied for decades. Google Scholar searches on the topic yield thousands of results.

Not so for wild horses, which, despite years of debate, have simply failed to motivate people to study them as the cause of the overgrazing reported by the media.

This tells you something very simple: when researchers and conservation groups study the problem of overgrazing, drought and climate change, they study *cattle* and propose *cattle-based* solutions. That's important to know.

2015



2015

“Monthly grazing fees on federal lands are currently set at a paltry \$1.35 per cow and calf. Despite the extreme damage done, western federal rangelands account for less than 3 percent of all forage fed to livestock in the United States.” — **The Center for Biological Diversity, “Costs and Consequences: The Real Price of Livestock Grazing on America’s Public Lands”**

http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/public_land/grazing/pdfs/CostsAndConsequences_01-2015.pdf

“The effects of livestock grazing on ecosystems are numerous, and effects on riparian systems in particular have been the subject of much study. Hydrology, plant and animal species composition, and soil characteristics can all be dramatically altered with the presence of cattle.” — **Environmental Management, “Restoration of Riparian Areas Following the Removal of Cattle in the Northwestern Great Basin”**

http://www.cof.orst.edu/hart/Batchelor2015_EM.pdf and <http://www.cof.orst.edu/hart/hartimages.html>

2014



2014

“...livestock grazing has been a major factor affecting fire frequency, fire severity, and ecosystem trajectories in the western US for over a century; and the removal or reduction of grazing impacts in these altered ecosystems is the most effective means of initiating ecological recovery.” — **Environmental Management, “Reducing Livestock Effects on Public Lands in the Western United States as the Climate Changes”**

<https://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1957/50113/BeschtaRobertForestryReducingLivestockEffects.pdf?sequence=1>

2010



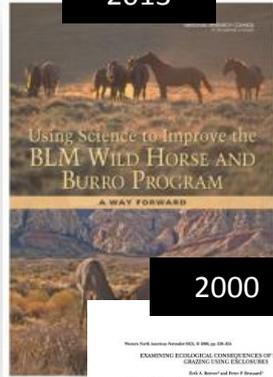
“Over 3 billion hectares of lands worldwide are grazed by livestock, with a majority suffering degradation in ecological condition. Losses in plant productivity, biodiversity of plant and animal communities, and carbon storage are occurring as a result of livestock grazing ... Worldwide, livestock production accounts for about 37 percent of global anthropogenic methane emissions and 65 percent of anthropogenic nitrous oxide emissions with as much as 18% of current global greenhouse gas emissions (CO₂ equivalent) generated from the livestock industry.” — **International Journal of Biodiversity, “Holistic Management: Misinformation on the Science of Grazed Ecosystems”**

<http://www.hindawi.com/journals/ijbd/2014/163431/>

“Livestock production is a chief contributor to many significant and intractable environmental problems. This article examines the causal role of livestock (especially beef) production in global climate change, predator control in the western United States, and winter elk feeding in Wyoming.” — **Boston College Environmental Affairs Law Review, “Trampling the Public Trust”**

<http://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=>

2013



2000

Examining Ecological Consequences of Feral Horse Grazing Using Enclosures

Monte L. Bean, Life Science Museum, Brigham Young University, *Western North American Naturalist*, "Examining Consequences of Feral Horse Grazing Using Enclosures"

1980



"Science alone, even the best science, cannot resolve the divergent viewpoints on how best to manage free-ranging horses and burros on public lands. Evidence-based science can, however, center debate about management options on the basis of confidence in the data, predictable outcomes of specific options, and understanding of both what is known and where uncertainty remains." — **The National Academy of Sciences, "Using Science to Improve the BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program: A Way Forward"**

<http://www.nap.edu/catalog/13511/using-science-to-improve-the-blm-wild-horse-and-burro-program>

"Although feral horses have inhabited western North America since the end of the 16th century, relatively little synecological research has been conducted to quantitatively characterize how they interact with ecosystem components." — **Monte L. Bean Life Science Museum, Brigham Young University, *Western North American Naturalist*, "Examining Consequences of Feral Horse Grazing Using Enclosures"**

http://www.jstor.org/stable/41717041?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

"Although it is widely alleged that horses and burros have severe grazing impacts on western rangelands, there are few published studies about the nature and extent of these impacts...Little controlled research has been done on the impact of grazing horses...The legacy of past grazing impacts (domestic sheep or cattle particularly between 1890 and 1920) may confound differences currently observed. This is nearly impossible to assess quantitatively because historical records from grazing from that time can rarely be found today."

— **The National Research Council, National Academy Press, "Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros: Current Knowledge and Recommended Research"**

<http://www.nap.edu/catalog/18642/wild-and-free-roaming-horses-and-burros-current-knowledge-and>

Key Findings

Understanding how private livestock graze BLM and USFS lands is a starting point from which to better report on public land uses and costs, the drought, climate change, conservation efforts and policy making.

- An estimated 2.1 million cattle outnumbered 56,656 WHB on 251 million acres of land according to 2014 BLM and USFS data. Cattle outnumbered WHB by 30:1 on 155 million acres of BLM land; 83:1 on 96 million acres of USFS land and 37:1 overall.
- Cattle are allocated 97 percent of the forage on those 251 million acres. WHB are allocated 3 percent of it, sharing just 12 percent of those lands (29.4 million acres) with cattle.
- Those 251 million acres supply less than 3 percent of the forage used by the nation's livestock industry. The ranchers holding federal grazing permits constitute just 2.7 percent of the nation's livestock producers. It's a lot of land and expense to aid a miniscule slice of livestock production.

When researchers and conservation groups study overgrazing, rangeland health and climate change, they study the impact of cattle, not WHB.

- Mentions within their studies may include WHB (in a minor way), among other wildlife.
- Removing livestock/retiring grazing permits is a primary solution for addressing overgrazing and climate change.
- The three studies on WHB (1980, 2000, 2013) agree that more science-based data will improve the management of wild horses and burros on public lands, given arid conditions and competition with other ungulates.

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For questions on this presentation or additional stats
and information on WHB and public lands ranching, contact:

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