

Restoration of the Coyote Canyon Wild Horse Herd

Senator Bill Morrow and co-sponsor Senator Dennis Hollingsworth have introduced SB1294, a bill that would restore the last remaining wild horse herd in Southern California to their native habitat in the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.

This wild horse herd has roamed the 100,000 acre Coyote Canyon watershed for a century providing visitors with the opportunity to view living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West.

In March 2003, the last herd of wild horses in Southern California was removed from their century old native habitat in the Coyote Canyon region of the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. California State Parks, the agency responsible for transferring the horses, did not have authorization to remove the horses. The wild horses were under the authority of the Federal Bureau of Land Management who erroneously allowed the horses to be taken from their natural habitat. Investigations by attorneys for BLM concluded that the herd did not belong to State parks. Subsequently, BLM asserted jurisdiction over the herd, which are being held pending restoration to their native Coyote Canyon habitat.

Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971 Act, Public Law 92-195 requires the protection, management, and control of wild free-roaming horses and burros on public lands. Wild free-roaming horses and burros shall be protected from capture, branding, harassment, or death; and to accomplish this they are to be considered in the area where presently found, as an integral part of the natural system of the public lands.

The removal of wild horses from their native ranges when BLM transfers land to another agency has spelled disaster for the herds and is a deceptive practice that would not be supported by the American public. 97% of the Herd Management Areas in California have been transferred to other public land agencies with management policies and agendas inconsistent with the Wild Horse and Burro Act.

California State Parks removed the 29 wild horses last March without public hearing under an emergency action ostensibly to save horses from drought and the threat of West Nile Virus. Other concerns of State Parks were competition of forage and water with Bighorn sheep. Subsequent study by State Parks and others show no competition be-



tween wild horse herds and Bighorn sheep for either water or forage.

The herd has remained stable and survived many seasons of drought as do other wild horse herds in the western states. 34% of the captured horse herd was 25 years or older. This fact, as well as the photo taken on March 18, 2003 (above), are clear testament to the stability of the herd and their adaptation to the desert environment.

For several years the equestrian community has consistently offered to work with State Parks to help manage the herd in its native range. BLM is amenable to a public/private partnership with the equestrian community and State Parks for management.

The California State Legislation SB 1294 will provide for the herd's restoration as the last wild horse herd in Southern California, protect them from further disruption, mandate a Partnership Management Program at no cost to State Parks, and a permanent herd management area in compliance with the Federal Mandate. A viable herd for restoration would be drawn from members of the original herd that was removed in 2003.

The site for monitoring the herd for the Pilot Program is Bailey's Cabin in Coyote Canyon, adopted by an equestrian organization in the 90s for Historic Preservation. The Senator's companion Bill 1338 would restore access to the Historical De Anza Route for this purpose and to the general public.

Please contact your State Senator and express your support for the return of the Coyote Canyon Wild Horse Herd to their native habitat. Both bills will be heard by the Senate Natural Resource's Committee at 9:00 on April 13, 2004 in Room 112 at the State Capital Building in Sacramento. Please support these bills by phoning Senator Hollingsworth, 916-445-9781 and Senator Morrow, 916-445-3731.