



Chasing Horses

Wild Horse Advocates



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Chasing Horses Wild Horse Advocates ("Chasing Horses") is a small, largely volunteer grassroots organization that was created in 2021 to advocate for the wild horses of Theodore Roosevelt National Park (TRNP).

Our organization was formed out of significant and genuine concerns regarding the management of the herd of wild horses in Theodore Roosevelt National Park that call the park home. The use of GonaCon as birth control, coupled with the constant removal of younger horses, was leaving an older herd that will eventually quit reproducing and die out.

Our most active year to date was 2023. The National Park Service (NPS) announced in December of 2022 its decision to eliminate the entire herd of wild horses from the boundaries of the park. They chose to implement a management plan utilizing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review process and let the public know that their proposed action was total elimination of the wild horse herd.

Chasing Horses immediately took a stand to lead the fight to save this majestic group of horses. This devastating news from the NPS led Chasing Horses to launch a massive national campaign to save this historic wild horse herd.



Outreach and Education

In 2022, Chasing Horses engaged with 76,000 people through our social media outlets that include Facebook and Instagram. One year later, in 2023, that number rose to 729,000 people.

We've also added regular blog posts to our website to educate our followers about Chasing Horses work on behalf of the Theodore Roosevelt National Park wild horses. This has resulted in our website traffic increasing from 15,930 followers in 2022 to 72,027 followers in 2023 – a 452% increase of followers for our small grassroots organization!



Chasing Horses ran successful ad campaigns on social media to educate and encourage our supporters to participate in the public comment periods that were mandated through the NEPA process for the proposed wild horse management plan.

These ads generated over 1 million ad impressions and contributed heavily to the over 44,000 individual comments that were received in 2022 and 2023 by Theodore Roosevelt National Park throughout their Environmental Assessment Process.





Chasing Horses started hosting "Horse Talks" via Zoom (a video conferencing platform) as a way to help our followers communicate with leaders and experts in different areas about the history, science, advocacy and state legislation. Fifteen different "Horse Talks" were held on Zoom in 2023. These recorded videos were uploaded to our YouTube channel for free public viewing.



Press

Reporters regularly contact Chasing Horses' President Christine Kman because they regard her as a trusted source of information about the TRNP wild horses.

Christine also appears frequently on local North Dakota news and radio stations to update the public on the current status of the TRNP wild horse and the NPS's plans for them.



The Washington Post

Democracy Dies in Darkness

Teddy Roosevelt wouldn't drag these wild horses away

BY CHRISTINE KMAN

Wild horses were roaming the North Dakota Badlands long before Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park was established near Medora in 1947. About 200 wild horses remain, though that could soon change if the National Park Service gets its way.

The park, now known as Theodore Roosevelt National Park, announced plans to thin or eliminate the herd of wild horses in 2022. Of the roughly 20,000 people who submitted comments in the public comment period, only about 45 supported the park's goals.

If either the removal or phased reduction is approved, horses would be rounded up and offered to area tribes and government agencies, be sold at auction or euthanized. Any remaining horses would get contraception. The United Tribes of North Dakota asked the park to keep the horses, and the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation asked for a genetically viable herd of horses to remain within park boundaries.

All of this is unnecessary. The horses are a cultural resource and an economic driver in North Dakota. But the park refuses to acknowledge any negative impact if the horses are removed and admits that the horses are not causing environmental damage or affecting forage for native species or the park ecosystem.

Despite that, park officials continue to label the horses as "livestock," which they claim are not native and not allowed in national parks. Officials claim the horses could compete with native plants and animals — including bison and elk, which had to be reintroduced, unlike the horses. The horses could be allowed to stay simply by changing their designation from "livestock" to "cultural resource."

Theodore Roosevelt National Park is a tribute to the "conservation president," and his time in North Dakota. We know from his writings that wild horses were part of his experience in the Badlands. Some of the horses might be traced back to Sitting Bull's war ponies from when he surrendered in 1881 at Fort Buford.



CHRISTINE AND GARY KMAN, CHASING HORSES
Stallion Ollie Jr. and filly Bayou at North Dakota's Theodore Roosevelt National Park last month.

The park's "thinning" proposal to reduce the herd to 60 or fewer is not a sound compromise. Gene variation is important to any population. Small herds are more susceptible to disease and genetic maladies. Leading wild horse geneticist Gas Cothran cautioned the park that keeping numbers that low would mean a loss in genetic viability, stress the horses and make the remaining horses more aggressive. Many wild horse herds are being properly managed to maintain genetically viable herds. There is no reason that cannot happen for the wild horses at Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

There are approximately 1,000 wild horses on National Park Service lands. But Theodore Roosevelt National Park is the only one working to eliminate them. Wild horses on NPS lands are not protected under the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, which has prompted advocates in other national parks to obtain federal protection for the herds. The Shackleford Banks wild horses in Cape Lookout National Seashore are shielded under the Shackleford Banks Wild Horses Protection Act. The Ozark Wild Horses Protection Act conserves wild horses within the Ozark National Scenic Riverways in Missouri. These two herds also fall under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service.

Support for keeping the horses continues to grow.

My nonprofit, Chasing Horses Wild Horse Advocates, is continuing conversations with North Dakota state legislators. Last spring, they passed a resolution requesting that the horses be allowed to stay. Because the park refuses to budge, something stronger, such as a state law to protect our wild horses, should be discussed in the next legislative session.

North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum (R) has offered to contribute state resources to allow the horses to stay. Sen. John Hoeven (R) added language to the National Park Service's funding bill urging the park to let the horses remain. Chasing Horses is hopeful that Hoeven will sponsor much-needed federal legislation to protect Theodore Roosevelt National Park's horses.

The park is the No. 1 tourist destination in North Dakota. Businesses in the neighboring town of Medora know that the wild horses are a big part of the draw and fear that losing them will have a negative effect on their bottom lines. Park officials have dismissed those concerns despite their own report showing that 89 percent of park visitors surveyed support the ongoing presence of the wild horses. Concerns from residents and businesses prompted Medora's town council to draft a resolution asking the park to keep the horses.

Despite the history, wide support and local economic concerns, the park's environmental assessment in September supported the elimination of the horses.

The latest public comment period ended in November. Park Superintendent Angie Richman has said a decision on thinning or eliminating the herd will come by the end of 2024.

Theodore Roosevelt National Park's wild horses thrill and delight about 600,000 visitors each year and do so without damaging the landscape or threatening other species. They are as integral to the park as the land itself. No one — not even the National Park Service — should take these horses from the lands they and their ancestors have roamed for ages.

The writer is co-founder of Chasing Horses Wild Horse Advocates.

Chasing Horses' fight to save the TRNP horse herd has been widely covered by local press, including The Forum and The Dickinson Press, and national newspapers, including the Associated Press, The Wall Street Journal, and The Washington Post. And much to our delight, it was also covered by international newspapers, such as The London Times and the Daily Mail.

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'One of the best atmospheres I've been a part of'

Blue Hawks fly away with homecoming victory — B1

The Dickinson Press

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2023 | 1 PAGE

Part of the herd of wild horses at Theodore Roosevelt National Park gathers on a hill to cool off in the breeze on a muggy August day. Patrick Springer/The Forum

A 'BLATANT LIE'

Park report 'misleading' public on support for wild horses in recent survey

BY PATRICK SPRINGER

Chris Kman, director of Chasing Horses Wild Horse Advocates, said a draft environmental assessment for a

were interviewed supported maintaining horse herds in the park's south unit. That would imply that 81%

In fact, Kman asked park officials to release the survey, which indicates that to vary

keeping the horses, Kman said. The draft environmental assessment said aspects of

THE TIMES



Lobbying and Legislation

Chasing Horses is the leading voice in advocating policy changes in the management of the TRNP wild horses at the local, state, and federal levels. Our accomplishments include the following:

- We drafted and introduced legislation requesting that the horses be allowed to stay in the park to our North Dakota State Legislators for the 2023 session. This included writing the initial legislation, finding sponsors and co-sponsors, and testifying before the North Dakota House and Senate committees.

Our hard work and dedication paid off in April of 2023 when the Senate Concurrent Resolution SCR-4014 passed unanimously in the North Dakota House and Senate. Chasing Horses was invited to be a part of the ceremonial signing of SCR-4014 by Governor Doug Burgum. President Christine Kman received the signed copy of the resolution from Governor Burgum in April of 2023.

- Chasing Horses collaborated with the City of Historic Medora and the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation (collectively called the MHA Nation) to draft and pass their own resolutions asking that the horses be allowed to stay in their home at the Teddy Roosevelt National Park.



- Our organization hosted a rally in Medora, ND where advocates from all across the country came to speak publicly and give a message that was recorded and delivered to NPS Superintendent Angie Richman and Regional Director Herbert Frost stressing the importance of allowing this iconic group of wild horses to remain in the park.
- We worked closely with U.S. Senator John Hoeven's Office, adding language to the National Park Service's Interior Department Appropriations' Bill that strongly suggested that the horses be allowed to stay in their natural habitat and home.
- Chasing Horses collaborated with the State Historic Preservation Office to set the precedent to establish that the horses be found historically significant through their Section 106 Review Process. We explained this aspect of the Historic Preservation Act to our followers, giving them timely actions to take as part of our successful advocacy.

Billboard



To help raise awareness about the TRNP wild horses amongst travelers going to Theodore Roosevelt National Park, Chasing Horses installed a billboard on West I-94.

The Save Our Wild Horses Conference in Washington D.C. in April of 2023 invited President Christine Kman of Chasing Horses to speak. She also utilized her time in the U.S. Capitol to personally lobby over 200 members of Congress and raise awareness about the plight of the TRNP wild horses.

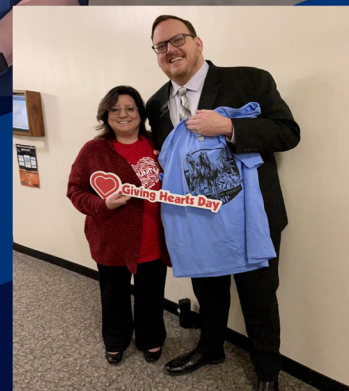
Additionally, Christine Kman is regularly called upon to consult with wild horse advocates to help replicate our success with the TRNP herd for other wild horse herds across the country.



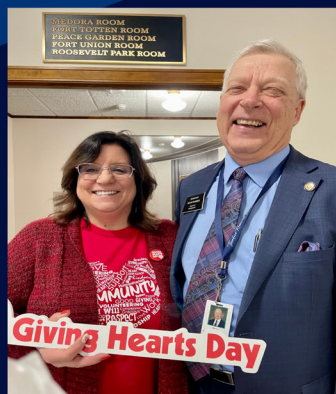
Senator Kevin Cramer



Congressman Kelly Armstrong



Christine has also worked hard to establish and maintain relationships with many North Dakota local, state and federal legislators.



The Future



Chasing Horses has a long-term vision of building and operating a wild horse sanctuary in Southwestern North Dakota. Our first step is to conduct a feasibility study for this endeavor. This study will include detailed information on all aspects of planning, building and maintaining the sanctuary long-term. This proposed sanctuary could serve a dual purpose:

First, the sanctuary would be a permanent home for some of the Nokota Horses currently owned by Frank Kuntz in Linton, ND. The Nokota horses were bought by Frank Kuntz and his late brother Leo from TRNP in the 1970's-1990's. Their intention was to preserve this unique breed of horses before the park introduced new blood and changed the genetics of this herd.

Second, the sanctuary could also provide a permanent home for horses that TRNP, according to their population objectives, deems necessary for removal from the herd. Under the current NPS guidelines, Chasing Horses, as a nonprofit with an educational purpose, would be allowed to give horses culled from the park a forever home in the sanctuary. The sanctuary could also include the reintroduction of the Nokota horses in the park if it is decided that their genetics would help improve the health of the herd.

End of the Year Status

As a recap, in 2022, Theodore Roosevelt National Park narrowed the choices down to three alternatives under the NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) umbrella. The three options they were considering were:

- The first, and their proposed action, was to eliminate the entire herd quickly.
- The second option was to eliminate the herd over the course of 10 years.
- The final alternative was their “no action” alternative which would allow 35-60 horses to remain in the park (there were just over 200 wild horses in the park at the end of 2023).

At the end of 2023, Chasing Horses was expecting a decision in the first half of 2024 from the park on the current management planning process.

Once a decision is reached, Chasing Horses plans to work for permanent protection for this herd so we never have to go through the threat of their removal again. Since Theodore Roosevelt National Park is managed by the federal government, federal legislation is the only way to ensure and preserve the longevity and safety of this majestic herd.

History shows us that if we do not use the momentum we have gained over the last two years to solidify permanent protection for this herd, it will only be a matter of time before TRNP park management decides to eliminate the herd again.

Chasing Horses plans to use the relationships we established with local, state and federal legislators in North Dakota to work to make federal protection for the TRNP herd a reality. We understand that this process will take years to complete, but plans are already underway to realize this arduous but necessary task.

With our strong and committed supporters, we are confident that we can save and preserve the Theodore Roosevelt National Park's wild horses for generations to come.





Wild Horse Advocates

Chasing Horses Wild Horse Advocates is a 501(c)3 organization that was formed in January 2021.

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Chasing Horses Wild Horse Advocates

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