

Inside the ‘Save America’s Wild Horses’ Campaign

A Project 2025 proposal appears to call for a culling of Western horse populations; How do you quantify the value of nature?

By [Xavier Martinez](#) | [Photography by Kim Raff for WSJ](#)
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In August, Hollynn Larrabee purchased a copy of the nearly 1,000-page [Project 2025](#) policy book. On page 528, she found herself staring down a call to arms against her beloved wild horses.

The three-paragraph passage—penned by William Perry Pendley, [acting director](#) of the Bureau of Land Management during Trump’s first term—argued that wild horses were overrunning Western rangelands. It called on Congress to let the BLM “dispose humanely” of some.

“It made me physically ill,” said Larrabee, a 54-year-old emergency physician living in Sandy, Utah. She adopted three horses—Stardust, Shaman and Santana—from a nearby wild horse range, in part because of the passage. She regularly photographs horses there with other aficionados.

Equine industry publications have raised hay, too. “[Under Project 2025, Will the Nation’s Wild Horses be Safe?](#)” blared an April headline from Thoroughbred Daily News.



Advocates argue wild horses are icons of the American West. A passage in Project 2025 says they are a strain on the land.

It isn’t clear whether the government would kill a large portion of the wild horse population. A spokeswoman for the Interior Department said the agency “remains committed to sustainably managing wild horse and burro populations on lands we manage.” It didn’t list euthanasia among the anticipated management strategies.

Pendley didn’t respond to a request for comment. He has previously called the horses an “existential threat” to public lands.

Advocates argue the animals are icons of America’s untamed West, and polls show public support for them is strong. Congressional lawmakers this month formed a new bipartisan Wild Horse Caucus, focused on promoting “humane policies” to care for and manage wild horse populations.

Still, advocates want to put the proposal safely out to pasture. They are lobbying lawmakers, meeting with DOGE operatives directly and bolstering educational campaigns.

Linda Greaves has taken to regularly renting a pickup truck with a mounted billboard emblazoned with “Save America’s Wild Horses.” She displays it in prominent locations around Washington, D.C.—catching the eye of some congressional aides.

Greaves, who works as a life coach, estimates she now spends as many as 40 hours a week on wild horse advocacy, including visits to Capitol Hill from her home in Great Falls, Va. She also organizes an annual conference for advocates. This year the four-day event is in northwestern Colorado and will feature “interactive range activities.”



As news of the Project 2025 proposal circulates in the horse world, advocates are trotting out a big lobbying effort. “People don’t know we have wild horses out West,” says Linda Greaves.

The debate over wild horses has roiled state and national politics for decades. The government estimates roughly 73,000 wild horses roam on public land today—nearly triple the number it says is sustainable. Federal officials [corral thousands of the horses](#) each year, saying they overgraze on grass needed by cattle and disrupt native wildlife.

Maintaining these populations is costly. The BLM is barred from euthanizing most of the horses, making many of them government wards for life. Currently, 62,000 live in holding facilities. The agency spent \$153 million on its horse program in fiscal 2024; two-thirds of it went to caring for those horses.

Last month, four wild horse proponents met with Department of Government Efficiency staff at the Interior Department headquarters in Washington, according to people who attended. Their argument: the overpopulation narrative is overblown and the roundups, often using helicopters, unnecessary.

“You would hope that, somewhere, someone in DOGE would see this archaic, inhumane way that we round up horses and say, ‘This is truly ridiculous,’” said Chris Kman, a horse advocate who lobbied to prevent the [removal of about 200 horses](#) from North Dakota’s Theodore Roosevelt National Park last year.

The advocates brought a 33-page bound booklet detailing program costs, cruelty claims and their suggested alternatives. One recommendation was to move cattle, which they say put more stress on the land than horses, to private rangeland.

DOGE aide Matt Luby didn’t confirm that the government was considering the Project 2025 proposal, attendees said. But he didn’t reassure them, either.

They said he referred to himself as the CFO of the federal government. He asked questions about the horses’ monetary value, whether they were a native species and whether there is an overpopulation problem.

“His questions felt like he had his mind made up,” said Britta Hesla, who lobbies on behalf of Horse Plus Humane Society.

The group left the meeting without receiving commitments from Luby. Hesla plans to try to score another meeting when she returns to Washington for a horse conference in June.

Luby didn’t respond to a request for comment.

“How do you quantify the value of nature?” asked Greaves, who was at the meeting. “It’s priceless; you can’t put a dollar sign on it.”



Horses graze in the 747,000-acre Onaqui Mountain herd management area outside Salt Lake City.

Though the Trump administration has distanced itself from the Heritage Foundation's policy blueprint, many of the president's executive orders [have aligned](#) with its recommendations.

Many political consultants consider support for the culling of wild horses to be political suicide.

At Doug Burgum's confirmation hearing for [Interior Secretary](#) in January, Sen. John Hoeven (R., N.D.) asked the former North Dakota governor to reiterate his commitment to wild horse populations, particularly in [Theodore Roosevelt National Park](#).

Burgum, a fellow horse lover, agreed and added: "For the record, people should know that as popular as Sen. Hoeven is in our state, the horses in the national park have even more followers on social media than he does."

Advocates aren't taking any chances. Hesla, who has lobbied on Capitol Hill since 2016, attended 15 meetings with congressional staffers during a two-day advocacy spree in March. She plans to continue the push.

With no confirmed BLM director, she is on high alert for any policies that would affect America's horses. "If they go through with this, it's going to be war," Hesla said.

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