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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**The Need for a Moratorium Clear after Wild Horse and Burro Meeting in Denver**

CHICAGO, (EWA) – Wild horse advocates attending the much anticipated Bureau of Land Management (BLM) workshop on June 14 and 15 found the meeting a marked improvement from their past experiences with BLM, but still far from comforting.

The meeting was announced by BLM director Bob Abbey who promised a new direction in the management of America's wild horses. But distrust between the advocates, ranchers and the BLM run deep and have grown deeper as BLM has ramped up the removal of mustangs from the range under Obama's Department of Interior (DOI) director Ken Salazar.

Earlier attempts to launch Salazar's plan to neuter the wild herds and move them to "refuges" in mid-western states had been met with derision and anger among advocates who dubbed the concept the "Salazoo Plan".

Now, with Salazar facing ever growing criticism for his abject failure to bring about promised reforms in his Minerals Management Service (MMS) and for the unprecedented disaster in the Gulf, BLM appears to be taking a more conciliatory stance toward the issue. But BLM's claims about the wild horse population have proven no more trustworthy than the MMS and BP claims about the volume of the spill.

Arising from the meetings was the consensus among advocates that until current range assessments and an independent population count are performed, round-ups should cease. They argue that six months or one year will not create a crisis and will give the BLM time to move forward with accurate scientific data.

The cattle rancher contingent attending sang a repetitious song of removing the wild horses. Privately owned livestock on public land already number in the millions yet stockmen continue to ask for the removal of the few thousand remaining horses. Their comments consisted largely of the mantra that wild horses were overpopulated and that advocates were being emotional.

Advocates countered that the leasing fees of only \$1.35 per cow and calf that ranchers pay are inadequate to even perform environmental assessments of the land they lease. Subsidies for the

privately owned livestock on public lands cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars per year and the proposed "refuges" would cost the taxpayers even more money.

On the positive side, Abbey had set ground rules for the planning that stated sending the horses to slaughter "was not on the table". True to his word, when pro-slaughter radical extremist Wyoming Rep. Sue Wallis rose to propose they be slaughtered, she was promptly squelched.

Equine advocates came prepared with suggestions, comments and recommendations backed up by facts, figures and data. Cloud Foundation CEO, Ginger Kathrens, reached out for common ground to build upon. She suggested additional breakout sessions before any plans were developed.

Advocates were also encouraged when the Board indicated two open positions would be filled with individuals for animal welfare and a public representative with equine knowledge. In the past "welfare" advisors have often been handpicked to represent BLM's views, so judgment will be reserved until the individuals are named.

The meeting came in the wake of the disastrous round-up of Nevada's Calico mustangs which resulted in deaths of over 140 of the horses and foals. Foals had their hooves run-off and the exhausted mares aborted foals from being stampeded over frozen rocky ground by roaring helicopters.

Disjointedly, the board's Larry Johnson was clearly out of touch with current conditions. Johnson continually referred to outdated Animal Management Levels (AML) and other erroneous information.

On Monday, Johnson commented that the issues at Calico were the fault of the lawsuit litigants and advocates for delaying the round-up into late January, when in fact, the round-up started on December 28. During the public comments, one advocate suggested that Johnson resign and the room exploded in applause.

There remains a significant split on the mechanism and scope of the Salazar plan. As presented by BLM, the herds will not be productive and will die out in zoo-like settings. Advocates suggested using public lands where herds had been zeroed out so the family and social structure of the herds could be maintained. Naturalist Craig Downer presented a plan in which BLM would be restricted to minimal contact with certain herds that were to be left alone in the wild without human contact.

Although there appeared to be some collaboration between the two sides, the clock is ticking against America's wild horses. Moreover, BLM birth control policy is leaving many of the herds genetically bankrupt. A plan that preserves the herds at manageable levels must be developed and implemented before the last of our wild horses and burros are rounded-up and become a closed chapter in our American heritage.

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*The Equine Welfare Alliance is a dues free, umbrella organization with over 110 member organizations. The organization focuses its efforts on the welfare of all equines and the preservation of wild equids. [www.equinewelfarealliance.org](http://www.equinewelfarealliance.org)*