



Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

February 11, 2022

Ms. Karen A. Sussman
President
International Society for the
Protection of Mustangs & Burros
Post Office Box 435
Rapid City, South Dakota 57709

Dear Ms. Sussman:

Thank you for your letters of June 20 and October 20, 2021, regarding Heber wild horses on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests (ASNF). I apologize for the delayed response.

As stated in the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, we are committed to maintaining a current inventory of wild free-roaming horses and burros on designated areas of the public lands. The Heber Wild Horse Territory (HWHT) is a 19,700-acre territory located within ASNF and, based on current counts since 2014, the Heber herd is approximately 700 horses.

The Forest Service is committed to using the best management tools available and exploring innovative ideas to manage protected wild horses to appropriate and sustainable numbers. We manage National Forest System lands for multiple uses, including herd management for a healthy population of wild free-roaming horses within the HWHT that will not adversely affect the fragile ecosystems in Arizona.

The ASNF has been actively working with wild horse advocates and members of the public on creative solutions. The ASNF works with a diverse collaborative group focused on the Heber Wild Horse Territory organized by the Arizona State University in 2017. There have been multiple opportunities for public input, including the official 30-day public comment period on the Heber Wild Horse Territory planning process from March 23 to April 22, 2021. We appreciate the variety of public input and interest in this issue.

The Heber herd of approximately 700 horses greatly exceeds an appropriate level to maintain a healthy herd and a thriving ecosystem on the territory. A Final Environmental Assessment and a detailed Territory Management Plan for the HWHT will be issued by early 2022. Please know that we will not be pursuing a study area for the Heber herd.

I encourage you to learn more about the HWHT planning process on the Forest Service Web site at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/asnf/landmanagement/resourcemanagement/?cid=fseprd534229>.

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Thank you for writing and your continued interest in the Forest Service's wild horse program. If you have questions, please contact Christopher Kerin, ASNF Wild Horse and Burro Coordinator, at christopher.kerin@usda.gov.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary