

International Society for the Protection of Mustangs and Burros



PRESS RELEASE

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ALPINE WILD HORSES TO BE WIPED FROM EXISTENCE

Rapid City, SD – ISPMB has been embroiled in a legal battle since June to save an extremely rare herd of wild horses from being sold for slaughter by the Forest Service (FS) in the Alpine District of the Apache-Sitgreaves Forests in Arizona, but a Judge’s Aug. 22nd ruling means this historic herd can now be sold for slaughter at auction in early September.

“The judge’s ruling is a devastating blow to these wild horses who have lived free on the Apache side of the forest since at least 1882,” said Karen Sussman, president of the International Society for the Protection of Mustangs and Burros (ISPMB). “The horses of the Alpine-Sitgreaves Forest should be proudly recognized and held up as an example of how healthy free-roaming wild horses self-manage in the United States when they aren’t ripped apart during removals. We tried to stop the FS in court, but a judge has ruled twice against our efforts.”

ISPMB hired the law firm of FR Law Group in Phoenix, Arizona to represent the organization in their efforts to stop the sale and potential slaughter of these rare wild horses, who, according to a witness, have lived on this forest since before 1882.

On June 28, 2022, ISPMB and its law firm filed a complaint with the FS for Declaratory Relief.

Despite the issues raised in ISPMB’s complaint, the FS pushed forward with its planned sale scheduled for July 14, 20 and 21.

ISPMB then filed a Temporary Restraining Order, and a partial restraining order was granted by US District Judge Steven P. Logan, which temporarily stopped all scheduled sale dates.

During a hearing on July 22nd in Phoenix Federal District Court, ISPMB asked the Judge to find that the FS had violated the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and to declare that the Alpine horses were wild and free-roaming and protected under the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act.

The judge ruled against ISPMB on July 28th on both issues.

ISPMB’s team continued to search for witnesses living in the Alpine area who could attest to wild horses living on the Alpine Forest prior to 1971 and after 1971, when the Act passed to save America’s wild horses. One such witness was found who had both personal and professional experience with the wild

horses and initially was willing to offer testimony. The witness had worked for the FS for decades, both prior to and after the passage of the 1971 Act.

“The witness stated that the horses were there prior to the witness’s family coming to the area in 1882 and believed that the horses were in the area as early as Coronado’s march from Mexico to Canada in 1540 to 1542. The witness also stated that the FS never wanted to manage the horses so they labeled them unauthorized livestock, so they wouldn’t have the protections provided by the 1971 Act,” said Sussman, who had spoken to the witness.

ISPMB’s lawyers petitioned the court on August 8th to reconsider its earlier decision, providing additional witness testimony to support our position. Meanwhile, the sale of 18 wild horses scheduled for August 10th moved forward – too late to stop. Tragically, one of the horses died at the auction and several horses were sold for slaughter to kill buyers.

“While waiting for a decision from the court on our latest motion, we learned that our witness’ cooperation had angered people with cattle interests in the Alpine area who wanted the wild horses removed to protect their own interests. Shortly thereafter, we lost the cooperation of our witness,” Sussman said. On August 22, Judge Logan ruled against ISPMB’s motion for reconsideration.

Now, the fate of these horses is all but sealed. These historic wild horses, who have lived on the Alpine Forest longer than anyone involved in this case has been alive, will now be removed from the Alpine Forest forever, many of them likely to be sold for slaughter.

Summing up the months-long fight for justice for these horses, Sussman stated, “It doesn’t appear as though the Agencies (FS and BLM) have ever wanted to manage the wild horses and burros in our country. This is just another step towards the horses’ total eradication.”

UNDISRUPTED FOREST HERDS LIMIT THEIR OWN POPULATION

The Alpine wild horses’ counterparts in the western side of the forest are the Heber horses.

“The Heber herd defies the Agencies’ data which falsely claims that herds double every four years and grow at a 20 percent rate,” Sussman said. “These counterparts to the Alpine wild herd have not been gathered in over 18 years due to a lawsuit we filed in 2006 which stopped the FS from removing them, until the FS developed a Territory Plan.”

The Heber herd’s growth, with little to no mountain lion predation, has grown at just 1 to 3 percent.

“I have witnessed when the highly evolved family band structures are stable without constant disruptions, they have the ability to limit their population,” said Sussman. “But this is something the Agencies have never studied as ISPMB has done for more than 20 years. With the millions of taxpayer dollars spent on gathers, roundups, holding corrals and now expensive and dangerous birth control, why haven’t they?”

Congress tasked the Agencies with studying the behaviors of wild horses to understand them as a wildlife species in 1980-1982. In a Report to Congress in 1984, the Agencies reported this study was not necessary because it would not justify the costs. Yet, they have continued to manage them as livestock instead of the wildlife species they are, costing the taxpayers millions upon millions of dollars through mismanagement.

“The study of the Heber herd could transform how the Agencies should manage wild horses,” Sussman said.

A historical account of the Agencies’ actions against America’s wild horses and burros has been compiled by Sussman and has been presented to select Congressional members, depicting what Sussman sees as the Agencies’ true intent to eliminate wild horses and burros from public lands since the Act passed in 1971.

ISPMB also delivered an appeal to Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack last year requesting the Heber herd in the adjoining part of the Apache-Sitgreaves Forest be declared a study herd. Secretary Vilsack said no, and Sussman said this is yet another example of the Agencies’ preference to practice old-school, ineffective management techniques.

“In clear daylight, in the forests and ranges across America, the Agencies are eliminating our wild horses from our public lands. Using one poor excuse after another, they move forward with their mission. That’s why we again are taking a stand to try to save another threatened herd of wild horses.

“With the help of our Arizona law firms in Phoenix, we are standing up to stop the slaughter of these historic wild horses in the Apache-Sitgreaves Forests of Arizona.”

ABOUT ISPMB:

ISPMB is the oldest wild horse and burro organization in the United States. The only organization to manage, in conservation, entire herds of wild horses studying and observing their behaviors over 20 years. ISPMB was the motivating force, along with its first president, Wild Horse Annie, in getting the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act passed through Congress. This Act passed without one dissenting vote. The American people do not want to see the destruction of these wildlife species. Learn more at ispmb.org.

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