May 6, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Vicki Christiansen
Chief, U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue and Chief Christiansen:

We are writing to express our concern with the U.S. Forest Service’s plan to sell wild horses from the Devil’s Garden Plateau Wild Horse Territory in Northern California without restrictions on slaughter.

It is our understanding the Forest Service intends to sell some of these rounded-up wild horses without such restrictions—for as little as $1 per horse—potentially starting this month. We are deeply troubled by this proposal as it represents a severe abdication of the government’s responsibility to manage these federally-protected horses humanely.

The Devil’s Garden Plateau Wild Horse Territory, administered by the Modoc National Forest, is home to California’s largest herd of wild horses, and represents a significant tourism draw to the region. More importantly, these horses are beloved icons in the country, and Americans overwhelmingly oppose horse slaughter. The Forest Service’s proposal would put wild horses at risk of being killed for food, and goes against California’s existing law prohibiting the sale or transfer of horses for human consumption (California Penal Code § 598c).

Congress’s intent on this matter is abundantly clear. Through annual Department of the Interior appropriations legislation, Congress has passed unambiguous language protecting wild horses from destruction for commercial purposes. To our knowledge, the Forest Service has never attempted to sell wild horses under its authority without restrictions on slaughter. Rather, the agency has abided by the Interior appropriations language and Congress’s clear position regarding the humane and appropriate management of federally-protected wild horses.

The process of slaughter presents serious welfare concerns as horses are typically transported extremely long distances in crowded trailers without food, water, or rest. Once at the slaughterhouse, horses, with their unique physiology and strong fight-or-flight reflex, may endure repeated blows before being rendered unconscious and killed. The U.S. Department of Agriculture itself documented appalling conditions and abuse when horse slaughter facilities operated on U.S. soil. Animal welfare concerns aside, ensuring consistency between how our federal agencies manage wild horses is paramount.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to your response.
Sincerely,

Ted W. Lieu  
Member of Congress

Duncan Hunter  
Member of Congress

Salud Carbajal  
Member of Congress

Lucille Roybal-Allard  
Member of Congress

Raul M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress

Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Member of Congress

Steven Cohen  
Member of Congress

Paul Cook  
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress

Mike Doyle  
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress

Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.  
Member of Congress

Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress

J. Luis Correa  
Member of Congress

Alice Hastings  
Member of Congress

Brad Sherman  
Member of Congress

Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress

Stephen Lynch  
Member of Congress
Alan Lowenthal  
Member of Congress

Grace Napolitano  
Member of Congress

Jim McGovern  
Member of Congress

Joe Neguse  
Member of Congress

Adam Schiff  
Member of Congress

Ann M. P. Kuster  
Member of Congress

Andy Kim  
Member of Congress

Sean Patrick Maloney  
Member of Congress

Tim Ryan  
Member of Congress

Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress

John Katko  
Member of Congress

Eliot L. Engel  
Member of Congress

Scott Peters  
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress

Kathleen M. Rice  
Member of Congress

Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress

Dina Titus  
Member of Congress

Karen Bass  
Member of Congress
Judy Chu  
Member of Congress

Jerry McNerney  
Member of Congress

Al Lawson  
Member of Congress

Brendan F. Boyle  
Member of Congress

Peter Welch  
Member of Congress

Marc Pocan  
Member of Congress

Charlie Crist  
Member of Congress

Ruben Gallego  
Member of Congress

Seth Moulton  
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman  
Member of Congress

Susan K. DelBene  
Member of Congress

Juan Vargas  
Member of Congress

Grace Meng  
Member of Congress

Vern Buchanan  
Member of Congress

Donna Shalala  
Member of Congress

Brian Fitzpatrick  
Member of Congress

Donald Beyer  
Member of Congress

Katie Hill  
Member of Congress
Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress

Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

Daniel W. Lipinski
Member of Congress

TJ Cox
Member of Congress

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

Katie Porter
Member of Congress

Ami Bera
Member of Congress

Susie Lee
Member of Congress