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Statement of Senator Mansfield in Support of Legislation to Provide Managerial Controls and Protect Free-roaming Horses

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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April 20, 1971

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Chairman and Members
Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs
United States Senate

FROM: Office of Senator Mike Mansfield

Senator Mansfield sincerely regrets that business on the Floor of the Senate this morning makes his attendance at this hearing impossible. Attached are the Senator's remarks. Your courtesy in including them in the official transcript will be sincerely appreciated.
Mr. Chairman: It is a pleasure to appear before you today in support of legislation to provide managerial controls and protect free-roaming horses and burros in the western states. The Committee is considering several pieces of legislation. One, S. 1090, which the distinguished Senator from Idaho, Mr. Church, and I introduced on March 3, is the companion bill to Congressman Gude's H. R. 4220, now being considered by the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee.

The very course of western history and, for that matter, to an extent our national history, has been set to a degree by the heritage of the mustang. The Spanish conquistadors exploration and partial settlement of what is now the great Southwest would have been impossible were it not for the horse brought from Spain. The Indians encountered by the Spanish soon realized the potential of horses and were quick to take advantage of a stray or an unguarded corral. These First Americans, with years of practice, far surpassed the white man's accomplishments as horsemen.

With increased mobility, the tribes moved more readily and over greater distances. As they wandered, the horse, with minor exceptions, became a way of life for the Indian, from the dominions of Canada in the North to the Rio Grande in the South. Stray stallions from the Indian camps gathered mares into roaming herds which, in the years to come, would supply the cow ponies of western fame. These tough and sure-footed animals moved the great herds to the railheads and north to states like Montana to found our present cattle industry.
The buffalo hunter, the packer, the prospector and the frontiersman who opened the West relied upon the mustang caught from the herd and "broke to ride." The rodeo enjoyed by millions of Americans today owes its origin to the early settlers of the West who sought the mustang, singling out the best, in the hopes of teaching it the way of the "bit and the rein."

Western dependency upon the horse and burro has steadily declined with the advent of the rails, highways and air routes. This, with the end of the open range has relegated the horse to a position of minor economic importance to be viewed by the tourists and to be ridden by the "dude."

In recognition of the historic significance of the horse, concerned individuals and groups have been successful in setting aside areas of the West as wild horse ranges under the management of the Department of the Interior. One has been established in the Pryor Mountains, along the Montana-Wyoming border.

In this day and age of probing scientific inquiry, little is known of the wild horse or mustang and its impact and contribution to the ecology of its habitat. Fortunately, in recognition of this fact, scholars at the University of Michigan and the University of Nevada are presently actively engaged in important research. It is my hope that in its consideration of legislation, the Committee will have an opportunity to hear from one of the researchers, Mr. James Fiest, who is presently doing work in my State of Montana.

I am confident the distinguished members of this Committee, as I, have received considerable mail from constituents, expressing concern for the promulgation of realistic and humane regulations. I would be remiss if I did
not say that I have been sensitive to their expressions of concern. I recognize
that conflicts of interest may, on occasion, arise between the agricultural
needs of a state and the interest of preservation of wild horses. I am confident
that this Committee will be sensitive to the needs in this area and move to make
recommendations, providing for a realistic balance between the differences.

At the same time, a great many unfortunate animals have been subjected
to frequent and varying harassment. They have been run to death by airplanes
as an ill-conceived sport and shot down for dog food.

Protection, Mr. Chairman, must be tempered by an effective and adequately
funded program of management. Existing and future herds of wild horses must,
from time to time, be culled, weeding out the old, the sick and diseased, as
well as those animals carrying a brand which do not belong in the wild horse
classification. It is critical that an ecological balance be achieved and
maintained so that horse populations be in balance with the food supply available
for them. This is well documented in a report I have received recently from
Mr. Edwin Zaidlicz, of the Bureau of Land Management in Billings, Montana, who
has responsibility and jurisdiction over the wild horse range in the Pryor
Mountains. I ask that this document be made a part of the record of this hearing.

You will note that the overriding tone of Mr. Zaidlicz's letter agrees
with the position for protection and management. In addition, Mr. Zaidlicz's
letter identifies a need for additional funds to assist in achieving managerial
excellence.