

RE: SCR1, Designating the Kiger Mustang as official state horse.

My name is Jenny Freeborn. I am a long time horse owner, "retired" horse trainer, NRHA (National Reining Horse Association) Professional and AQHA (American Quarter Horse Association) Professional, as well as a farm kid from rural Polk County, near Rickreall.

I am writing in opposition to SCR1, the bill to designate the Kiger Mustang as the state horse. On the surface, this bill seems harmless, but First, I have serious concerns about what this could mean to the management of the "mustang," or more accurately, feral horse herds in western Oregon. The two herds in question, the Kiger and Riddle Mountain herds, are in areas that are important to the farming & ranching industry, and the related rural economies. I have visited both areas, and spoken with some local ranchers over the years, including Rusty Ingles this weekend - Harney County Farm Bureau President - who is only about 20 miles from one of the herd management areas in question. His concerns echo my own. We realize that the actual herd management and the lands in question are managed by the BLM, a federal government body. However, we are concerned about what considerations the state may impose on the future management of these herds if this bill were to pass. The lands are already commonly overgrazed, the feral horses are known to damage fencelines, waterways and streambanks, and cost local ranchers grazing permits on otherwise excellent range land due to the overpopulation of these herd. If this bill were to pass, we fear additional restrictions on the roundups and management of these herds may be imposed, furthering the overpopulation, damage to the rangeland and waterways, and costs to the county, both direct and opportunity costs.

Secondly, I want to point out, there is no such thing as a "native" horse to the state of Oregon. All "wild" horse herds in eastern Oregon are feral - they were introduced by settlers. Yes, some earlier in history than others, as it is supposed that the Kiger herd in particular originated from Spanish horses. But they are still feral horses. There is no apex predator in the state that can balance their population without human intervention, because human intervention is what brought them here. In addition, over the years that herd has existed, the bloodline from the Spanish horses that makes these mustangs so "special" in many people's eyes has been diluted. They have mixed with rancher's herds, as well as other feral horse populations in the state, which eventually will make them no different than any of the other feral horses throughout the state. Is it honestly a good idea, to bestow a position of honor, a state animal designation, upon a feral animal? How is a feral horse different from feral cats, dogs, or even invasive weed species? They do not have a positive impact on rural Oregon, on the rural economy, or on the environment. They cost the state, the taxpayers, and the local ranchers money every year. Please understand, I'm not suggesting we eradicate these herds. I realize there is some value from a tourism aspect, as well as from the aspect of preserving the "old west" throughout the western United States. I am just asking that we don't bestow a place of honor on them, for our state, when they truly do more harm than good.

Finally, and I have to admit my first thought when I read this bill, is - why are we spending time, and taxpayer's money, even discussing such a thing, when there are so many more important issues to face in Oregon this legislative session? This bill is in no way going to help our economy, our infrastructure, our education, our legislative processes. When I spoke with Rusty, that was his first reaction, as well - he laughed and more or less said, now who the heck came up with such an idea? I agree. In my opinion, this is a waste of time, and a waste of my tax dollars.

In summary, I hope that this committee will consider these concerns when reviewing this bill, and oppose it. Please do not pass this bill out of committee. It is potentially damaging to farmers, ranchers,

and the rural economy. It is trying to make a representative of our state out of a feral animal that is not native, nor representative, of our state. And there truly are more important things on the agenda this legislative session. Please oppose this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

~Jenny~

Jenny Freeborn  
Rickreall, OR