Secretary Sally Jewell
Department of the Interior (DOI)
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Director Dan Ashe
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

9 September 2013

Re: Support for Feral Horse Gathers at Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge

Dear Secretary Jewell and Director Ashe:

As active members of the conservation community and supporters of the National Wildlife Refuge System and feral horse and burro management, we commend and support the steps taken on Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) to remove all feral horses. Sheldon NWR is a critical area for sage-grouse recovery efforts and the leadership U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) staff has taken to preserve and meet the primary mission of the refuge is commendable. Taking a firm stand on feral horse removal is a daunting endeavor but is necessary to ensure the ecosystem health of this fragile sage brush steppe ecosystem. Their action should be applauded and supported. The impending gather on September 9, 2013 is necessary, humane and this action is the result of scientific finding by FWS.

FWS has pursued every means necessary to ensure these management actions are sound, science-based, and publicly vetted. The Sheldon NWR Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) clearly outlines desired timelines, courses of actions, and solutions for unwanted horses. In full compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, FWS conducted first an Environmental Assessment, and later an Environmental Impact Statement with a Record of Decision. Furthermore, the FWS has been very responsive to public concerns. Public observation of the gathers is now allowed and contracts for adoption have been enhanced to achieve greater accountability and transparency, including checks on the health and wellbeing of horses after they leave the refuge. FWS staff is also actively engaged with organizations to find homes for removed horses. Each of these actions goes above and beyond what is required in the CCP to ensure the humane and ethical treatment of horses.

Leaving horses on the refuge is not an option. The refuge's primary mission cannot be met while feral horses continue to damage and degrade sensitive habitats. Sheldon NWR is an important public conservation resource that provides critical habitat for greater sage-grouse, migratory pronghorn, the once imperiled California bighorn sheep, and numerous waterbirds, songbirds, reptiles, and amphibians.

We encourage and support your efforts to implement the proposed gather schedule. Sound feral horse and burro management will always be met with some level of opposition, but preferential management of a non-native species should not come at the cost of science-based conservation and management of native fish, wildlife, and plants. We look forward to lending our support as steps to eradicate feral horses on Sheldon NWR continue. If you have any questions, please contact Terra Rentz, The Wildlife Society's Deputy Director of Government Affairs (terra@wildlife.org) or Desiree Sorenson-Groves, Vice-President of Government Affairs with The National Wildlife Refuge Association (dgroves@refugeassociation.org).

Sincerely,

W B Kessler

Winifred Kessler, President
The Wildlife Society

David Houghton, President
National Wildlife Refuge Association

Craig L Kauffman

Craig Kauffman, President
Safari Club International

The following organizations represent a diverse partnership of wildlife conservation and sportsmen organizations, industry partners, and professional societies in support of aggressive horse management on Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge:

1. The Wildlife Society
2. National Wildlife Refuge Association
3. Safari Club International
4. Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
5. Archery Trade Association
6. Boone and Crockett Club
7. Bowhunting Preservation Alliance
8. Campfire Club of America
9. Catch-A-Dream Foundation
10. Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
11. Defenders of Wildlife
12. Dallas Safari Club
13. Delta Waterfowl Foundation
14. Ducks Unlimited
15. Friends of Nevada Wilderness
16. Izaak Walton League of America
17. North American Bear Foundation
18. North American Grouse Partnership
19. National Association of Conservation Districts
20. National Audubon Society
21. National Wild Turkey Federation
22. Masters of Foxhounds Association
23. Mule Deer Foundation
24. Oregon Natural Desert Association
25. Orion, the Hunter's Institute
26. Pheasants Forever
27. Pope and Young Club
28. Public Lands Foundation
29. Quality Deer Management Association
30. Quail Forever
31. Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
32. Ruffed Grouse Society
33. Sacramento Safari Club
34. Society for Range Management
35. Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
36. U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance
37. Whitetails Unlimited
38. Wildlife Forever
39. Wildlife Management Institute
40. Wildlife Mississippi