



Feral Horses

As a conservation organization, Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) is concerned with the persistence of Alberta's natural biological diversity including wildlife and natural ecosystems. Feral horses are an introduced species to Alberta. As such, they may have an adverse effect on native wildlife populations through direct competition or through altering ecosystem interactions, and they may have a negative impact on ecosystems that are sensitive to the types of disturbances caused by large herds of the horses. Globally, it is well-established that invasive introduced species are among the top five greatest threats to biological diversity. The protection of feral horses in Alberta, therefore, does not fit within our mandate of protecting Alberta's wildlife and wild places.

Points of Emphasis

AWA fully supported the humane capture of all feral horses on the proposed National Wildlife Refuge at Suffield landscape in 1984 as there was direct evidence that they were in conflict with native species including pronghorn antelope, especially with regard to access to the few natural springs where damage from the horses was evident and growing.

There is growing anecdotal evidence, including personal observations by AWA members, suggesting that feral horse populations in the South Eastern Slopes foothills have increased significantly over the last 10 years and that native ungulate and large predator populations have decreased. We need sound scientific research in the area to understand the population status and trends of these species, the interactions that are happening between these populations, if any, and what impacts the feral horses may be having on the native flora and fauna of the South Eastern Slopes which is a highly sensitive and valued ecosystem.

AWA is concerned with the general lack of wildlife research on Eastern Slopes lands over the past 30 or more years; there has been no published "Status of Wildlife Report" in decades. It is disconcerting that limited resources are being used towards creating policy for an introduced species such as the feral horse when many native species are declining and not receiving adequate research or attention. Feral horse policy should be developed in the context of protecting native species and natural ecosystem processes and in conjunction with an updated policy for native wildlife.

AWA is supportive of efforts by our provincial government and its public advisory committee on feral horses, to establish ecologically, humanely, and sustainably sound policies for management on Alberta's Eastern Slopes.