

What Is The Value Of An American Wild Horse?

Does \$72,000.00 sound right?



William E. Simpson II - May 25, 2018

A minority of Americans want to see American wild horses sent to slaughter to make room for more livestock grazing on public lands. Obviously, we don't see most Americans giving up their hamburgers and steaks, so the demands for beef, lamb and pork are slowly increasing. But do we need to kill wild horses in slaughter houses? And is this even a wise use of these publicly-owned wild horses?

The question of value arises; are wild horses more valuable in a pet food can, or in a wildfire fuel abatement role helping to protect forest resources and the lives and assets of humans?

Since the codification of the 1971 Wild Burro and Horse Protection Act five decades ago, there have been many profound breakthroughs and discoveries in science. For instance, we now know that wild horses have successfully maintained habitats in virtually every biome on the planet ranging from sub-arctic to tropical. We also now know that wild horses survived the Ice Age in forests, as we read here: <https://cosmosmagazine.com/biology/into-the-woods-horses-survived-mass-extinction-by-adapting-to-forests>

A new question arises:

Knowing what we know today as far as genetics (including epigenetics), paleontological ecology

(ranges of wild equids based-on fossil records) and the cultural archaeology of native Americans and their horses, whose wild horses arguably pre-date the Columbian Period, would planners today draw the same lines on maps defining areas for wild horses under any new law for their protection? I seriously doubt it. In the late 1960s and in 1971, we knew very little about wild horses, as well as their history and ecology as compared to today. And even by today's standards, we still have much to learn in many areas. Little money is allocated to fund the study of American wild horses in comparison to studies related to livestock.

In a world where we have more people than ever wanting more resources than ever, financial considerations must not be discounted.

What is a wild horse worth? I would respond to those with love in their hearts; the sum is beyond quantification.

To those who render meat? An 800-pound horse is worth ~\$160.00 (20-cents per pound wholesale).

To those who have vision; each wild horse is worth at least \$72,000.00.

Here is why:

Each horse deployed into and around remote forest wilderness areas with depleted deer populations can abate 5.5 tons of ground fuel (grass and brush) annually (~30 pounds/day) in and around forest the areas that are virtually inaccessible, especially wilderness areas. For comparison, a deer consumes about 7-pounds of grass and brush per day. Many of these remote wilderness areas are poorly suited to commercial livestock grazing due to the extensive predation of calves and lambs, poor accessibility and very difficult terrain. These and other factors significantly reduce any profits. Losing calves and lambs is not an option of livestock production.

Western forests are depleted of deer due to poor wildlife management of predators. California and Oregon are down over 2-million deer over the past 5 decades. These deer had been abating nearly 3-million tons of grass and brush. It will take decades to correct our depleted deer populations.

A wild horse will abate about 5.5 tons of prodigious grass and brush annually in and around forests. 5.5 tons of grass and brush equals roughly 5-7 acres of grass and brush (varies with area), which can easily be maintained by wild horses year-round at nominal levels without any human intervention or the added risk of man-caused wildfires, especially during summer.

According to Science Magazine: (and NIH studies) "By altering the quantity and distribution of fuel supplies, large herbivores can shape the frequency, intensity, and spatial distribution of fires across a landscape. There are even unique interactions among large herbivore populations that can influence fire regimes.

In order to accomplish the same task of deployed wild horses in the mitigation of prodigious

grass and brush levels in areas of remote and difficult wilderness terrain, it would require 2-men about four to five weeks of work, according to at least one article using hand tools (<https://www.motherearthnews.com/homesteading-and-livestock/cutting-hay-by-hand-zmaz79mjzraw>). It is important to note that motorized equipment and methods are by law prohibited in wilderness areas.

Each man requires a minimum wage of about \$15.00/hour, which equals \$120/day/man, or \$240.00 per day for two men. This is multiplied by the minimum of 4-weeks (20-days), which equals \$4,800.00. There are also other HR issues in this method, which add more costs. So using man-power, we arrive at a per-acre grass and brush abatement cost of \$685.71 per acre, based upon the greatest efficiency (\$4,800.00 divided by 7-acres).

A wild horse abates excess grass and brush fuel from wildfires on the same 7-acres virtually at no cost. And in wilderness areas, this is important since virtually all traditional fuel treatment method used by the USFS and other agencies are prohibited.

According to the USFS, even in areas where their most cost-effective method fuel treatment is allowed, which is prescribed burning, the cost to taxpayers for that is \$400.00 per acre. Of course there are unwanted side effects to prescribed burns; toxic smoke is released into the air and some wildlife, especially reptiles, amphibians and ground birds are overcome and killed by the smoke and heat. Further still, some prescribed burns get out of control and become uncontrolled wildfires.

A wild horse will live about 15-20 years in a wilderness environment and has no HR issues. Therefore, each horse will yield about \$72,000.00 in work value over its life (\$4,800 each year X 15 years).

The value of a wild horse in a wildfire fuel mitigation roll is a multiple of 450-times the value of the same horse rendered as meat.

It's clearly obtuse to even consider using wild horses for slaughter given that on top of the \$72,000.00, there is added value to that outlined above in regard to the savings to taxpayers in firefighting costs, increased insurance costs, value of natural resources lost, increase health costs from smoke, loss of economic value in communities due to fire damage to properties leading to loss of tax role values, etc.

Furthermore, having evolved on the North American continent, wild horses have documented symbiotic mutualisms with both forest and soils ecosystems that invasive species cattle and sheep do not have as ruminants.

Wild horses are monogastric digestors (single stomach) and pass both humus and viable native plant seeds back onto the soils they graze, which restores fire-damages soils. More here: <https://www.horsetalk.co.nz/2018/01/08/fire-grazing-wild-horses-better-cattle/>

It may be reasonable to add another \$10,000 per horse in value for these additional savings and value due to their mitigation of wildfire fuels and the reduction of exponential losses and related

costs, bringing the total value of each wild horse that is redistributed from BLM/USFS corrals into targeted forest areas to \$82,000.00 (one horse).

This makes the approximate 48,000 wild horses in the BLM/USFS corrals worth about \$4-billion dollars to taxpayers in a wildfire Prevention Plan.

New Mini-Documentary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O26lZ0nX30U>

ABC NEWS coverage on WHFB: <http://www.kdrv.com/content/video/482990121.html>

TheDoveTV coverage on WHFB: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_6yWyq_Hk

Natural History thesis film from Colorado College: 'Fuel, Fire and Wild Horses':
<https://vimeo.com/327282987>

TheDoveTV interview with Perry Atkinson on April 23rd, 2019:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=7&v=ve1ANL5zn9Q

More here: <http://healthyforests.org/2018/01/catastrophic-wildfire-genesis-and-mitigation/>

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