

For my seventh birthday, we took a trip out to see the Onaqui herd of wild mustangs. We searched for hours to find them, but it wasn't until we were driving back along the desolate road that we spotted a small band of about nine horses out in the distance. Even though we kept our distance, I could feel the gentleness and protection the older horses showed towards their young. All these horses ever wanted was to survive the harsh desert and teach their young how to do the same. Throughout the years, these innocent wild horses have faced many challenges including roundups that often end with dead horses, being shipped off to slaughterhouses, and being shot for no reason. By my 90th birthday, I hope to impact the lives of wild mustangs so they can live on the range without the threat of being taken from their home or shot on any given day.

In the history of the West, there has been a feud between ranchers and wild horse activists over where the mustangs should live. As the cattle industry grew it demanded more land for grazing, which the American government happily supplied, choosing to support cattle ranching rather than protect the wild mustangs. In the early 1900s, an estimated one million wild mustangs were counted, but during a recent count, there were only 8,300 free mustangs, and an additional 300 mustang skulls were found from those that had died (Moretti). The choice doesn't have to be ranching or wild mustangs; there are ways for the two to coexist. Mustangs deserve to stay. Humans caused the problem, and humans should fix it.

Wild horse activists have been working since the mid 1900s when Wild Horse Annie brought attention to the problems facing wild mustangs to the public. She hoped to find ways that cattle ranchers could live in harmony with the mustangs. One of the best solutions that has been suggested for mustang population control is the humane administration of birth control to some

of the wild mares. This would allow the birth of wild horses each year but on a smaller scale. We cannot, however, have untrained people administering birth control to untamed horses.

Equine veterinarians are best equipped to administer birth control, and I plan to become one of them when I grow up. Many horse-crazy girls have a copy of *Black Beauty*, but next to my copy, I have the *Merck Veterinary Manual*, which I received for my tenth birthday. I have also completed an online class in equine welfare and management through UC Davis. I want to become a veterinarian because I will be better equipped to advocate for the use of humane birth control if I am a trained veterinarian. When I am a veterinarian, I will also be able to assist in the administration of birth control, if such a time comes where it is allowed.

Wild mustangs are an important part of our country, and by my 90th birthday, I want to provide wild mustangs with the opportunity to thrive in their homeland, unharmed by the human populations around them. If we were to take steps to protect the wild mustangs, it would show that we as a people care about more than just our own needs. Dr. Jane Goodall inspires me because she demonstrates the importance of understanding other creatures and protecting them and their environment. We are all interconnected, and like Dr. Goodall, we can strive to make the world safe for all living creatures.

### Work Cited

Moretti, Laura. "History of America's Wild Horses | American Wild Horse Campaign." *American Wild Horse Conservation*, <https://americanwildhorse.org/history-americas-wild-horses>. Accessed 5 March 2024.