

Wayne Pacelle: House Committees Urge Enforcing Anti-Cruelty Laws, Bar U.S. Horse Slaughter

But BLM Gets Millions for Horse and Burro Round-Ups, While USDA Gets Millions for Inhumane Predator Killing

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, July 13, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- by Wayne Pacelle

In 2017, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) removed from a searchable website the animal welfare inspection records for puppy mills, horse shows (where "soring" is prevalent), laboratories using animals, and circuses and other public exhibitors of animals. It was an outrageous maneuver to deny the public information about individuals not following the bare-minimum animal care standards called for in the Animal Welfare Act and the Horse Protection Act. This scrubbing of information, combined with lax enforcement, was a double-barreled betrayal of the American public and a set up for the abuse of animals.

Lawmakers of both parties – from Martha McSally, R-Ariz. to Sanford Bishop, D-Ga., to Vern Buchanan, R-Fla. — demanded that USDA restore the searchable database, and they used the annual funding bill for the USDA to give them the directive. Congress controls the purse strings, and USDA grudgingly seems to recognize that it must listen to this dictate from Congress.

That was one example of how the work the Congress did last year through its annual Agriculture spending bill changed the fortunes of animals. And this year's bill is equally consequential for animals, with Chairman Bishop continuing to promote animal welfare through this bill. The



Yearlings at Stone Farm in Paris, Kentucky | Photo Credit: Marty Irby

House Appropriations Committee on Thursday passed a \$153 spending bill for the Department of Agriculture and Food and Drug Administration for 2021 and a nearly \$14 billion measure for the Interior Department. There's so much at stake for animals in each of these bills, and here are some highlights.

Agriculture-Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Spending:

In 2017, USDA nixed a last-minute rule from the Obama team that would have strengthened the Horse Protection Act by banning the large stacked shoes and ankle chains that some trainers and owners put on the feet of Tennessee Walking horses for shows. The Obama Administration waited until the last second to publish the final rule in the Federal Register and the key personnel failed to complete the job, giving a pathway for the freshly minted political appointees from the Trump Administration to roll back the regulation. They did so even though more than 300 Senators and Representatives backed the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, an even more sweeping measure to reform the industry.

This year's Agriculture-FDA spending bill urges USDA to restore the 2017 rule as written. The bill also doubles — to \$2 million — spending on enforcement to protect horses from soring and instructs the USDA's Office of Inspector General (OIG) to better enforce the HPA. Both actions signal again that the U.S. House wants to see the end of the long era of horse torture in the Big Lick segment of the Tennessee Walking horse industry.

This bill also continues a ban on U.S. inspections of horse slaughter plants, blocking the opening of any U.S.-based plants butchering horses for export for human consumption. In recent years, this has been a contentious issue, with most Republicans on the committee favoring slaughter and most Democrats opposing it. With the Democrats taking control of the House in 2018, the committee's leadership has been resolute in including the provision in the spending bill and



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settling the issue. To their credit, no Republican lawmakers on the committee, led by ranking member Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, R-Neb., challenged the ban on horse slaughter in yesterday's committee consideration of the bill.

The package includes \$3 million in funding for 2021 for the Pet and Women Safety (PAWS) Act that Animal Wellness Action worked to successfully get signed into law in the 2018 Farm Bill. The PAWS Act was enacted to help address the issue of domestic violence against pets and the lack of ability to accommodate pets in domestic violence shelters.

Lawmakers also included language urging USDA OIG to enhance animal fighting enforcement, encouraging the department's law enforcement arm "to combat this illegal activity and to investigate animal fighting as soon as it has any evidence of such illegal activity." That's especially significant because a series of AWA and AWF investigations have uncovered massive cockfighting operations in at least a dozen states and also called out Puerto Rico's political leaders for abetting illegal animal fighting activities in the Commonwealth. All animal fighting, including in the territories, has been outlawed since December 2019, when the AWA-backed Parity in Animal Cruelty Enforcement (PACE) Act took effect.

USDA has the responsibility to enforce the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act. The law denies any protection for poultry, but nevertheless, USDA inspects those plants for food safety and worker safety purposes. In April, after slaughter plants became the nation's hot spots for COVID-19, USDA approved more than 15 poultry processing plants' requests to increase line speeds by 25%, from 140 to 175 birds a minute. That increased pacing results in more mistreatment of birds and unending pressures on line workers. This bill would forbid the USDA increase in processing speeds.

The race for a COVID-19 vaccine has put FDA in the center of our nation's anti-pandemic strategies, and the committee weighed in emphatically on this issue, noting that "nonclinical approaches that do not involve use of animals to evaluate new pharmaceuticals are being developed and might better predict some human outcomes and reduce animal testing." AWA, the Center for a Humane Economy, and the Center for Responsible Science want to see Congress and the FDA lift its mandates for animal testing, including in circumstances where animals cannot contract a disease or show symptoms. The committee's language is a great first step toward 21st-century science.

Rep. Marcy Kaptur, D-Ohio, was instrumental in holding FDA accountable for pet food safety. There has been a raft of pet food adulteration cases, and Kaptur is pressing FDA to report to the Congress and the public to provide assurances, so that pets don't become ill or die from the commercial food they consume.

The committee has continued to nudge USDA's Wildlife Services in the direction of doing more in the way of non-lethal wildlife management to address human-wildlife conflicts, but it has not directed the rogue program to restrict its use of body-gripping traps, poisons, and aerial gunning

to kill native wildlife. Wildlife Services uses these killing strategies mainly for the benefit of the cattle and sheep industries already getting below-cost grazing rights on our federal lands.

AWA Rating of the bill: B+

Interior Spending:

In a major development for wildlife, the U.S. House Interior spending bill released by a key subcommittee today includes a prohibition on importing elephant or lion trophies from Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. This came about partly because of last year's House floor vote pushed by AWA — and led by Rep. Vern Buchanan, R-Fla. — to forbid imports of the heads and hides of these rare animals. "The hunting and slaughter of endangered elephants and lions should not be supported with taxpayer funds," Buchanan said. "Banning the import of these so-called "trophies" will help protect these magnificent creatures. We don't get a second chance once a species goes extinct."

This policy is so crucial because the United States has been the world's largest trophy hunting nation, with Americans trekking to African nations by the thousands to slay elephants, lions, leopards, giraffes, and other majestic creatures, including animals on the List of Threatened and Endangered Species. We applaud Chairwoman Betty McCollum, D-Minn., for including this provision in the bill. Now we need the Senate Interior Appropriations committee to follow suit to see that this policy is enacted in the final spending bill approved by the Congress. Please sign and share the petition below and call your lawmakers about the issue.

With the Democrats in charge, this bill contains no language to remove federal protections for wolves in the Great Lakes and several other species targeted by a small number of lawmakers. Delisting is a necessary step for trophy hunting of wolves and commercial trapping of them in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. The Trump Administration has proceeded with a wolf delisting rule for the wolf populations in the Northern Great Lakes region, and the committee adopted some cautionary language to the agency on that subject. Both the Obama Administration and now the Trump Administration have pursued delisting, but the federal courts have repeatedly blocked those ill-considered and premature maneuvers.

The Interior spending bill also includes additional monies to combat wildlife trafficking, which is one of the world's most lucrative and destructive industries.

On the downside, the committee gave the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) more than \$102 million for the wild horse and burro program, even though the department has said it will round up as many as 30,000 horses a year. The committee's report language did not express any enthusiasm for the BLM's wild horse and burro management plan recently submitted to Congress, but somehow decided to give them as much money as last year and with no restrictions on how that money could be used. Somehow, and without any objective foundation, a few animal protection groups, led by HSUS, continue to tout that these spending levels and

BLM's ruthless round-up plans are a boon to horses and burros.

No good can come from BLM getting more money with William Pendley at the helm. He has publicly expressed his contempt for wild horses and burros, announced in his intentions to depopulate wild horses and burros from the West, and labeled humane fertility control a foolish strategy. Last week, President Trump last week announced he is seeking to formalize Pendley's role by seeking his Senate confirmation as director of the BLM (he's been "acting director" for the bulk of Trump's first term). A long-time zealot and anti-wild horse and burro crusader — the former president of the extremist Mountain States Legal Fund and a booster of putting more livestock on our public lands — Pendley does not deserve U.S. Senate confirmation.

The House Appropriations Committee again includes language forbidding slaughter of wild horses and burros removed from the range. While that policy is one we support, it does not address the massive round-ups the bureau is promising. As those round-ups transfer tens of thousands of horses and burros from federal lands to captive holding facilities, the costs of care will rise, enabling pro-horse-slaughter lawmakers and interest groups to make the argument that swelling captive populations of wild horses and burros can only be responsibly managed by sending them to slaughter.

AWA Rating: B

The Senate Appropriations will take up its Agriculture-FDA and Interior spending bills soon. In the end, Congressional leaders are likely to settle disputes between the House and Senate versions and send final bills to the President at the end of the year. This is just the beginning of the process, but an important and defining start to legislating that has life-altering consequences for animals.

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