

Katherine Heigl, Horse Advocates Take Utah Capitol by Storm in Rally to Save Iconic Onaqui Herd from Biden's Roundups

State Capitol Event Seeks to Prevent the Roundup of Onaqui Herd by Federal Bureau of Land Management

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH, USA, July 2, 2021

/EINPresswire.com/ -- Today, actress Katherine Heigl, joined by [Animal Wellness Action](#), the Center for a Humane Economy, the Jason Debus Heigl Foundation, Wild Horse Photo Safaris, the Red Birds Trust, and the Cloud Foundation held a wildly successful "Wild Horse and Burro Freedom Rally" at the Utah State Capitol to raise public awareness of the plight of Utah's famed Onaqui wild horses, who face a devastating mass helicopter roundup beginning July 12 that will send 80 percent of the herd to an uncertain future. Heigl and leaders of the groups involved spoke to rally attendees, before traveling directly to the rangeland where the Onaqui wild horses live wild and free. On July 1, President Joe Biden's Bureau of Land Management, [doubled-down in a press release](#) announcing they will proceed with the roundups.



Speakers at the event included (left to right): Jen Rogers, Red Birds Trust; Ashley Avis, director of Disney's Black Beauty film; Katherine Heigl, Scott Beckstead with the Center for a Humane Economy; Marty Irby with Animal Wellness Action; and Eric Molva

In May, Heigl, a Utah resident, and co-founder of the Jason Debus Heigl Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to animal welfare, joined the campaign to prevent the eradication of most of the treasured Onaqui herd in the Great Basin Desert. The horses, beloved far and wide by wild horse enthusiasts, tourists, and photographers, are scheduled to be rounded up by helicopter and incarcerated in private holding facilities by the federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and U.S. Dept. of Interior (DOI) led by Secretary Deb Haaland, a former Member of Congress from New Mexico.

“We’re pulling out all the stops in pressing President Joe Biden to stop the roundup and eradication of the iconic Onaqui wild horses in Utah and call on the president to implement a course correction before it’s too late,” said actress Katherine Heigl, who lives in Summit County where she keeps here horses.

“With over 52,000 wild horses and burros currently in government facilities, it's time to stop round ups and focus on a robust humane fertility control program utilizing PZP,” said Erika Brunson, philanthropist, and member of the Global Council for Animals. “Currently only 1% of the population is addressed which is ludicrous.”



A crowd of more than 100 advocates gathered on the Utah State Capitol Steps with Katherine Heigl on July 2, 2021 | Photo by: Animal Wellness Action

“The Onaqui wild horses and burros are protected by federal law. Cattle and sheep are not,” said Scott Beckstead, director of campaigns for the Center for a Humane Economy. “The Bureau of Land Management must stop misleading the public about wild horse populations and be honest about the impact of commercial livestock in degrading our public lands.”

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“The buck stops with President Biden, and he can either leave a legacy of saving the iconic Onaqui wild horses or be known as the leader who eradicated them with draconian helicopter roundups, the choice is his,” said [Marty Irby](#), executive director at Animal Wellness Action who was recently honored by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for his

work to protect horses. “We call on the president to use his power of executive order and the authority vested by the American people to cancel roundup set for July 12th – it’s not too late to stop this egregious injustice.”

“Having spent the past three years filming wild horses and traversing the vast Western United States— the purported, general, blanket misinformation that wild horses are “starving” or are “unable to sustain on the land” is frankly absurd,” said Ashley Avis, director of Disney’s Black Beauty and founder of the Wild Beauty Foundation. “This is a result of a collective machination

fueled and funded by special interests to prioritize tax subsidized livestock grazing, and to forcibly remove wild horses off our public lands. None of this is in the interest of the vast majority of Americans, and if something isn't done soon, wild horses will potentially face extinction."

"We are calling on President Biden to stop the Onaqui roundup and allow the community-based birth control program to humanely manage the herd on the range," said Deniz Bolbol, Advocacy Director for The Cloud Foundation. "Putting more wild horses in government holding facilities is not sustainable and is not supported by the majority of Americans."

"The BLM says there are too many wild horses at Onaqui, even while it authorizes three-and-a-half times the cattle grazing as the 474 wild horses take," said Erik Molvar of Western Watersheds Project. "Our field monitoring shows that parts of Onaqui where cattle predominate - including lands where wild horses have been fenced out - have been grazed down to bare dirt, while the areas far from water where the wild horses graze are in much better shape. The Onaqui range can easily support today's population of 474 wild horses and maintain healthy wildlife habitats; the problem is the BLM is adding far too much cattle grazing to the mix."

Background:

Descended from horses used by pioneers and native tribes in the late 1800's, the Onaqui horses are known for their robust beauty and their ability to thrive in the harsh environment of the Great Basin Desert of western Utah. They are a favorite among wild horse photographers and enthusiasts and are believed to be the most popular and photographed wild herd in the country. Tourists from all over the country, and even the world, travel to Utah to view and photograph



Actress Katherine Heigl calls on President Biden to stop the Onaqui wild horse roundups



Left to right: Katherine Heigl, Marty Irby

their favorite animals, including stallions with names like Charger, Goliath, Buck, Moondrinker, with glimpses of the herd's elder statesman, Gandalf (also known as "Old Man" by some), being the most coveted prize.

But the Onaqui horses are facing a grim future. On July 12, the BLM will use helicopters to chase, trap, and remove most of them from their home range on Utah's Great Basin Desert. Helicopter roundups of wild horses are notorious for their cruelty and the suffering they inflict on the animals. Horses will be chased for miles in the summer heat to the point of utter exhaustion, and some will sustain injuries or even be killed. There are new foals and elderly horses in the herd who will be in jeopardy of being left behind, wounded, or even killed during the terror, chaos, and confusion of the stampede into the traps. From there the horses will lose the two things that mean the most to them – their families and their freedom. They will be shipped by truck to BLM corrals where they will languish in barren feedlot conditions, awaiting an uncertain future. After being sorted and separated, the BLM will offer the animals for adoption, a process that poses a grave threat to their lives, as it has been recently reported that the BLM's wild horse and burro adoption program is sending horses to their deaths in foreign slaughter plants.

The BLM claims there is insufficient forage for the horses on their HMA, yet the agency has allocated wild horses only between 9 and 15 percent of the resources on public lands, while livestock are allocated between 85 and 91 percent. Livestock greatly outnumber the horses currently on the HMA, yet the agency has announced no plans to reduce or eliminate private grazing, and continues to follow the direction of a diabolical plan misleadingly deemed the "Path Forward," that calls for the roundup and eradication of tens of thousands of wild horses and burros on federal lands at a cost of up to \$5 billion to the American tax-payer, according to the most recent Acting Director of the BLM.

The roundups are also planned for tens of thousands of wild horse and burro herds across the western United States, as the BLM heeds the wishes of the livestock industry and scrambles to remove as many wild equines as possible. Unless that is, they are stopped.

In April, a coalition of more than 70 groups sent a letter to Secretary Haaland calling for a freeze on grazing permits and an elimination of livestock grazing on all wild horse and burro Herd Management Areas. There has been no response from Haaland despite the media contacting the Secretary's Office and the White House, who declined to comment.

The lack of response from the Biden Administration, combined with Haaland's testimony before the House Appropriations Committee on April 20th that the Dept. of Interior is "in agreement with the plan of the previous Administration," prompted a second letter in May directly to the President himself. Signed by more than 90 groups, rescues, and businesses, and more than 1,100 individuals, the letter called for Biden to immediately place a moratorium on the mass helicopter roundups. There has since been no response from the White House.

Visit the campaign website at www.SaveTheOnaqui.org for more details on the rally and coming

events.

Animal Wellness Action (Action) is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) organization with a mission of helping animals by promoting legal standards forbidding cruelty. We champion causes that alleviate the suffering of companion animals, farm animals, and wildlife. We advocate for policies to stop dogfighting and cockfighting and other forms of malicious cruelty and to confront factory farming and other systemic forms of animal exploitation. To prevent cruelty, we promote enacting good public policies, and we work to enforce those policies. To enact good laws, we must elect good lawmakers, and that's why we remind voters which candidates care about our issues and which ones don't. We believe helping animals helps us all.

The Center for a Humane Economy ("the Center") is a non-profit organization that focuses on influencing the conduct of corporations to forge a humane economic order. The first organization of its kind in the animal protection movement, the Center encourages businesses to honor their social responsibilities in a culture where consumers, investors, and other key stakeholders abhor cruelty and the degradation of the environment and embrace innovation as a means of eliminating both.

The Animal Wellness Foundation (Foundation) is a Los Angeles-based private charitable organization with a mission of helping animals by making veterinary care available to everyone with a pet, regardless of economic ability. We organize rescue efforts and medical services for dogs and cats in need and help homeless pets find a loving caregiver. We are advocates for getting veterinarians to the front lines of the animal welfare movement; promoting responsible pet ownership; and vaccinating animals against infectious diseases such as distemper. We also support policies that prevent animal cruelty and that alleviate suffering. We believe helping animals helps us all.

The Jason Debus Heigl Foundation, is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, founded in 2008 by Nancy and Katherine Heigl. The Heigl's' desire to end animal cruelty and abuse inspired them to create an organization dedicated to animal welfare that would celebrate the compassion, kindness and memory of a beloved son and brother. Throughout his brief lifetime, Jason loved all animals, especially dogs, cats, and monkeys, and he lived his life extending compassion and kindness to all creatures great and small. The Foundation is his legacy.

The Cloud Foundation (TCF), a 501(c)(3) non-profit, has been at the forefront of wild horse advocacy since its inception in 2005. TCF was founded by Emmy award-winning filmmaker Ginger Kathrens, creator of three acclaimed PBS Nature series documentaries that followed the wild stallion Cloud throughout the seasons of his life. Dedicated to the protection and preservation of wild horses and burros on our public lands, The Cloud Foundation advocates for protecting natural wild equid behaviors, repatriation of wild horses to zeroed-out Herd Areas, and equal allocation of forage within Congressionally-designated Herd Areas.

Red Birds Trust 501(c)(3) is a grassroots organization based in Tooele, Utah founded by local wild

horse advocates who have immersed themselves in the lives of the Onaqui here in Utah's west desert. It is our goal to help these wild horses live their best lives both on the range and after adoption. Because all board positions are filled by volunteers donating their time and energy to the cause it then allows for all donations received to go to the betterment of our wild and adopted Onaqui horses.

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