

## WILD HORSES

### Advocates drop Forest Service lawsuit

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A herd of wild horses running on public lands. Bureau of Land Management

Advocates say they're dropping a federal lawsuit against the Forest Service after Congress blocked the agency from selling wild horses removed from California's Modoc National Forest without limitations preventing their possible slaughter.

The [lawsuit](#), filed in 2018 in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, challenged a proposed sale of wild horses from the Devil's Garden Plateau Wild Horse Territory. It argued that a sale without limitations threatened the protected horses.

Congress for years has added provisions to appropriations bills that forbid the Bureau of Land Management from using euthanasia on healthy wild horses and burros and limit its ability to sell animals. The provisions, however, only covered the Interior Department; the Forest Service is an agency under the Department of Agriculture.

But appropriators last year added the Forest Service for the first time to those provisions in their fiscal 2020 Interior-EPA funding bill.

The groups in a press statement today said that they are convinced Congress will include the Forest Service in wild horse provisions in future appropriations bills, removing the need to continue litigation.

"We're pleased that our legal action blocked the Forest Service from selling federally-protected wild horses in California for slaughter and gave Congress time to act definitively to shut down this lethal option that Americans strongly oppose," said Suzanne Roy, executive director of the American Wild Horse Campaign, in a statement.

The American Wild Horse Campaign; the Animal Legal Defense Fund; and Carla Bowers, a Volcano, Calif., resident who has advocated for the protection of the Devil's Garden herd, filed the lawsuit ([E&E News PM](#), Oct. 22, 2018).

"This litigation achieved its purpose by avoiding the sale of Devil's Garden wild horses for slaughter, but also importantly set to stage for the congressional prohibition against sales of wild horses for slaughter by the Forest Service in any national forest," Stephen Wells, executive director of the Animal Legal Defense Fund, said in a statement.

The fate of the rounded-up horses at Modoc National Forest drew national attention.

A bipartisan group of 64 congressional leaders sent a [letter](#) to Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue and Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen requesting they cancel any planned sale without first ensuring the purchased animals don't end up in slaughterhouses ([Greenwire](#), May 6, 2019).

Department of Justice attorneys representing the Forest Service had maintained in court documents that the service "would never sell a horse without limitation to a buyer for the purpose of slaughter for human consumption" ([Greenwire](#), May 30, 2019).

The agency had also agreed to limit any sales until the lawsuit was resolved.

The Forest Service has said it was able to adopt almost all of the horses it removed from Modoc National Forest.

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