

Feral horses are trampling our mountains

The first explorers, squatters and stockmen came to the Snowy Mountains in the 1830s. On discovering the lush mountain pastures, they established small huts for themselves and their stockmen.

By the 1860s, homesteads were being built. By 1890 a great number of horses were to be found all over the ranges. Hay was grown for horse feed as horses were vital in stockwork, horses carried supplies and provided the power for cropping and ploughing paddocks. Horse riding was an intrinsic part of high-country living.

The feral horses, also known as brumbies are escapees and descendants of escapees from rural properties. Brumbies were viewed by many as a pest and were being chased as early as the 1870s.

From the 1920s to the 1950s brumby running and catching was a recreational activity. Feral horses were chased by horsemen who sometimes tied them to trees, never to release them. Often they were herded into small trapyards or salt yards, and being crowded into small areas, injured each other.

Later in the twentieth century, cruelty to these horses was forbidden. Since then, some have been trapped and a small number re-homed but if not culled, horses will double in number every 4 years. The 2019 population estimate in Kosciuszko National Park was 19,000 feral horses.

Feral horses must be eradicated from national parks

Horses like to be where there is moisture. Habitat damage in streams, wetlands and adjacent riparian systems occurs through selective grazing, trampling, track creation, pugging (soil compaction), wallowing, and dust bathing leading to stream bank slumping, erosion and straightening.

The sponge effect of the mosses and sphagnum bogs is being destroyed so moisture is not being retained as long, so there is less water in the creeks in summer. Water courses are being polluted so that water is non-potable.

If destruction of this kind were being perpetrated on farms, farmers would be considered absolutely negligent. The Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act 2018 was passed to protect feral horses in Kosciuszko National Park but feral animals must be eradicated from national parks.

In February 2020 it was determined that 4,000 feral horses should be removed from certain badly burnt areas. Horses are being trapped and transported for slaughter which causes much more suffering than shooting and is ineffective because it cannot keep up with the rate of increase. Horse numbers have still increased.

The RSPCA supports professionally managed aerial culling of feral horses as the most humane and effective method of control but it is not allowed by the NSW Government.

Restore our alpine environment and our pure drinking water

If feral horses were eradicated from Kosciuszko National Park right now, the habitat may be restorable in more than 70 years. Refurbishment of the alpine wetlands may save native animals like the Corroboree Frog and the Broad Toothed Rat from extinction and kangaroos numbers to be restored.

Feral horses are not protected in national parks in the ACT.

In 2016, 42 eminent scientists involved in alpine research and conservation decision making wrote the Australian Ecologists' Letter to the NSW Premier in support of effective feral horse control, including the recommendation to implement aerial culling.

We need to ensure protection of our natural environment, our farm and hydro-electric dams and especially of our drinking water.

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