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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Journalist Laura Leigh Files Emergency Appeal in United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit

On Monday, February 14, 2010, an emergency appeal was filed in the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit by journalist Laura Leigh v Ken Salazar, Secretary of the Department of the Interior; Bob Abbey, Director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM); Ron Wenker, Nevada State Director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

This latest filing respectfully petitions the 9th Circuit Court for permission to immediately appeal from the district court's inaction or refusal to rule or decide Petitioner's Amended Motion for Preliminary Injunction, which was sought some four months past, after it was filed October 1, 2010. The appeal argues that The District court's inaction or refusal to rule is in effect, a denial of the Petitioner's requested preliminary injunctive relief.

The original complaint sought Declaratory and Injunctive Relief in regard to the proposed Silver King Wild Horse roundup which the BLM euphemistically calls "gathers," that was to be conducted in Nevada in September/October 2010 by the Bureau of Land Management. An initial hearing was held in Nevada on Nov. 17, 2010. To date, there has been no word from the court on this lawsuit.

Leigh's suit champions the public's right and her own right to reasonable access to observe all aspects of the government's handling of the wild horses. This lawsuit is based 100% on violations of First Amendment rights. It directly challenges the Defendants' unconstitutional prior restraints on the Plaintiff's First Amendment rights by denying her reasonable access to wild horse roundups and related activities, to observe and report on all activities from capture, removal, processing, shipping, transportation, housing, and ultimate disposition of wild horses taken during the wild horse roundup operations. Laura Leigh is a journalist and videographer whose work on wild horse issues has garnered her international attention and the legal actions are supported by Grass Roots Horse.

"Without a free press able to operate as intended by our First Amendment Rights, our system of democracy fails. And it is failing now. This agency (BLM) is doing everything it can to impede the process of informing the public of its actions and all activities. From proof of the necessity for roundups, to responding to FOIA documents (filing a request for information through Freedom of Information Act) to actual activities on the ground, the BLM goes through tremendous gymnastics to control content of what the public knows and can see. "That's not democracy, this is something else." said Plaintiff Laura Leigh.

“As each moment passes without action by the courts we are harmed and damage is done that we can never be made whole from. There is zero accountability in this agency’s handling of America’s wild horses. From what we have been able to uncover, this secretive agency is engaged in behavior that in my opinion can only be described as a clear and consistent defrauding of the American people” said Maureen VanDerStad, executive director of Grass Roots Horse“. On Feb 12, 2011, we called for Congress to intervene and investigate this agency immediately. Even with severely limited viewing access at the current Antelope wild horse roundup, Laura Leigh captured horrifying images of abuse and cruelty to our wild horses. We need these roundups stopped, we need to know what is going on and we need the doors to the closed holding facilities opened now”.

“The access games continue,” states Leigh “since the documentation obtained here at Antelope has reached the public the ability to provide any meaningful documentation is almost non-existent.”

Grass Roots Horse is a 501(c) 3 non-profit equine welfare and mustang advocacy group that considers the big picture of what is happening on our public lands. All legal filings and press releases can be read at www.grassrootshorse.com and daily reports from roundups at <http://blog.grassrootshorse.com>