A **Mustang** is a free-roaming [horse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horse) of the [North American](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_America) west that first descended from horses brought to the [Americas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americas) by the [Spanish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spain). Mustangs are often referred to as [wild horses](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wild_horse), but there is intense debate over terminology. Because they are descended from once-domesticated horses, they can be classified as [feral horses](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feral_horse).

In 1971, the [United States Congress](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Congress) recognized Mustangs as “living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West, which continue to contribute to the diversity of life forms within the Nation and enrich the lives of the American people.”[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mustang_horse#cite_note-0) Today, Mustang herds vary in the degree to which they can be traced to original [Iberian horses](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iberian_horse). Some contain a greater genetic mixture of ranch stock and more recent breed releases, while others are relatively unchanged from the original Iberian stock, most strongly represented in the most isolated populations.

Today, the Mustang population is managed and protected by the [Bureau of Land Management](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bureau_of_Land_Management). Controversy surrounds the sharing of land and resources by the free ranging Mustangs with the [livestock](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Livestock) of the [ranching](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ranching) industry, and also with the methods with which the federal government manages the wild population numbers. An additional debate centers on the question if Mustangs—and horses in general—are a [native species](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Native_species) or an introduced[invasive species](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Invasive_species). Many methods of population management are used, including the adoption by private individuals of horses taken from the range.