

Official designation for the Florida Cracker Horse

A bill filed for next year's legislative session would designate the Florida Cracker Horse as the official state horse.

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Florida Cracker Horse

If next year's legislative session passes a bill designating the Cracker Horse as the official state horse of Florida, breed enthusiasts and conservationists will have a lot to cheer about. The bill is expected to be voted on next spring.

Currently, the Florida Cracker Horse is listed as "critical" by the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy, which means there are fewer than 200 annual registrations of these rare horses in the United States and an estimated global population of less than 2,000.

Among those rooting for the bill's passage is Florida's Agriculture Commissioner Charles Bronson. His family, as well as a handful of other conservations, is credited with the breed's survival over the last 50 years.

Bronson, who, along with his brother, is still involved with the Florida Cracker Horse, say his history with the breed goes way back. "My family has farmed this country since 1635," he says. The early Bronsons were cattlemen who relied on strong, sturdy horses for their livelihoods. "They were involved with Spanish and English horses," Bronson says.

The ancestry of the Cracker Horse can be traced back to Spanish horses brought to Florida in the 1500s. Used by early Spanish ranchers and settlers, including the Bronson family, the horses also played an important role in the life of the Seminole Indians.

How the horses got their name is interesting: Florida cowboys were nicknamed "crackers" because of the sound made by their whips cracking in the air, and the moniker transferred over to the horses they rode.

By the 1930s, Cracker Horse numbers had significantly declined as Florida ranchers turned to larger Quarter Horses for ranch work. However, over the last 30 years the breed has seen a comeback. In 1989, the Florida Cracker Horse Association was organized and a registry was established. Today, the Florida Cracker is promoted as a valuable and vital part of Florida's heritage.

Bronson says it only makes sense that the Florida Cracker Horse receives the official state designation. "The Cracker is the original bloodline horse of Florida," he says.

Florida Cracker Horse Characteristics (from the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy):

Florida Crackers are small riding horses, standing 13.2-15 hands and weighing 800-900 pounds. They have wide foreheads and finely made faces, with straight or slightly roman noses. Croups are sloped and tails are set low. While this external type is distinctive, breed proponents insist that the best way to tell a Florida Cracker horse is to ride one, with its easy, ground-covering gaits. The breed is found in many colors, with dark bay and black most common, and gray, chestnut, and various shades of dun also present. Paint and roan strains still persist, and these other colors (historically present in the breed) may yet be located in some remote corner of Florida.

For more photos and information, visit the [Florida Cracker Horse Breed Profile](#)>>