



**POKEGAMA WILD HORSE
HERD
MANAGEMENT AREA PLAN
Lakeview District
Klamath Falls Resource Area
March 2002**



RESOURCE AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Preparation of this wild horse Herd Management Area Plan (HMAP) is designed to specifically manage the wild horses populating the Pokegama Herd Management Area (HMA) herd considering multiple use values and constraints. This HMAP is designed to effectively manage the wild horse population in accordance with the wild horse regulations at Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 4700. The wild horse population will be managed as a component of the public lands in a manner that maintains or improves the rangeland ecosystems. Wild Horse management is necessary to restore the range to a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple use relationship. The HMAP adheres to the multiple-use policy specified in the Wild Free-roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971 (P.L. 92-195), Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (P.L. 94-579), and Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978, while maintaining the free-roaming behavior of the wild horses within the HMA. A wild horse herd area is defined as an area used by wild horses or burros as habitat as of 1971 when the Act was passed. An HMA is an area where the land use planning process has determined that wild horses or burros will be managed. This includes the Pokegama HMA. The appropriate number of horses for which to manage may be considered variable depending on habitat conditions and competing resource needs. Current BLM planning for the area - the June 1995 *Klamath Falls Resource Area Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan* - has acknowledged the decisions of the current laws and past plans, which specified that the Pokegama herd area will be managed as an HMA.

Within the following sections is a brief description of the Pokegama wild horse herd and the existing environment of the HMA. A more complete discussion of the existing environment can be found in the *Klamath Falls Resource Area Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan* (1995), the *Topsy/Pokegama Landscape Analysis* (1996), *Lakeview District Wild Horse Gather Environmental Assessment* (June 1995). The 1978, *Pokegama Herd Management Area Plan* was written and approved by the Medford BLM District. A revision of this plan was drafted in 1986, but was apparently never signed and approved. Thus, the 1978 plan, despite its advanced age, is still the most current. Much of the information in this plan is taken from the above plans; in particular the 1978 and 1986.

HORSE BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

The Pokegama HMA is located approximately 35 miles west of Klamath Falls, Oregon and is defined as follows: south of highway 66, east of Jenny Creek, and north and west of the Klamath River. Topography of the HMA varies from the cliffs along Klamath Canyon to high plateau of 3,800 feet and mountains to 5,000 feet.

Local residents of the Pokegama area recall seeing bands of wild horses in the area since the early 1900s. The horse population is believed to have originated from one buckskin Quarter Horse stallion and approximately seven buckskin mares that a local rancher permitted to run loose on the range, a very common occurrence in the days prior to the 1934 Taylor Grazing Act. It was also a relatively common occurrence in many areas, up until the 1971 Act, for local ranchers to manage the wild horse herd in order to remove occasional horses for working ranch stock or for market. The Pokegama herd has apparently always been relatively small and continues to use the same general historic area.

Adult horses in the HMA weigh an average of approximately 1,000 pounds and are around 15 hands high. The conformation of most of the horses is still reasonably good, i.e. decent sized, straight heads (not “jug headed”), with other desirable Quarter Horse traits. Horses vary in color though dominated by bays, buckskins, and blacks. In general, the breeding season is from mid February to May. Thus, the majority of the colts are born from late February to May, with April being the peak month, though the horses can foal in any month.

Current (2002) estimates of the herd size are in the 30 to 40 head range. In 1972, 25 horses were counted during BLM’s first inventory. Since then, the herd has been inventoried frequently with the counts ranging from 25, to a high of 55 in 2000. Actual horse numbers were probably 25-50% higher than the actual counts due to the difficulty of counting animals on a forested landscape. The following is a list of wild horse counts/population estimates made since the 1971 Act. These are based only on ground counts prior to 1995; a combination of aerial and ground since then:

<u>YEAR</u>	<u># of HORSES</u>	<u>YEAR</u>	<u># of HORSES</u>
1972	25 horses	1995	55 horses
1973	25 horses	1996	55 horses (Removal of 20 horses)
1977	30 horses	1997	40 horses
1978	35 horses	1998	50 horses
1985	41 horses	1999	55 horses
1992	55 horses	2000	55 horses (Removal of 18 horses)
1993	50 horses	2001	35 horses
1994	50 horses	2002	30 horses

The average yearly increase in the Pokegama horse herd over this period is only 4 to 5 percent. This is extremely low by wild horse productivity standards elsewhere, which generally average approximately 22 percent. It has been long rumored - and entirely possible - that young horses have been periodically (and illegally) removed over the last 25 years. There is also a high possibility of mountain lions killing the young foals during the winter. During this time of year, large numbers of deer winter in the area attracting a proportionately high number of lions. From observations during recent field seasons in the Pokegama area, 4 to 5 young foals have been observed during the late fall. The following spring these young horses have not been observed by helicopter or ground checks, indicating a high possibility of mountain lions killing these colts during the winter. This would help to explain the low increase in herd size. The Pokegama HMA’s Appropriate Management Level (AML) is 30 to 50 head. Every late winter/early spring since 1995 the BLM along with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) have done a

horse/elk census via a helicopter, these numbers are estimates because of the difficulty in “counting” horses due to the tree coverage in the Pokegama area.

In 1996, the actual wild horse numbers were found to exceed 50 head and resulted in the first ever government removal of horses from this HMA. During the late spring, summer, and early fall of 1996, 20 horses were removed from the HMA via a bait trapping method. In 2000, the horses were found to again be above the AML maximum of 50 head. Because of this, 18 more horses were removed, using the same trapping method, during May and June of 2000. All of these



horses were captured north of Highway 66 - outside of the designated Herd Area. All of the captured horses were taken to the Burns, Oregon wild horse facility where they are made available for public adoption as required under the wild horse regulations.

WILD HORSE HABITAT

According to the 1978 HMAP, the Pokegama HMA, including both California and Oregon, is 91 percent privately owned lands. The 1978 land ownership/administration pattern was broken down as follows: Private - 132,030 acres, BLM - 12,090 acres, USFS - 760 acres, and State (OR) - 80 acres: Total 144,960 acres. However, the 1986 plan revision significantly revamped the acreage amounts, coming up with a total of 80,885 acres within the HMA - 79% of which is privately owned. The 1986 figures appear more accurate and are as follows:

<u>Ownership/Administration</u>	<u>OR acres (%)</u>	<u>CA. Acres (%)</u>	<u>Total acres</u>
O&C	11,980		11,980
PD	3,795	710	4,505
Total BLM	15,775 (23%)	710 (5%)	16,485 (20%)
Klamath County	20	--	20
State (Oregon)	80	--	80
Klamath National Forest	--	740	840
Total Other Public	100 (<1%)	740 (6%)	840 (1%)
U.S. Timber	48,187	825	49,012
Other Private	3,807	10,741	14,548
<u>Total Private</u>	<u>51,994 (77%)</u>	<u>11,566 (89%)</u>	<u>63,560 (79%)</u>
TOTAL HMA ACRES	67,869	13,016	80,885

For decades, the major land owner within the HMA was the Weyerhaeuser Company. However, in the fall of 1996 they sold all of their local lands to U.S. Timberlands Company (UST). Both companies have generally allowed the presence of wild horses on these lands providing the horses are within the established AML and do not range outside of the HMA. However, if UST were to formally request the BLM to remove all wild horses from their lands, the BLM may be obligated to remove most, if not all, of the horses from the HMA, as per 43 Code of Federal Regulations 4720.2-1. This regulation states in part that “*Upon written request from the private landowner to...the Bureau of Land Management, the authorized officer shall*

remove stray wild horses from private lands as soon as practical...” . Since the horses are known to spend at least 80-90% of their time on private lands, all of the horses would have to be removed if requested, in order to ensure that the BLM fulfills its regulatory requirement.

The HMA lies within the area encompassing the Pokegama Cooperative Habitat Improvement Project. The project cooperative group includes federal and state agencies, interested user groups, and land owners - including UST. The purpose of the project group is to cooperatively address and find solutions for the resource problems in the area. The April 18, 1991 “Memorandum of Understanding”, prepared and signed off by the major members of the group, has as an objective to “*Maintain a wild horse population in the Pokegama Herd use area.*” It is important to keep the horse herd within the AML for resource related reasons and because of the KFRA’s participation as part of the Pokegama group. The Pokegama group allows for a multi-resource approach as well as encourages a cooperative spirit towards accommodating the horses in an area of competing resource demands. Periodically since 1979, the BLM has received letters and input from Weyerhaeuser and now UST, the local office of the ODFW, and other land owners requesting, encouraging, and/or supporting the reduction of wild horse numbers down to the lower end of the AML. These requests along with resource concerns prompted the completion of an environmental assessment (EA) in 1995 to allow for the removal of Pokegama horses. A decision record was issued on this EA which became final without appeal. As noted previously, horses were removed in 1996 and 2000.

FORAGE

Food directly relates to the vegetation since horses are herbivores. Horses are the most selective of grazers, primarily eating grasses and grass-like species and largely avoiding other plant classes. Horses do, however, have an ability to utilize coarse grass unsurpassed by any other kind of stock. Both cattle and elk also have high dietary overlap with each other and with horses. The overlap is not often perceived as a problem where range conditions are good or the intensity of cattle and horse use is low. There may be problems, however, where forage availability is limited, as on winter ranges or on sites with cattle/horse/elk concentrations, such as riparian areas. Dietary overlap between deer and horses during any season is very low.

Between January of 1979 and February of 1981, the BLM contracted for the periodic microhistological analysis of fecal material collected from within the HMA (for horses) and in the general geographical area for deer, elk, and cattle (BLM 1982). This Pokegama herd specific information confirms that the horses’ diet is predominately made up of grasses with minor supplemental additions of forbs and trees on occasion. Highly preferential use of grasses is consistent throughout the year. The following table summarizes this information.

	<u>Winter</u>	<u>Spring</u>	<u>Summer</u>	<u>Fall</u>
Grasses	88%	95.5%	95.0%	95.5%
Shrubs	0%	1.0%	0.4%	0.0%
Forbs	8%	1.8%	3.0%	2.0%
Trees	5%	2.0%	2.0%	2.5%

*Some columns do not total 100% due to rounding.

The complete file of microhistological analysis information is available and found within the wild horse files in the KFRA office. This information shows that needlegrasses (*Stipa* spp.), fescues (*Festuca* spp.), Brome grasses (*Bromus* spp.) - both annual and perennial, bluegrasses (*Poa* spp.), muhly (*Muhlenbergia* spp.), oatgrass (*Danthonia* spp.), wildrye (*Elymus* spp.), medusahead wildrye (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*), and rushes (both *Juncus* and *Eleocharis*) makeup the vast majority of the grass component of their diet. Medusahead is relatively abundant in the diet during the spring and early summer when it is most abundant and relatively palatable (for a largely unpalatable species). This is consistent with the observations that horses have the ability to utilize very coarse grass species. Also consistent with this is the fact that the horses consume the same high percentages of grass in the winter, when all grasses are at their most coarse and fibrous, as in the spring summer when grasses are the most palatable.

Also of interest is the relative abundance of rushes (particularly *Eleocharis*), sedges, and other meadow/riparian species during the summer and fall. This is consistent with past and recent observations of the horses during that time of year making extensive use of meadow and riparian areas. Due to the presence of the horses year-round in the Pokegama area, they are believed to have at least as much - and probably more - impact to meadow/riparian areas than do the current levels of cattle and elk grazing.

The minor though consistent grazing use of tree species by the horses is of some interest in the area since the WEYCO/UST lands have been and continue to be managed primarily for timber production. The horses in the HMA have some taste for pine (*Pinus* spp.) throughout the year, but especially in the fall. However, the average pine component in their diet was only about 2% and never exceeded 6% during the study period. It is possible the horses were eating small, tender branches off young or seedling trees - perhaps in tree plantation areas. Other tree types occasionally sampled included Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga* spp.), oak (*Quercus* spp.), and juniper (*Juniperus* spp.).

Since U.S. Timberland purchased the Weyerhaeuser lands in 1996, aggressive harvesting has been occurring within the HMA. The primary target species are Ponderosa Pine, Douglas Fir, White Fir, and Incense Cedar. These harvest activities have changed the landscape of the HMA so that it is now much more open with a significantly increased potential for herbaceous forage. This is good for the wild horses until the forest canopy closes back in reducing the forage levels.

COVER

Horses are traditionally seen grazing on the fringe of the tree line or in open meadows. The dense timber within the HMA allows the horses to have shelter in adverse weather conditions and provides covered areas where the mares will foal. These conditions make it difficult to get an accurate count of the herd. During the spring and summer the horses are seen in the north and middle portions of the HMA. They move south later in the fall and stay there into the winter months. The Pokegama herd is not typically "spooked" by people as it is not uncommon to walk or drive within 30 yards of the animals before they turn and walk away.

In 1992, the BLM hired a seasonal employee (Sari Gottlieb) to observe the Pokegama horses and their habitat during the late spring, summer, and early fall. This resulted in a 1993 report entitled "*Habitat Utilization and Population Characteristics of the Pokegama Wild Horse*

Herd". During Gottlieb's survey of the Pokegama HMA, she found the horses had decided preferences for certain areas in the summer. The following is extracted from her report:

"Utilization of shelter by wild horses was investigated by recording the habitat type that horses were observed in. Horses were found in meadows/open areas; in meadows under a lone tree; in the tree cover on the edge of meadows; and on a dirt road a quarter mile from a meadow. Horses were not located in thick tree cover, presumably due to diminished visibility inherent in that habitat type. Thirty-three percent of the sightings occurred in meadows/open areas, 11 percent were under lone trees in meadows, 50 percent were found in tree cover on the edge of meadows, and one sighting (6 percent) took place on a dirt road.

"Concerning meadow use, 44 percent of the horses were sighted in meadows, 50 percent utilized the tree cover on the edge of meadows.....Wild horses showed a preference for meadow and open areas, remaining in or on the edge of this habitat type. Sixty-one percent of the horses sighted were under trees, suggesting that shade supplied by tree cover is important for shelter during hot, sunny summer days."

Wild horse winter use has been observed to follow a similar trend - that the horses gravitate towards more open (non or less tree covered) areas since these areas always have a more abundant grass component to the vegetation community. Also, the open areas receive more sunlight which melts the snow off much quicker than under the forest canopy, making the forage accessible. Due to the typically high winter snow accumulations present on the higher (central and northern) portions of the HMA, the horses concentrate in the south end of the area from December through March. These areas include around Wild Gal Spring, Grizzly Flat, Edge Creek, and east to Hayden Creek as well as south in the portion of the HMA that lies in California north of Copco Lake and the Klamath River. During periods of heavy snow most of the horses will move down into Klamath Canyon. The amount of winter snow and forage are the main factors in determining winter use areas. These winter areas include more non-meadow open areas - scabland flats and shrub dominated vegetation types - than the HMA lands to the north. In summary, cover is not a limiting factor for the Pokegama Herd

WATER

As with many wildlife species in relatively arid areas, the availability and location of water is critical to the survival and habitat utilization of the herd. The following is from Gottlieb's (1993) report on the Pokegama Herd:

"Location of drinking water appeared to be an important factor in habitat selection of wild horses in the Pokegama herd. Eighty-seven percent of all sightings occurred within a half mile of a water source. 70 percent were within a quarter mile, and 35 percent of the bands were observed at a water hole. Average distance to water was 0.28 miles".

"Wild Horses are found to concentrate near water sources during hot, dry summer months but wander farther during cooler weather...Horses were observed to remain within 3 to 7 miles of a water source during very hot weather. In the (Pokegama HMA), it would be difficult for the horses to be further than 5 miles from any water source due to

the size of the area, and the fact that it is bisected by a permanent creek and includes scattered springs...Remaining close to water sources during the dry summer would enable the wild horses to conserve energy because they would not have to travel far for water. Water is also an important factor for plants, therefore plant species edible to horses may be located near water.”

The primary water sources for the Pokegama herd are Wild Gal Spring, Edge Creek, Hayden Creek, Long Prairie Creek, and Jenny Creek as well as several dozen catchment ponds, reservoirs, and springs. Generally speaking, water is not a limiting habitat factor for the Pokegama HMA, although the majority of the water sources are on private lands. Livestock, elk, and horses are known to congregate along these water areas and do cause excessive trampling on the riparian stream banks. To protect the riparian areas surrounding portions of Wild Gal and Hayden Creek, exclosures were built to protect them in the 1980's. In 2001 a portion of Long Prairie was fenced by UST.

LIVESTOCK GRAZING USE

The Pokegama HMA includes two grazing allotments - Edge Creek and Dixie. They are addressed separately in the following narrative:

Edge Creek Allotment (#0102)

The Edge Creek allotment makes up the eastern ½ of the HMA and includes approximately 38,260 acres of which approximately 8,860 are public land administered by the BLM. The remaining approximately 29,400 acres of private land are owned by UST (approximately 27,900 acres), PacifiCorp (approximately 760 acres), and other landowners (total of approximately 740 acres). The Edge Creek allotment extends from Highway 66 on the north to the Klamath River on the east and southeast, the California-Oregon border on the south, and to the vicinity of Long Prairie Creek on the west.

In 1966 the BLM, the Oregon State Game Commission (currently the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), and Weyerhaeuser began work on seeding and fencing projects to benefit the deer herd in the Pokegama deer winter range. The fencing projects were designed to protect deer winter range from late season use by livestock. The fencing projects resulted in the creation of three separate pastures in the Edge Creek allotment. These pastures were designated the North, Ward, and Edge Creek pastures. The North Pasture is the largest of the three pastures (approximately 29,000 acres) and includes mainly UST lands with some BLM-administered land (approximately 4,000 acres) in the south end of the pasture. The Ward pasture (approximately 5,000 acres) is located along the north side of the Klamath River and includes BLM, PacifiCorp, and smaller private lands within the Klamath River canyon and about 4 sections of BLM-administered land above the canyon. The Edge Creek pasture (approximately 3,500 acres) lies to the west of the Klamath River canyon and contains mainly UST and BLM-administered lands. The livestock grazing was reduced considerably by Weyerhaeuser (and continued by UST) in early 1995. The following summarizes the livestock use up to the beginning of non-use in 1995. (Figures include public and private lands. The season-of-use was generally May into October.)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>CATTLE NUMBERS</u>	<u>AUM'S</u>
1989	362 head	1,914
1990	362 head	1,920
1991	378 head	1,913
1992	378 head	1,913
1993	218 head	990
1994	64 head	324
1995 thru 2000	NON USE	---

In 2001, UST again leased their private lands for grazing use and their grazing lessee applied for and was granted the related BLM grazing lease. The total authorized grazing use for public and private lands combined was for approximately 450 head with a grazing season of May 1st through September 15th. The BLM portion of this use was minimal and based on the proportion of BLM lands in the area, i.e. approximately 15% of the total use (207 AUMs). At least 85% of the actual grazing use occurs on the private lands, as they are much more open than BLM administered lands, with commensurately higher forage levels. UST lands include virtually all of the natural open meadow areas favored by cattle, elk, and horses. The current grazing leases (public and private) are valid through the 2004 grazing year. Livestock grazing use after 2004 is unknown at this time but likely to continue.

Horses have been observed in all 3 of the pastures within the Edge Creek allotment. It has been noted in the Edge Creek files that horses compete for the same types of forage that elk and cattle eat.

Dixie Allotment (#0107)

The Dixie allotment makes up the western half of the HMA and includes approximately 27,807 acres of which 5,547 are public lands. This allotment is divided between the Medford and Lakeview Districts, the BLM land is administered by the Klamath Falls Resource area. Of the public lands within this allotment, approximately 60% are within the Medford District and 40% in the Klamath Falls Resource Area. Horses travel back and forth between these boundaries, with the west portion of the HMA being in Jackson County.

The Dixie allotment is currently divided into two separate pastures - the predominantly BLM south end and overwhelmingly UST on the north half. These two portions were divided with a discontinuous drift fence just north of the BLM's Dixie enclosure (built 5/95 by Weyco). In late 2000/early 2001 the division fence was made more continuous and functional - including extension from Grizzly Mountain west to Jenny Creek (all of UST). Weyerhaeuser and UST did not lease their lands for grazing from 1995 - 2000, but resumed leasing in 2001 (see Edge Creek discussion). The BLM lessee in Dixie and the UST lessee are different operators. The BLM lessee is supposed to stay south of the division fence; the UST lessee to the north.

On the south end of the Dixie Allotment, Long Prairie Creek is a popular area where the horses are commonly seen.

California Lands

The lands in the California portion of the HMA (13,016) are essentially all private and grazed by various land owners or lessees. The only significant BLM land is a very small (480 acres)

grazing allotment known as the Hopkins Lease which is administered by the Redding BLM Field Office, though licensed for grazing by the KFRA. This allotment is grazed in common with much larger parcels of private land. The Pokegama horses can be found on the California lands at any time of the year, though they favor it most in the winter and early spring.

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES/ACTIONS

1. ANIMALS

- a.** Manage wild horses in the Pokegama herd unit to maintain a viable herd of approximately forty healthy animals - the mid-point of the determined AML range of 30 - 50 head.
- b.** Initiate a control (removal) program on an as needed basis to maintain horse numbers at the AML of 30-50 head. Once the horse numbers exceed 50 animals, the BLM would remove horses via bait trapping. Horses may also be removed, as needed, upon private land owner request to eliminate nuisance animals - typically lone studs annoying privately owned mares. All gathered animals will be transported to Burns, Oregon where they will be placed into the Bureau's adoption program.
- c.** Collect age and sex ratio data to determine population dynamics of this herd. This information is necessary to make a population and age structure analysis which will guide future management decisions.
- d.** Do an aerial census via helicopter in late February to early March. Coordinate with ODFW and other BLM specialists to perform elk and horse counts during the same flight.
- e.** Introduce 2 buckskin horses from another Oregon herd area into the Pokegama HMA to add "new blood" to maintain viable herd genetic diversity. The first introduction will be tentatively scheduled for Fall of 2002. This could also be done periodically in the future, i.e. once every 5-10 years.

2. HABITAT

- a.** Continue to maintain the existing reservoirs and springs in the HMA which provide season long water for wild horses.
- b.** Maintain or improve riparian/aquatic habitat in good or better habitat condition. This includes the periodic repair and maintenance of the fences around the important riparian areas.
- c.** Continue informally monitoring yearly forage production and reading the formal range monitoring studies according to the KFRA Rangeland Monitoring Plan.

- d. Manage wild horse grazing levels on public lands to ensure a thriving natural ecological balance and prevent deterioration of the range.
- e. All grazing management (livestock and wild horses) should reflect the importance of deer winter range conditions and the potential for forage competition with the expanding elk population.
- f. Work with UST & Pokegama cooperative habitat improvement group to facilitate habitat improvements.

SIGNATURES

/s/ Tonya Pinckney

4-1-02

Tonya Pinckney, Range Technician & Preparer

Date

/s/ Barbara Ditman

4-4-02

Barbara Ditman, Supv. Natural Resource Specialist

Date

/s/ Teri Raml

6-5-02

Teri Raml, Klamath Falls R.A. Field Manager

Date

