

- Palouse Prairie habitats around Horn Butte provide some of the only habitat for Washington ground squirrel in Oregon.
- Lewis' Woodpecker habitat on the North Fork of the John Day
- Wintering bald eagle habitats on the North Fork of the John Day

## WILD HORSES

The only wild horses in the planning area are located in the Murderer's Creek Herd Management Area. The herd management area spans 108,568 acres and is managed under the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 that mandates that these horses be managed in a thriving ecological balance with the land and as part of the natural landscape. The Bear Valley Ranger District of the Malheur National forest has primary responsibility for managing this herd and annually inventories the Murders Creek wild horse population with a ground census. The Appropriate Management Level (AML) for this herd management area ranges between 50-140 wild horses. The wild horse herd averages about 100 head.

The lineage of the Murderer's Creek horses is diverse. Part of the lineage of horses found in the area by early explorers can be linked to animals that escaped from Indian herds assembled from horses escaped from or released by Spanish Conquistadors. It is also likely that many of the Murderer's Creek horses are descendants of animals lost or turned loose by settlers and ranchers.

## HERD MANAGEMENT

Wild horse herds increase at a rate of 18% per year, so their populations, without controls, double about every 4 to 5 years. Wild horses have few natural predators, except for humans and mountain lions. Prior to the enactment of the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971, wild horses were not federally protected species. Herd numbers were controlled by ranchers and by mustangers who hunted the horses or gathered them for sale. After the Act, the population control has been by mountain lions and the managing agencies, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management.

Mountain lions do an adequate job of controlling wild horse numbers in only a few locations. The size of most herds must be controlled by the managing agencies in order to protect the land from overgrazing and to protect the horses from eventual starvation due to overgrazing. It is for the health of the land and the health of the animals that "excess" wild horses are removed from their territories.

## VISUAL RESOURCES

The variety of landscapes across the John Day basin provides a visual smorgasbord for residents and visitors. The 13 subcoregions within the planning area provide scenery that ranges from broad vistas of rolling grassland to rugged canyons to mountain peaks flanked by forests. While much of the area appears to be relatively undisturbed, logging, grazing, fire suppression, road building, mineral extraction, and the creation of infrastructure such as roads and utilities have left an imprint on the land and on the overall scenic quality within