

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT OR-10-08
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BLM Director Seeks Input for New Direction in National Wild Horse and Burro Program

Bureau of Land Management Director Bob Abbey today announced that the agency is taking the Federal Wild Horse and Burro Program in an unprecedented new direction, and is seeking in-depth public comment on a Strategy Development Document implementing Secretary Ken Salazar's Wild Horse and Burro Initiative

"It's a new day, and we need a fresh look at the Wild Horse and Burro Program," Abbey said. "As part of this effort, we want all those with an interest in wild horses and burros and their public lands to consider our initial ideas and offer their own." The BLM will consider the public's input as it prepares a long-term strategy for the management of America's wild horses and burros. The BLM's strategy will be presented in a detailed report to Congress later this year.

"When Secretary Salazar announced his Wild Horse and Burro Initiative last October, we contacted the independent and impartial U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution. We asked them to take a detailed look at how the BLM could best engage the public in creating a new strategic plan for the program," Abbey said. "We requested the Institute's assistance with this effort for two reasons: to let people know that we are committed to working with all stakeholders in a transparent manner, and to encourage an open, positive dialogue with the public."

The Institute partnered with the BLM in preparing a detailed assessment and plan for public outreach and engagement around a new strategy for the program. The BLM used the Institute's report to develop its Wild Horse and Burro Strategy Development Document. Both documents are available on the BLM's web site at (www.blm.gov).

Abbey said that as part of its new strategy, certain topics and options will be off the table, including the euthanasia of healthy excess animals or their sale without limitation to protect the animals from slaughter. He said other difficult topics and even some controversial options will be up for discussion. Among them: implementation of a comprehensive animal welfare program; the potential reintroduction of wild horses or burros into herd areas where they currently don't exist; increased use of fertility control or other methods to slow population growth; opportunities to make more forage available for wild horses and burro use; the establishment of preserves to care for unadopted wild horses; the designation of selected wild horses and burros as treasured herds; opportunities to place more excess animals into private care; and continued emphasis on science and research to ensure the BLM is using the best available science to manage our wild horse and burro herds now and in the future.

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Abbey clarified that the BLM will move forward with scheduled gathers in the near term. “These gather operations are being carefully analyzed, engaging the public in the planning process. Abbey added, “Based on the best information the BLM currently has, without these gathers the land will suffer, wildlife will suffer, and ultimately, the horses will suffer. While these gathers are necessary in 2010, the BLM will simultaneously be listening to and working with those offering other constructive options to fulfilling our mandates.”

To gather feedback, the Strategy Development Document outlines specific areas where the BLM is seeking public input over a 60-day comment period. To ensure input from the broadest number of stakeholders, the BLM is using *ePlanning*. To access the document and provide the BLM with feedback, follow the link provided at www.blm.gov. A pdf copy of the document is also available by clicking on that link.

The BLM estimates that nearly 38,000 wild horses and burros roam BLM-managed rangelands in 10 Western states. Another 35,000 wild horses and burros are fed and cared for at short-term corrals and long-term pastures. Costs for the program, particularly those for animals in holding facilities, have risen dramatically in the last several years. In fiscal year 2009, for example, approximately \$29 million, or about 70 percent of the total wild horse and burro program budget of \$40.6 million, was spent on animals held in corrals and pastures.

About the BLM: The BLM manages more land – 253 million surface acres – than any other Federal agency. This land, known as the National System of Public Lands, is primarily located in 12 Western States, including Alaska. The Bureau, with a budget of about \$1 billion, also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM’s multiple-use mission is to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Bureau accomplishes this by managing such activities as outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, mineral development, and energy production, and by conserving natural, historical, cultural, and other resources on public lands.

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