

WILD HORSE AND BURRO PROGRAM

PURPOSE OF THE BRIEFING DOCUMENT:

The primary goals of the BLM-Montana Wild Horse and Burro Program are to manage wild horses in the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range (PMWHR); conduct adoptions of excess wild horses from the PMWHR; and support the national program by adopting out wild horses originating from other states.

ISSUES:

The Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971, as amended, mandates the BLM and Forest Service to manage wild horses and burros in a manner that achieves and maintains a “thriving natural ecological balance on public lands while maintaining multiple use relationship in that area.” It also directs the BLM to remove excess animals and place them with qualified adopters. Subsequently, the BLM is responsible for compliance inspections ensuring the humane treatment of adopted animals and the titling of animals into private ownership.

Montana’s only free-roaming wild horses are in the Pryor Mountains, about 60 miles south of Billings. These animals are reputed to be of Spanish ancestry. Although portions of the PMWHR were established through a Secretarial order in 1968 and 1969, the Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971 superseded that direction. The Pryor Mountain Herd Management Area Plan, written in 1984 and revised in 1992, guides management of the range.

The Pryor Mountain Herd Management Area Plan (HMAP) was issued on May 22, 2009, involving a partnership among the Forest Service, National Park Service, and BLM. The HMAP takes a balanced approach to wild horse management while recognizing each agency’s authority in wild horse management. The HMAP is designed to preserve Spanish characteristics, increase genetic diversity, and balance the wild horse population with the resources. The plan has numerous water projects, weed control, riparian protections and other improvements in order to protect resources and work towards increasing the AML. The HMAP is currently under appeal.

A gather was conducted September 3-8 on the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range and adjacent lands. A total of 57 wild horses were removed and 42 mares treated with PZP 22.

An adoption of excess horses from the PMWHR and adjacent lands was conducted Sept. 26 at the Britton Springs Administrative Site at the base of the Pryors on the Montana/Wyoming state line. A total of 52 wild horses were adopted and five older horses were direct sale.

Excess wild horses from other states are adopted out through annual events held throughout the region. Since 1984, more than 15,000 wild horses have been placed with qualified adopters in Montana/Dakotas.

MAIN DECISION OR MESSAGE:

The BLM strives to manage the PMWHR primarily for the benefit of wild horses while maintaining a thriving natural ecological balance and preserving multiple use relationships.

Effort is being made to hold more adoptions to support placement of excess wild horses from other states with good adopters. Montana personnel will be called upon more often by the national office to support strategic wild horse goals throughout the BLM.

BUREAU PERSPECTIVE:

Wild horse issues attract national and international attention. Local and national interest groups often are very passionate and highly involved with issues surrounding the Pryor Mountain wild horses. Some groups are interested in minimizing any human management while others are primarily concerned with the humane treatment of the horses, the economics of the horse program, or the environmental impacts wild horses have on the range. The Pryor Mountain Mustang Center provides local support. Success of the wild horse and burro program is highly dependent upon partnerships and volunteer efforts with interest groups and other federal and state agencies.

CONTACT:

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