

Questions and Answers about the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Herd Gather

Why is the BLM gathering the Pryor herd?

The gather is necessary to achieve a thriving natural ecological balance on the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range (PMWHR) over the next several years. In addition, some wild horses are now permanently residing outside the PMWHR. Vegetation monitoring data shows the 38,000-acre PMWHR does not have the capacity to sustain the current wild horse population over the long-term on healthy rangelands. We've been hearing statements that the range is in excellent shape. This is simply not true. Several studies over the past few years show that parts of the range are in very poor condition. These range studies were comprehensive and quantified. The higher and lower elevations of the range are suffering resource damage. Use of the middle part of the range is limited due to few water sources. The BLM is prohibited from allowing a "deterioration of the range associated with an over-population" (Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971). In our 2009 herd area management plan (HMAP), we proposed to develop some mid-range water which would achieve a more even use of the range. However, the 2009 HMAP is being appealed and so cannot yet be implemented.

What is the current population of the herd?

The current population is approximately 190 (not counting this year's foals). The appropriate management level (AML) of the range (determined in 1992) is 85-105 horses. The 2009 HMAP sets the AML at 90-120. We will be removing enough horses to achieve the 120-head level. The AML is based upon the carrying capacity of the land while preserving multiple use relationships. Currently about 65% of the horses are mares. We want that percentage to be closer to 50%. We plan to remove about 20 males and 50 females from the range.

How do you gather the horses?

We will use a helicopter and wranglers on horseback to drive the horses to traps (corrals or pens). Helicopter drive trapping was also used in 1997, 2001, and 2003. Horses that are not trapped at Britton Springs will be transported there in horse trailers for sorting.

What will happen to the horses once you gather them?

We will try to gather all of the horses on the range and then release 120 of them back to the range. As we do so, we will even the gender ratio. Mares returned to the range which have previously foaled will be treated with a contraceptive vaccine. We will try to keep bands together when the horses are released.

What happens to the horses that don't go back to the range?

These horses will be offered for adoption to qualified adopters on September 26 at the Britton Springs corrals. Before the adoption, the horses will be examined by veterinarians, freeze-branded, and vaccinated. Adoption-eligible horses will go through the oral competitive bid process; sale-eligible horses (over 10 years old) will go through the sale authority process (oral competitive bid for one round then first come-first serve). Any horses not adopted or sold will be transported to the BLM's Elm Creek, Nebraska, holding facility where they will be rested before being sent to another adoption event or to long-term holding, as appropriate.

Will the removal affect the genetic viability of the herd?

Genetic testing/research done between 1991-2001 show that the “current levels of genetic diversity within the Pryor Mountain herd are relatively high for a wild horse population, are well above the mean for domestic breeds, and have been steady during the period of the studies.” These results occurred after several years of gathers on the range. Approximately 600 wild horses have been removed from the PHWHR since 1968.

Why don't you just add more land to the range so it can support more horses?

Wild horses can only be managed on areas of public lands where they were known to exist in 1971, at the time of the passage of the Act.

Where did the Pryor horses come from?

The origin of the Pryor horses is not definitely known. A researcher recently concluded that the horses are descendants of New World “Spanish” breeds and related to European “Spanish” breeds. The horses carry no genetic markers that other horse breeds don't carry.

How can I adopt one of the horses.

Contact Nancy Bjelland in the Billings Field Office at 406-896-5222 for information on how to adopt or visit

http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/wild_horse_and_burro/What_We_Do/wild_horse_and_burro_0.html. We are tentatively planning to have a wild horse training demonstration at Britton Springs on September 25. Wild horse advocacy groups, the BLM, and the Humane Society of the United States have designated September 26 as National Wild Horse Adoption Day. The goal is to have 1,000 wild horses adopted on that day. Nationwide, 2,800 animals have been adopted in FY09.