KEARNS & WEST

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Background

In a letter to Senator Harry Reid dated October 7, 2009, Interior Secretary Salazar outlined a set of challenges facing the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program ["Program"] and offered proposals to put the Program on a more sustainable track, enhance conservation, and provide better value for taxpayers. This Initiative is, in part, a response to a 2008 GAO report, as well as to recent actions by Congress.

A BLM Subcommittee of its Associate State Directors' Field Committee co-chaired by Mike Mottice and Ruth Welch is overseeing the work of a Strategy Implementation Team, or SIT, organized into five smaller teams: Adoptions, Treasured Herds, Preserves, Sustainable Herds, and Communications. The SIT is charged with developing a written Strategy for the Initiative. The Strategy will be part of a report to Congress presently scheduled for delivery by late September 2010.

The U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution ("Institute") is assisting BLM in assessing stakeholder interests and developing an effective stakeholder engagement plan for the Strategy. J. Michael Harty, of Kearns & West (K&W), is under contract to the Institute for this effort. K&W has conducted extensive interviews inside BLM, with external stakeholders, and with some former BLM personnel as part of an assessment. The range of external stakeholders was intended to reflect key interests and perspectives involving wild horses and burros and public lands. K&W also worked with the SIT and FC Subcommittee during a two-day meeting in Reno in early March as part of the assessment and to develop a preliminary approach for public engagement (Fig. 1) prior to preparation of this plan. Under this approach:

- A draft Strategy document will be developed through multiple iterations
- The draft Strategy document will be a vehicle for public engagement through posting on the BLM web site
- BLM will conduct direct outreach to stakeholders
- The anticipated timeframe for short-term public engagement on the draft Strategy is approximately 60 days from its release.

Assessment Themes for Public Engagement

This plan describes themes developed through the assessment phase that should be considered in designing a public engagement plan for the Strategy. The following is a summary of some key themes:

- **There is broad agreement within and outside BLM that the Program is not sustainable, but views about a more sustainable path reflect important differences in values and objectives.**
- **Realistic expectations for public consensus about the elements of a sustainable Program will reflect history and basic values differences, but should not ignore the potential for improved relationships and new partnerships.**
- **Effective, sustained BLM leadership and significant resources are essential to support meaningful change toward a sustainable Program.**
- **A report on the Program prepared by the National Research Council (NRC) in the early 1980s provides relevant perspectives on data gaps, the role of social factors in decision making, the persistence of conflict over values, and research priorities.**
- **BLM's on-range management philosophy of gathering excess animals to achieve AML has supporters, but a different philosophy that assumes wild horse herd populations will self-regulate has been advocated by some wild horse advocacy organizations for many years.**
- **BLM's approaches to estimating herd populations and setting AML have changed gradually to improve reliability and consistency but are still subject to external questions.**
- **Concerns about the credibility and reliability of the BLM as a potential partner have the potential to affect partnerships for the Initiative.**
- **The Wild Horse & Burro Advisory Board faces challenges as a forum for public engagement.**
- **There is a narrow time window for short-term public engagement driven by the schedule for reporting to Congress. BLM should carefully evaluate tradeoffs involving its schedule and the importance of effective public engagement.**

Approaches and Recommendations for Public Engagement

Public engagement begins with the goal of informing about a decision or choice. Additional goals depend on the level of impact that the public can have on a decision. For the Initiative BLM should address the following:

- **What is the nature of each decision or choice facing BLM for which it seeks to engage the public?**
- **What is the *extent of policy flexibility associated with each decision or choice in the Initiative and draft Strategy?***
- **What are the most appropriate goals for pubic engagement given the decisions and corresponding flexibility: inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower (reflecting increasing levels of impact)?**
- **What actions are best suited to achieving those goals?**
- **What is the time frame for public engagement?**

Public engagement for the Initiative should have an initial, short-term phase that fits the schedule for preparing the draft Strategy and report to Congress. *Informing* the public is the first goal for public engagement in the short-term. Principal actions to achieve this goal are:

- **Post the draft Strategy on the BLM web page**
- **Organize and conduct strategic briefings with potential partners and key stakeholders, both in DC and in key states**

Actions for this initial public engagement goal do not carry any feedback commitment from BLM to stakeholders or the broader public and may be subject to criticism. BLM may decide to increase public impact on its decision by *involving* and even *consulting*; each step involves greater commitments by BLM to demonstrate how input shapes the Strategy. One example would be to conduct a workshop on the draft Strategy as part of a meeting of the Advisory Board.

This plan also identifies potential long-term public engagement actions: requesting a NRC committee review; an overhaul of Advisory Board membership and procedures; engaging with external partners including individuals with resources who are committed to specific solutions, and former BLM employees interested in supporting the Initiative and Program; and overhauling the BLM web site based on user input.