

National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board Meeting  
Tucson, Arizona

February 25, 2008

Board Members Present: Robin Lohnes, Renee Taylor, Larry Johnson, Gary Zakotnik, Dr. Vernon Dooley, Richard Sewing, and Dr. Wayne Burkhardt. Board Members Absent: Melissa Scott and Dr. Boyd Spratling. Washington Office Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Staff: Deputy Assistant Director, Renewable Resources and Planning, Bud Cribley; Don Glenn; Sharon Kipping; Sally Spencer; Jenny Lesieutre; Dean Bolstad; Lili Thomas; Alan Shepherd; Ramona DeLorme; and EK James. BLM Arizona District Manager, Gila District, Tom Dabbs. BLM Nevada State Wild Horse and Burro Specialist, Susie Stokke. U.S. Geological Survey, Jason Ransom. USDA, Forest Service, Toni Strauss.

Don Glenn introduced the Government Accountability Office employees.

Robin Lohnes opened the meeting at 8:05 a.m., February 25, 2008. She introduced the Advisory Board Members to the public.

### **Welcoming Remarks**

Bud Cribley thanked the National Wild Horse and Burro (WH&B) Advisory Board (Board) for its continued work with the Program. The WH&B Program could not have been as successful as it has without the Board. He also thanked the public for their support. With the Program getting so close to reaching Appropriate Management Levels (AML), the trend has been to assume that the budget can be reduced too. The Department of Interior (DOI) has now recognized that the WH&B Program costs are actually going up and adequate funding in the horse program is a very important issue.

Bud also explained that even though the BLM is removing horses and reaching AML on the range, the problem with holding horses is a major issue. Bud asked the Board to help in anyway they could in finding placement for the animals removed.

### **Arizona Report**

Tom Dabbs, BLM District Manager, Gila District, Arizona, reported that the population of wild horses and burros is estimated to be approximately 2,000 animals that reside in and outside of Herd Management Areas (HMA) and Herd Areas (HA). The AML for Arizona is 1,808 wild horses and burros. The recruitment rate is 5-7% annually due to drought. Because this rate is much lower than the normal 13-17% recruitment rate for Arizona, AML has been maintained by removing approximately 100-200 animals a year. Only two HMAs have horses. Since 2000, Arizona has adopted 2,061 animals.

Arizona established an Arizona Wild Horse and Burro Action Plan in 1999 with a budget of over \$1,100,000 per year over a five year period (2000-2004) for a total budget of \$6,251,000.

Approved June 30, 2008

Arizona is making a push to do more compliance inspections despite budget limitations. The Board suggested that Arizona work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) on compliance within the State. The Board asked if burros were being kept in Arizona for adoption or if they were shipped to Eastern adoptions. Don Glenn responded that some burros are shipped nationwide for adoption.

The Board asked about the five year plan for labor issues and funding for the Kingman facility. Tom will send a response to the Board. He will also respond to the Board on census, water issues, and on the ground management of Arizona HMAs in 2007.

### **November 5, 2007 Minutes**

The Board approved the November 5, 2007 minutes.

### **By-Laws, Charter Review, and Subcommittee**

The BLM reported that the Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board's proposed Charter for 2008 – 2010 has been signed by the Secretary of Interior and was delivered to the Forest Service for signing by the Secretary of Agriculture. The Department of the Interior's Solicitor made one change to the new Charter under "Section 10. subcommittees" to clarify the use of subcommittees by the Board.

The Board asked when the new Charter would take affect. The BLM responded that the filing date is the responsibility of the BLM and the filing date will correspond with the end of the existing Charter.

The BLM gave an update on nominations received for the positions of Veterinary Medicine, Public Interest, and Wild Horse and Burro Advocate. The BLM is in the process of reviewing the more than 50 nominations and is preparing to send a letter to all nominees explaining the process and acknowledging receipt of their nomination. This letter is anticipated to be sent by mid-March.

The BLM recommended that the Board's By-Laws be reviewed at this time to coordinate with the renewal of the Charter. The Board asked that BLM resend the By-Laws to all Board Members and any comments be presented at the next meeting.

### **Update on the Sheldon Refuge/BLM Meeting**

Dean Bolstad passed on Paul Steblein's, Project Leader, Sheldon & Hart Mountain National Wildlife Refuges, regrets that he was unable to attend this meeting. Paul is available to address the Board at their June 9, 2008 meeting.

Dean reported on a meeting that was held in Lakeview, Oregon between the Sheldon Refuge and the BLM personnel from Oregon, California and Nevada, who all administer public lands that are adjacent to the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge. The Sheldon Refuge is working to maintain its

boundary fences and expects to complete fencing their entire perimeter in 2008. The two agencies discussed beginning a study to examine the seasonal movement of horses on the landscape, and collaborated on ways to improve population estimates. The Sheldon is planning studies that will provide statistically valid population estimates of horses on the Sheldon, and studies to document ecosystem response to horse removal by using exclosures that exclude horses but allow entry by wildlife. An upcoming project for the Refuge is the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement.

### **Nevada Update**

Susie Stokke, Nevada Wild Horse and Burro State Lead, reported that the AML had been reduced in several HMAs. There are continuing concerns about areas affected by the drought. Nevada BLM has scheduled a field trip this spring to look at the range and condition of the 5,300 horses that are in drought areas. The information from this trip will be used to prioritize gathers. There are 18 HMAs above AML. Nevada uses a direct count method for census. Nevada would like to use more census flights, but the cost is very high - around \$800 per hour.

Nevada is working to reconstruct the Cedar Well, Cactus, and Silverbow on the Nevada Wild Horse Range (Nellis); however, funding is tight. The Board wondered if interest groups could help since there is no funding for water development or construction. Nevada is developing an Interagency Agreement with the Department of Defense to haul water to the horses at Nellis until the reconstruction of the water developments is complete. The pond that had the high nitrate level continues to be fenced and the water is being retested. A HMA Plan is also being developed for Nellis. Four possible options for managing the herd over the long term are being considered. One of the options is to manage a portion of the herd as a non-breeding population of geldings.

The Board wanted to know why managers are not implementing fertility control. Susie reported that it is not as effective when done in the summer, you have to capture a large percentage of the animals in order to have enough to treat, and the drug is available from only one source.

Nevada would like to have a mentoring program that would help new BLM employees learn from experienced employees.

Nevada is providing 200 mustangs for the 2008 Extreme Mustang Makeover and 250 yearling mustangs for the Extreme Yearling Makeover and Challenges sponsored by the Mustang Heritage Foundation.

The Board applauds the BLM for involvement with other agencies. This involvement needs to be expanded to the State Department of Wildlife. They may be able to help with census by having a WH&B specialist ride along when there is an empty seat on the plane. Susie will look into flight safety rules to see if this is possible.

Don Glenn presented GIS drought condition maps. The Board would like all states to prioritize their HMAs for gathers.

## **Forest Service Update**

Toni Strauss reported on the status of the Forest Service. The WH&B liaison position in Reno, Nevada is still vacant. Toni will be assisting with WH&B issues until the position is filled. The 2005 Interior Appropriations H.R. 4568, Title II, National Forest System runs through fiscal year (FY) 2009.

## **Budget Overview**

Jenny Lesieutre provided an overview of the FY08 Initial Workload Targets broken down by each State, including the Washington Office, and provided a detailed breakdown of the funding available for the program and the projected costs for FY08. Jenny advised the Board that there is a State Lead meeting the week of March 10, 2008 to review the needs and priorities of the program. During this meeting, the program will work together to update the FY08 Annual Work Plan (AWP) and create the FY09 Planned Target Allocations (PTA). The program recently added another program element "HH" to enable precise accounting of holding costs by separating out short-term holding from long-term holding.

The FY09 President's Budget was announced early in February and the Board was provided a copy of the WH&B 2009 Budget Justification as presented to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The 2009 budget request for the program is \$36,961,000 which provides an increase of \$678,000 over the 2008 enacted level. Jenny provided a breakdown of what the program could accomplish based on the funding with the assumption that targets will be met in FY08. One key assumption in FY08 is that the program will need to adopt 5,200 animals in order for holding costs to come in under 60% of the appropriated funding in 2009.

Jenny presented in detail the costs associated with long-term holding. The presentation showed that on October 1, 2007, there were 20,800 animals in long-term holding and that the lifetime costs over the next 28 years of these animals only would exceed \$208 million. The assumption is that no other animals would be added to the 20,800 and the unit cost used to calculate is today's unit cost of \$1.27 per day per animal.

The Board commented that they would like to see more dollars spent in the future on herd management.

## **Pending Litigation**

There are two federal court cases in Colorado still pending in U.S. District Court. The Piceance/East Douglas HMA gather completed September 2006 and West Douglas HA gather completed October 2006. Plaintiffs have filed a second amended complaint, now enjoining the final West Douglas decision into the litigation. Attorneys for the BLM will make a motion by the end of February 2008 to dismiss that part of the complaint dealing with the 2006 gathers at Piceance/East Douglas HMA and West Douglas HA. If the judge and plaintiffs accept the motion, the BLM will then litigate the final West Douglas decision.

In Montana, there has been no ruling on the BLM portion of the case regarding the use of PZP, and the United States Forest Service (USFS) prevailed in their portion of the case regarding territory boundaries in the Pryor Mountains.

### **Facility and Pipeline Reports**

Lili Thomas provided an update on short- and long-term holding facilities. On February 11, 2008, there were 10,321 horses and 413 burros in short-term holding facilities that have a total capacity of 12,985 animals. There were 21,646 animals in long-term holding facilities that have a total capacity of 21,800. The facilities are almost full. There are two long-term holding solicitations for a minimum of 500 animals and a maximum of 2,500 animals that will close March 24, 2008.

### **FY08 Gather Schedule**

Lili Thomas provided the Board with the gather schedule for FY08. The space in the holding facilities is limited, so the States will need to prioritize their gathers. There were 3,000 horses instead of the planned 2,000 horses gathered this past winter due to emergencies.

### **Research Update**

Alan Shepherd gave an update on ongoing wild horse and burro research projects. The fertility control research is working on the development of a 3-4 year agent using longer lasting pellet. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) has finalized their research proposal for fertility control. The Research Committee met with the HSUS in January 2008 and helped develop criteria for selection of HMAs for the research study. They have identified 16 potential HMAs that meet their criteria. Alan has contacted each appropriate State Lead for the individual HMAs to discuss potential involvement in the project.

Jason Ransom, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), reported on the aerial population estimation techniques used in the census research. A draft manuscript on all tests of the photomark-resight technique with sightability bias correction is near completion and will be submitted for publication later this year.

The test of the simultaneous double-count technique on the known population at McCullough Peaks had to be rescheduled due to weather. That flight was rescheduled for February 22, 2008. A comprehensive manuscript on this technique will be prepared following this flight.

The BLM and USGS discussed moving forward with the aerial survey implementation team. This team will begin to facilitate the transfer of aerial survey research methods to management use. Dr. Wayne Burkhardt will be the Boards liaison for the aerial survey implementation team.

### **Adoption/Sales Update**

Sally Spencer reported on adoptions and sales. In FY08, as of February 23, 2008, there have been 1,055 animals adopted: 890 wild horses and 165 wild burros. The adoption goal for FY08 is 5,235 with 80 adoption events remaining. There have been 335 fewer animals adopted this year as there were last year at the same time. There have been 171 animals sold so far in FY08.

The Oregon Kiger Adoption was a success. There were 93 horses adopted for a total of \$98,935. The average price per horse was \$1,063 and the high bid was \$7,800.

Festival in Austin, TX. We are working with the production company to promote the adoption program. Also, the US Border Patrol's Nobel Mustang Project has been featured in radio interviews and in WH&B National Advertising.

At present, the Save the Mustangs Fund has \$116,885.02. The fund has recently been used to pay for the care of wild horses being trained by the Saint Mary's-of-the-Woods College Equine Program.

### **Mustang Heritage Foundation**

Sally Spencer updated the Board on the Foundation's activities. The Foundation will exhibit at the Road to the Horse, March 1-2, 2008, in Murfreesboro, TN and the Extreme Mustang Makeover trainers, Bill Lopez and Dwight Bilyk, will display the talent of their mustangs.

There will be a Mustang Smack Down, May 25, 2008, in Fort Worth, TX at the Texas Classic Horse Show. Five Extreme Mustang Makeover trainers and mustangs will compete against five of the best domestically raised freestyle horses in a no holds barred freestyle smack down. There are three Mustang Challenges: Midwest (April 18-20, 2008), Western States (June 6-8, 2008) and Wyoming (August 15-16, 2008). The Extreme Mustang Makeover – The 200 will be September 18-21, 2008 and the Extreme Yearling Makeover – Mission: 007 will be September 18-19, 2008.

The Foundation has nominated Wild Horse Annie to the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame. The Foundation asked if the Board would send a letter of support to the Hall of Fall. The Board asked Sally to draft the letter of support.

### **Report to Congress Update**

Don Glenn stated that the WH&B Program continues to work on the Report to Congress and will try to complete the report by the end of FY08 so that it could positively affect funding in FY10.

### **Futuring Team Update**

The Futuring Team report was presented to the BLM Deputy Director Henri Bisson. The option recommended would place all WH&B facilities under the national program. Also, the adoption program would be nationalized. The WH&B Program has been asked to analyze additional options.

### **Public Comments**

Each speaker was asked to provide a written copy of their presentation so that their comments can be included in the meeting's record. Public comments started at 3:13 p.m.

### **WHBPS Update**

The Wild Horse and Burro Program System (WHBPS) will eventually replace the Wild Horse and Burro Information System (WHBIS). WHBPS will be able to track the planning and reporting of gathers and HMA records. Employees will learn how to use the system through self-training modules. The system should be deployed by the end of 2008.

### **Holding Cost Alternatives**

Renee Taylor gave the overview on holding cost alternatives for the Advisory Board Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee spoke with a variety of people. The concept of the Wyoming Pilot Project could be used as a model if the current restrictions were reduced. Adequate incentive would be needed to place the 5 to 10 year old horses in private hands: possibly \$500 in the year that title is transferred. Also, other Government Agencies should be involved. The Sub-Committee recommends that the BLM pursue this idea.

Larry Johnson spoke on what motivates him to be on the Board. He volunteers many hours, is very committed, and feels that every resource needs to be managed. The WH&B Program budget is limited, so different ideas need to be looked at. Larry proposes that the BLM run a pilot project at Nellis that converts the entire herd to geldings. He also suggested that the BLM review what is needed for instant titling. This would open up a Canadian adoption market.

### **Board Recommendations**

The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board made three recommendations. Please see attached. Robin Lohnes, on two separate occasions, pointed out that the third recommendation was simply to request a cost analysis for each of the three alternatives listed and should not be misconstrued as an endorsement of any or all by the Advisory Board.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be June 9, 2008, in Sacramento, CA.  
The meeting adjourned at 4:56 p.m.

National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board Recommendations  
Tucson, Arizona

February 25, 2008

1. The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board recommends that Dr. Spratling serve as a liaison to assist the BLM in the development of the Nevada Wild Horse Range Herd Management Area Plan, specifically to develop a protocol for gelding.
2. The National Wild horse and Burro Advisory Board recommends that all states evaluate Herd Management Areas to assess horse and range conditions to identify and prioritize potential emergencies.
3. The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board recommends that the BLM conduct a critical analysis, including cost comparison, of the following alternatives to reduce long-term holding costs:
  - a. A national stewardship incentive adoption program.
  - b. Converting herd management areas to non-reproducing gelding herds; as well as, introducing geldings as a component to the herds;
  - c. Evaluate regulatory and legislative changes needed to implement instant titling.

Approved June 30, 2008