

# D R A F T

## Bureau of Land Management Wild Horse and Burro Program

### Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program

October 1, 2011

#### Mission Statement

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is committed to the well-being and responsible care of wild horses and burros managed by the BLM. The Bureau's mission of promoting healthy rangelands provides the foundation necessary to ensure the necessary habitat is available for healthy animals on the range. This is the first step in the BLM's mission to protect the well-being of wild horses and burros. BLM continues in that mission by ensuring humane care and treatment for wild horses and burros during gathers and following their removal from the range. The BLM recognizes that America's wild horses and burros are a National treasure, held in the highest regard by the public, deserving of consideration and respect and protected by Federal law. At all times, the care and treatment provided by the BLM and their contractors will be characterized by *compassion and concern* for the animal's well-being and welfare needs. The policies and procedures followed by the BLM will prevent or minimize fear, pain, distress, suffering and the risk of injury to the greatest extent possible while protecting rangeland resources and providing for the needs of the animals in a humane manner.

#### Introduction

Like many segments of the wildlife and domestic animal communities in recent years, the BLM Wild Horse and Burro (WH&B) Program has been increasing its efforts to ensure the humane treatment of animals under its care and to demonstrate this commitment to others. The BLM is charged with the *protection* of wild horses and burros. The Bureau and its employees and contractors accept this charge with pride and a determination to provide the best possible care for the animals. The Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program (CAWP) will help the BLM and its contractors in these efforts.

The CAWP is *comprehensive* in its scope, from animals on the range through adoption. The CAWP will identify those elements of wild horse and burro habitats that are essential for the animal's well-being and ensure that range management objectives provide for those needs. The CAWP will address animal care and handling during gathers and throughout BLM short-term holding and pasture facilities. The CAWP will also include providing for the animals' needs through the adoption and sale programs and the post-adoption compliance process.

Before they are gentled or complete a transition to domestic life, wild horses and burros have unique needs that can affect their health and well-being. These are not simply untrained or poorly behaved horses and burros. They are wild animals that can react to capture or handling in unpredictable and sometimes violent ways. While they are rarely aggressive unless restrained, their reactions can endanger themselves and their handlers. Fortunately wild horses and burros are very adaptive and retain their penchant for training and domestic life. They quickly settle into routines associated with captivity and can be humanely managed in captivity with accommodation for their physical and mental well-being. These characteristics present a unique

challenge to the BLM and their contractors during capture and handling. Over the past 40 years the BLM and their contractors have learned how to properly and humanely care for wild horses and burros. The methods used today have been developed by dozens of experts over many years. These methods are constantly adapted as necessary to create the gold standard of methodology for the capture and care of wild horses and burros.

The goal of the CAWP is to ensure that the responsible care and humane treatment of wild horses and burros remains a priority for the BLM at all times. The objectives are to use the best available science, handling and husbandry practices applicable for wild horses and burros, monitor the Program's performance on an ongoing basis, make improvements when and where possible and report the success of the CAWP to the public.

## Methodology

A ten step process will take the CAWP from its inception to an ongoing Program as follows:

- 1) This concept paper will outline the *Mission Statement and Methodology of the CAWP* and the BLM regarding the proper care, humane treatment and welfare of wild horses and burros. During Program development by an initial Animal Welfare Team, the BLM will move forward regarding the creation of a full-time National WH&B Animal Welfare Coordinator to provide leadership, guidance and continuing coordination of CAWP implementation.
- 2) The Program will be budgeted in the FY2012 WH&B Program budget.
- 3) The Animal Welfare Team and the National Animal Welfare Coordinator will work with the WH&B Program to explain the CAWP internally. This *outreach within the WH&B Program* will explain why the CAWP will be good for the Program, what it will entail and how it will be implemented. The WH&B Program will acknowledge the mission of the CAWP and make it a priority *to protect the health and well being of wild horses and burros and treat them humanely and with care and concern for their well-being at all times.*
- 4) A full review of *BLM policies, SOPs, procedures, contract specifications and handbooks* will be conducted to consolidate all Program guidance relative to animal care, welfare and humane treatment. This review will include internal and external reviews from qualified experts in the fields of equine and animal science, veterinary medicine, animal behavior, wildlife biology, welfare science and jurisprudence. Where current procedures are not supported by SOPs or policy, and where contract specifications need modification those gaps will be addressed. Where existing approaches to animal care and handling can be improved this will be addressed with changes to existing policy and procedures where indicated.
- 5) Working with leading experts in the field, the CAWP will develop a *WH&B Welfare Assessment Tool* for use throughout the WH&B Program. This Tool will be based on those policies, SOPs, procedures and contract specifications identified in Step 2 as the best practices for protecting the welfare of wild horses and burros. Much like animal welfare audits performed throughout the livestock and poultry industries the Program itself will establish the standards that will be used to ensure that animals receive the best possible care and treatment within the Program. The BLM has more experience and

expertise caring for wild horses and burros than any organization in the world. Improvements will always be possible but the foundation for the best standard of care for wild horses and burros exists within the WH&B Program. The WH&B Welfare Assessment Tool is a means of evaluating BLM's own performance on an ongoing basis and demonstrating that performance to the public.

- 6) Initially the WH&B Welfare Assessment Tool will be used internally in a process of *self assessment*. Every facility and every contractor will be reviewed and scored by the same people responsible for providing animal care in these areas. Results of these reviews will be recorded and shared within the Program and with the public.
- 7) The CAWP will develop an additional assessment tool for on the range use. This will include providing for the well-being of horses at the herd level by ensuring there is adequate habitat and sufficient genetic variability to support healthy horses. This tool will be employed in internal and external reviews with data recorded and shared with the public in a manner similar to that for animal care and handling.
- 8) Where weaknesses are identified they will be addressed by revisiting policy, SOPs, procedures and guidance for the Program. Training programs on animal care and handling will be developed as stand-alone programs or components of existing courses to provide a mechanism for *continuing education for all employees and contractors involved in animal care and handling*. This will provide the opportunity for sharing new information and help to ensure consistency across all aspects of the WH&B Program.
- 9) After the initial internal reviews are completed and weaknesses have been addressed, an *ongoing formal evaluation program* will be developed using internal and external reviews. The same Welfare Assessment Tool developed by the Program will be the basis for all these reviews. BLM will set the standards for animal care and handling with input from external experts as indicated, and the Program will be evaluated on an ongoing basis using these same standards. Recognized university experts in the fields of equine and animal science and veterinary medicine will be used to complete these evaluations. A random sampling of facilities and contractors will be evaluated each year such that every subject is evaluated at least once every five years. Only a satisfactory score will be acceptable, and this will earn each participant recognition as *CAWP Certified*.
- 10) Results of the internal and external reviews will be recorded using the Welfare Assessment Tool and these data will be summarized and reported internally and publicly using a *database and annual performance reports*. This accountability and transparency will be continued throughout the CAWP using public reports to the National WH&B Advisory Board, the internet and social and conventional media outlets. The CAWP will develop a consistent and effective communication template covering animal care, handling and the humane treatment of wild horses and burros for wild horse specialists, facility personnel, and public affairs personnel as well as the media and the public.

The CAWP will be reassessed on an ongoing basis. A formal reassessment of the Program will be done after the first five year cycle of all facilities and contractors is completed. Strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement within the CAWP will be identified and where knowledge gaps are found in the current science new research needs will be identified for those areas.