



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

June 27, 2016

# News Release

Oregon/Washington

Contact: Tara Thissell (541) 573-4519



## BLM Initiates Wild Horse Research in Oregon

*Agency Works with Veterinarians to Study Safe, Humane Methods to Spay Mares, Control Unchecked Herd Growth*

**Portland, Ore.** – The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Burns (Oregon) District today released its decision to initiate research, in cooperation with Oregon State University, to develop and evaluate safe and humane methods to spay wild horse mares as a method for managing the growth of wild horse herds on public lands. The decision comes on the heels of the BLM's latest annual population estimate that shows approximately 67,000 wild horses and burros roaming public lands in 10 Western states. This most recent estimate is 15 percent – equivalent to 9,000 additional animals – more than what was estimated in 2015. The population of wild horses and burros on public lands is now more than double what the agency has determined is healthy for the animals and the rangeland resources on which they and many other species depend. The BLM's goal is to manage healthy horses on healthy rangelands.

Managing the population of wild horse herds is essential to maintain the health of the animals and of public lands. With virtually no natural predators, herds can grow 15-20 percent per year, doubling in just four years if left unchecked. Overpopulation on the range can damage fragile rangeland resources and compromise animal health. In addition to the on-range population, the BLM is responsible for the care of 46,000 unadopted wild horses and burros in its off-range pastures and corral facilities. It costs nearly \$50,000 to care for one unadopted horse in a corral over its lifetime. The BLM is tasked with overseeing the protection, management and control of wild horses and burros by the Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971 (Public Law 92-195).

The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) found in a June 2013 report there are no highly effective, easily delivered, and affordable fertility-control methods available across the BLM's West-wide Herd Management Areas. As a result of these findings, the BLM aims to develop a variety of new population management tools to reduce the number of animals that must be removed from the range as well as the number of animals that must be cared for in off-range facilities. As part of this effort, the decision announced today will initiate three of 21 research studies and projects with universities and the U.S. Geological Survey to develop new management tools and improve wild horse and burro management. Detailed information about each project has been posted on the agency's website (<http://on.doi.gov/1WDtWjt>).

The three research studies announced today are focused on investigating the safety and effectiveness of three methods of mare fertility control. The BLM has awarded a research grant to Oregon State University to conduct the studies, and the procedures will follow an animal care protocol approved by the university. Licensed and experienced veterinarians will conduct the procedures and

provide post-procedure care. The research will start this summer at Oregon's Wild Horse Off-Range Corral in Hines, OR.

The BLM considered the Proposed Action to conduct the studies and the No Action alternatives in Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-OR-B000-2015-0055. The BLM has selected the Proposed Action. Copies of the Environmental Assessment, Finding of No Significant Impact, and Decision Record are found on BLM's planning documents website: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/>. To search for a document, you can use the map to locate Burns District or click on the "Text Search" tab and search by state, document type, year (2015), and program. For further information on the Spay Research project, please contact the BLM's Burns District Office at (541) 573-4400.

Additional steps BLM is taking to address wild horse population issues include transitioning horses from off-range corrals to more cost-effective pastures; working to increase adoptions with new programs and partnerships; and requesting two new pieces of legislative authority in the Department's Fiscal Year 2017 budget request—one to allow for the immediate transfer of wild horses to other agencies that have a need for work animals and one that would create a congressionally-chartered foundation that could help fund and support adoption efforts.

The BLM manages more than 245 million acres of public land, the most of any Federal agency. This land, known as the National System of Public Lands, is primarily located in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM's mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America's public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. In Fiscal Year 2015, the BLM generated \$4.1 billion in receipts from activities occurring on public lands.

-BLM-