

Riddle Mountain

and

Kiger Wild Horse Herd

Management Area Plan

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RIDDLE MOUNTAIN AND KIGER HERD MANAGEMENT AREA PLAN

I. INTRODUCTION

This Horse Herd Management Area Plan (HMAP) supersedes and replaces the 1975 Riddle Mountain HMAP, the 1974 East Kiger HMAP, the 1975 Smyth Creek HMAP, and all revisions to these HMAPs. It also incorporates the land use planning decisions of the 1987 Drewsey Management Framework Plan Amendment, and the 1992 Three Rivers Resource Management Plan (RMP).

This plan is developed under the authority of the 1971 Wild Horse and Burro Act (as amended) and is in accordance with BLM Manual Section 4710.

This plan shares common resource objectives with the Smyth-Kiger (#5331), Happy Valley (#5309), and Burnt Flat (#5313) Allotment Management Plans (AMPs). This document is a part of and is tiered to the Kiger Mustang Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) Plan.

II. HERD MANAGEMENT AREA LOCATIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS

A. Riddle Mountain Herd Management Area

The 28,021-acre Riddle Mountain Herd Management Area (HMA) (Map #1) is located approximately 50 air miles southeast of Burns, Oregon, and is southeast and adjacent to Riddle Mountain. Topography varies from gently rolling hills to steep slopes and buttes with broad valleys. The landscape is dominated by a big sagebrush/bunchgrass vegetation type with playa lakebeds and areas of western juniper and aspen.

B. Kiger HMA

The 36,618-acre Kiger HMA (Map #2) is approximately 45 air miles southeast of Burns, Oregon, and 2 miles east of the small town of Diamond. The area is gently rolling with occasional rock rims. Some areas are open playa flats while others are dominated by scattered to thick western juniper cover that has an understory of sagebrush and bunchgrass.

III. ACTIVITIES, RESOURCE USES, AND DESIGNATIONS WITHIN THE HMAS

A. Activities and Resource Uses

1. Recreation

Recreational activities on public lands within the HMAs are increasing. The current level of use has not been quantified but is considered compatible with the wild horses and other uses of the public lands.

Big game hunting occurs during the fall in both HMAs, and travel to the Kiger Horse Viewing Overlook occurs on an almost daily basis during all seasons except early spring and winter. Frequent visitors to the Kiger HMA include hikers, horseback riders, and national media writers and photographers.

Off-highway vehicle (OHV) use has been an issue. OHV designations restrict vehicle use to existing roads and trails.

2. Livestock Grazing

Livestock grazing is authorized in both HMAs. The Riddle Mountain HMA includes two pastures of the Burnt Flat Allotment. The Kiger HMA contains all of or portions of three grazing allotments and is fenced into eight pastures. AMPs outline grazing management prescriptions for each of the four grazing allotments. Overlay #1 for Maps #1 and #2 display the locations of the grazing allotments and their pastures.

B. Designations

1. Wilderness Study Area

A portion of the Stonehouse Wilderness Study Area (WSA) is located in the southern and western parts of the Riddle Mountain HMA.

2. Area of Critical Environmental Concern

The Three Rivers RMP designated the Kiger and Riddle Mountain HMAs as an ACEC. The wild horses in these HMAs exhibit Spanish Mustang characteristics and are known as the Kiger Mustangs. These horses are important from a cultural and historic standpoint, as they represent the genetic heritage of Spanish Mustangs introduced by European explorers.

The primary management goal of the Kiger Mustang ACEC is to perpetuate and protect the conformation and dun factor color characteristics typical of wild horses currently present in the Kiger and Riddle Mountain HMAs. The management actions of this HMAP and of the AMPs (see I. Introduction) will be the means to perpetuate the horses and maintain their habitat.

IV. FORAGE ALLOCATIONS AND APPROPRIATE MANAGEMENT LEVELS

A. Forage Allocations

The Three Rivers RMP made forage allocations to wild horses, wildlife, and livestock in the Riddle Mountain and Kiger HMAs. Wild horse forage allocations are 984 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) in the Kiger HMA and 672 AUMs in the Riddle Mountain HMA.

B. Appropriate Management Levels and Thriving Natural Ecological Balance

The Appropriate Management Level (AML) for the Riddle Mountain HMA is a horse population whose numbers are within the range of 33 and 56 animals. The Kiger HMA's AML is a population of horses ranging from 51 to 82 animals.

These AMLs are based on the conclusion that these numbers of horses, permitted numbers of cattle (see AMPs), and existing populations of wildlife are in thriving natural ecological balance with the capability of the land. The evaluation of several years of rangeland monitoring data for forage utilization and rangeland trend support this conclusion. The Three Rivers RMP allocates forage to support permitted livestock numbers, wildlife populations, and the high end of the AML for wild horse numbers,

These wild horse AMLs and the other listed multiple uses of the HMAs are in thriving natural ecological balance and can be sustained by the rangeland resources if the prescribed management actions described in this HMAP and the AMPs are followed.

V. OBJECTIVES, MANAGEMENT ACTIONS TO ACCOMPLISH OBJECTIVES, AND MONITORING PLAN

A. Horse Habitat Objectives

The objectives for maintaining or improving the vegetative, water, and soil resources (horse habitat) upon which horses are dependent for survival are the same as the "resource objectives" listed in the AMPs referenced in the "I. Introduction" section of this document. The following horse management actions are designed to act in concert with the livestock grazing management actions listed in the AMPs to accomplish these resource objectives.

1. Management Actions

- a. Population Control through Gathering, Potential Fertility Control, and Sex Ratios

Gathering

Numbers of grazing animals must be controlled in order to maintain the health of the rangeland resources and to achieve resource objectives. Periodic wild horse gatherings using a helicopter and portable panels will be the primary means to manage horse numbers. Gatherings will be conducted in a manner that will support accomplishing both horse habitat and horse herd objectives (Section V.B.) in the most effective and economic manner feasible.

Gatherings will be conducted in accordance with existing Bureau procedures to ensure safe and humane treatment of the horses. A gathering strategy will be developed by the Area Manager, Wild Horse Specialist and Range Management Specialist for the HMA prior to conducting a gathering. At times most horses will be gathered. At other times, gathering will focus on bands of horses causing resource damage, while small bands distributed throughout or in remote parts of the HMA will not be gathered.

Subject to available funding every effort will be made to manage horse numbers between the low and high number of the AML range for each HMA. Budget constraints may demand that methods be employed which will reduce the existing reproductive rates of these herds. Lower reproductive rates would reduce management costs through less frequent gatherings.

Gatherings should be planned when horse numbers are approaching or will exceed the high end of the AML for the HMA. The number of horses that will trigger gatherings are 56 for Riddle Mountain and 82 for Kiger.

The number of horses to be removed (excess animals) are those animals that exceed the low end of the AML.

Numbers of horses to be maintained in the HMA after a gathering are 33 in Riddle Mountain HMA and 51 in Kiger HMA. Excess animals will primarily be processed through BLM's Wild Horse Adoption Program. A few animals may be relocated to other HMAs.

Extreme drought could trigger exceptions to the above gathering practices, although in recent droughts, the Riddle HMA and most parts of the Kiger HMA have had adequate forage and water resources. Some or all of the wild horses in these areas could be temporarily removed if the survival of the wild horses or the health of rangeland resources are severely threatened. Minimum AML numbers of Kiger Mustangs would be artificially maintained in holding facilities until rangeland resources are capable to support them again.

Fertility Control

Approved fertility control methods may be used to reduce reproductive rates and aid in managing horse numbers.

Sex Ratio

A 50 percent male and 50 percent female sex ratio is generally considered to be the standard for herd management. The herd may be managed for a 60 percent male and 40 percent female population to reduce reproduction rates and aid in managing horse numbers.

b. Riparian Management at Yank Springs

Any action necessary to improve riparian habitat and to preserve the water source to Yank Spring Creek will be analyzed in cooperation with the private landowner. This may involve excluding cattle and horses from the headwaters of Yank Spring.

c. Development and Maintenance of Horse Watering Sources

Reservoirs and public land water sources in the HMAs that are used by wild horses will be periodically maintained and cleaned. The Three Rivers RMP's Table 2.8 (page 2-50), Overlay #2 for Map #1, and Overlay #3 for Map #2 display important horse water sources.

Dependable water in the Kiger HMA on public land would be ensured if a well were developed in the Smyth Creek Allotment. This well would be desirable in times of extreme drought.

d. Gate and Fence Management

Fence Maintenance

Fences on the exterior of the HMAs are to be maintained to contain horses within the HMAs. Interior and exterior fence maintenance is assigned to grazing permittees.

Kiger HMA Gate Management

Gates in fences on the Kiger HMA boundary are to remain closed year-round. Gates between public land and private land pastures will always be closed to prevent horses from entering the private land pastures. Gates in pasture fences accessing public lands within the HMAs will usually stay closed during the cattle grazing season of April 1 through October 31.

Some gates in pasture fences accessing public lands will be opened as soon as practical after October 31. The Area Manager, Wild Horse Specialist, and Range Management Specialist for the area are to determine, on an annual basis, which gates are to be opened or remain closed during the winter season. The decision to open or close gates will consider: 1) maintaining the free-roaming nature; 2) access to adequate forage, water, cover, and winter range; 3) distribution of wild horses in the HMAs; and 4) accomplishment of horse habitat (resource) and herd objectives. Important gates that control horse movements between pastures are shown on Overlay #2 for Map #2.

Efforts may be made, through gate management practices, to limit the number of horses in Yank Springs Pasture to prevent excess concentrations of horses in this pasture or other areas where concentrations become an issue.

Riddle Mountain HMA Gate Management

All gates on the perimeter of the Riddle Mountain HMA will remain closed with the following exceptions. The gate between the Louie Hughes Pasture and the Riddle Mountain Allotment (outside of the HMA) will be left open for a few days during early summer and fall. Gates in private land pastures inside and adjacent to the HMA will be opened for several weeks each fall to accommodate livestock gathering.

These gate management practices accommodate livestock management needs and do not compromise containment of horses in the HMA. Horses are not normally in these areas at these times of the year.

Fence Reconstruction in Riddle Mountain HMA

Horses often leave the HMA and enter private lands (Clark Field) in the area of T. 30 S., R. 35 E., WM, Section 26. Horses move through portions of the fence that are damaged by large snow drifts, and may be moving through unfenced gaps in rimrocks. A combination of new construction, fence relocation, and fence redesign will resolve this situation.

2. Monitoring Plan

a. Horse Census

Horse numbers will be monitored by conducting helicopter counts. The method of census will be to fly each pasture in each HMA by traversing the area in a north-south pattern. Personnel who are familiar with the lands involved should conduct the inventories. Five hours of helicopter time should be planned for a census of both HMAs.

A census should be conducted immediately after a gathering to ensure that the low end of the AMLs has been attained in the HMAs. A census should occur on the second year following a gathering to verify numbers and begin the planning for the next gathering. A census may be conducted at other times if deemed necessary by the authorized officer.

b. Forage Utilization

Utilization studies should be conducted prior to and after livestock use when possible.

c. Rangeland Trend

Trend study methodology and schedules for conducting these studies are outlined in the associated AMPs.

B. Horse Herd Objectives

Maintain a healthy and sustainable herd of 33 to 56 wild horses in the Riddle Mountain HMA that exhibit the dun factor colors and physical characteristics of Spanish Mustang horses that currently exist in the HMA.

Maintain a healthy and sustainable herd of 51 to 82 wild horses in the Kiger HMA that exhibit the dun factor colors and physical characteristics of Spanish Mustang horses that currently exist in the HMA.

1. Management Actions to Accomplish Horse Herd Objectives

a. Physical and Conformation Characteristics Criteria

The following physical and conformation characteristics (illustrated in Appendix 1) will be managed for through gathering and return to the range practices:

- Dun factor colors (various color phases are dun, red dun, grulla, buckskin (claybank), and variations of these colors. Other colors will not be managed for.

- Markings on these animals include dorsal stripes; zebra stripes on the knees and hocks; chest, rib and arm bars; shoulder patches and sawtooth marks alongside the dorsal stripes; dark color outlining the ears; the top one-third of the ears on their backside darker than the body color; fawn color inside the ears; multi-colored manes and tails; cobwebbing on the face; and face masks. The less white these horses have, the stronger the dun factor. Horses having the dun factor may have some or all of these markings.
- Height ranges between 13 to 15 hands, and weight between 750 and 1,000 pounds.
- Other characteristics: generally possess the physical characteristics of Spanish Mustang confirmation, light to medium bone, small feet, ear tips are very hooked and females with very fine muzzles.

Sex ratios: Maintain an approximate 50 percent female and 50 percent male ratio in the population unless a lower female component is desired to reduce herd reproduction rates (see V.1.).

Age structure: Ideally all age classes would be represented in the population.

b. Exchanging Horses Between HMAs

Periodically exchange stallions and/or mares between the Riddle Mountain and Kiger HMAs to maintain genetic diversity.

2. Monitoring Plan

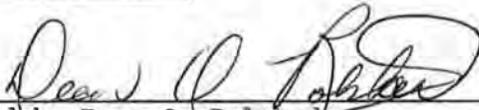
Gathered horses will be examined to determine if the herd is successfully reproducing, progeny exhibit the desired physical and color characteristics and if appropriate age structures and sex ratios are being maintained.

VI. EVALUATION SCHEDULE

The effectiveness of the management actions and accomplishment of objectives will be evaluated at the end of a 10-year period following initiation of this HMAP.

VII. SIGNATURE PAGE

Participating Staff


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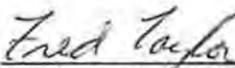
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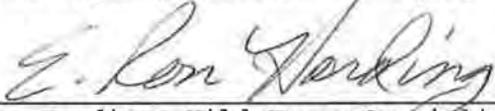
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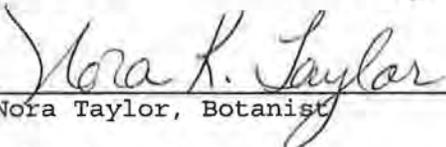
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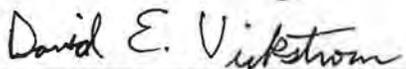
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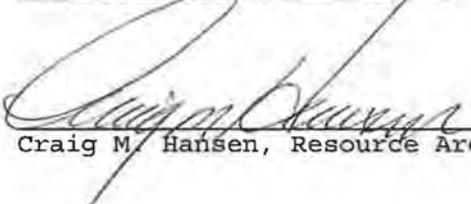

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