



# United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Vale District Office

100 Oregon Street

Vale, Oregon 97918

<http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/vale>

4700 (ORV000)

**MAY 11 2015**

Dear Interested Public:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Vale District Office will start the process of writing a Wild Horse Gather Plan for the Cold Springs Herd Management Area (HMA). This letter provides interested parties an opportunity to participate in the development of this plan. BLM will prepare an Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-OR-V040-2015-022-EA) to analyze the environmental effects of various alternatives associated with returning and maintaining the wild horse population within the Appropriate Management Level (AML). Based on previous monitoring data and following thorough public review, the AML for Cold Springs HMA is set as a range from 75-150 wild horses.

The goals of this project are to return and maintain the wild horse population within the established AML for Cold Springs HMA, protect rangeland resources from deterioration associated with the current overpopulation, and restore a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple use relationship on public lands in the area consistent with the provisions of Section 1333(b)(2) of the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971.

The BLM has determined that as of fall 2015, the excess horses in the HMA will impact the habitat and natural resources. This assessment is based on the following factors including, but not limited to:

- An aerial inventory of 213 wild horses was conducted in July 2014. After including a 20 percent population growth rate to account for the 2015 foal crop, there would be approximately 256 wild horses which equates to an excess of 181-106 horses above low and high AML, respectively.
- By summer 2015, use by wild horses will exceed the forage allocated to their use (1,800 AUMs) by approximately 40 percent.
- Herbaceous forage utilization monitoring documents heavy to severe utilization levels in portions of the HMA experiencing concentrated wild horse use.
- Upland monitoring documents heavy utilization of upland perennial plants, and extensive trailing and soil displacement within the previous and current burned portions of the HMA.
- Field observations in 2013 and 2014 documented poor water availability across the HMA due to below average precipitation amounts. Large concentrations of wild horses (75+) have been observed around these limited water sources.

Through internal scoping, BLM has developed a proposed action which includes; gathering 90 percent of the wild horses in the HMA; selecting mares and studs to be released back to the HMA based on desired characteristics of the overall herd; treat with Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP) fertility control approximately 33 mares to be released back to the HMA; re-establish the population with a 50 female/50 male ratio of horses; use bait trapping in areas where concentrations of wild horses are detrimental to habitat conditions or other resources; and conduct subsequent gathers, over the next 10 years, following the proposed action to efficiently maintain AML.

Previous scoping has identified the following issues that will be addressed in the Wild Horse Gather Plan for the Cold Springs HMA:

- *Could bait and/or water trapping alone be used in place of helicopter gathers?*
- *Will the public be notified and able to attend bait trapping?*
- *How does permanent sterilization of horses change their behavior?*
- *What is the definition of “thriving natural ecological balance”?*
- *How will BLM avoid undue stress to foals and elderly horses during helicopter gathers?*
- *How much will the proposed gather cost versus alternate methods to manage wild horse numbers (e.g. bait trapping, long-term fertility control.)?*
- *What time of year would helicopter gathers occur?*
- *What time of year would bait and water trapping be conducted?*
- *Has the use of PZP been effective at population management of the Cold Springs herd in the past?*
- *How can volunteers be used to accomplish population management actions for wild horses?*
- *Can the following data be included in the EA;*
  - *previous census data;*
  - *a breakdown of forage allocations in the Cold Springs HMA to... livestock;*
  - *wildlife;*
  - *wild horses;*
  - *actual livestock use for the past ten years;*
  - *all fencing in the HMA;*
  - *all available genetic testing reports;*
  - *comprehensive rangeland health studies;*
  - *all available water sources on private and public land;*
- *If deemed necessary, how and why would a horse be euthanized?*
- *How will BLM maintain the genetic diversity and health of the Cold Springs herd?*
- *Can wild horses found outside the HMA boundary be relocated to the HMA instead of removing them?*
- *What is the percentage of mares that need to be vaccinated with PZP for it to be effective as a population control method?*
- *Can only select young animals be removed so they are more likely to be adopted?*

- *Can an adaptive management plan be in place to react to changing conditions and situations to alter management of wild horse numbers on a year to year basis?*

Comments received from interested parties following receipt of this letter will be used to identify potential environmental issues beyond what is listed above that are related to gathering wild horses and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that also achieve the objective of the project.

Please provide information that you have on the status or condition of the resources or resource values of the proposed project area and BLM's proposed action or alternatives to consider. We would like to receive all replies by May 29th, 2015. For responses, comments, and/or any other information please contact Pat Ryan, Vale District Office at the address above; send an email to [blm\\_or\\_vale\\_wbh@blm.gov](mailto:blm_or_vale_wbh@blm.gov) or call (541) 473-6277.

Sincerely,



Thomas Patrick "Pat" Ryan  
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