



# BLM NEWS RELEASE

U.S. Department of the Interior • Bureau of Land Management • Washington, D.C., Office • 1849 C Street N.W. • Washington, D.C.

Bureau of Land Management  
For release: Friday, December 3, 2010

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## **BLM Releases Report by Independent Observers on Handling of Animals at Three Wild Horse Gathers**

The Bureau of Land Management today released a report prepared by four independent, credentialed equine professionals concerning the care and handling of wild horses and burros at three major gathers or round-ups held over the summer. The full report, accessible at the BLM's national Website ([www.blm.gov](http://www.blm.gov)), made several observations and findings, including the observation that, in general, "horses did not exhibit undue stress or show signs of extreme sweating or duress due to the helicopter portion of the gather, maintaining a trot or canter gait only as they entered the wings of the trap. Rather[,] horses showed more anxiety once they were closed in the pens in close quarters; however, given time to settle, most of the horses engaged in normal behavior...." The report also favorably noted the helicopter's "precision" in gathering horses and burros, comparing it to "a dog working sheep."

The four professionals who prepared the report, each of whom is an academia-based equine veterinarian or equine specialist, are Camie Heleski, Ph.D., from Michigan State University; Betsy Greene, Ph.D., from the University of Vermont; Sarah Ralston, VMD, Ph.D., from Rutgers University; and Carolyn Stull, Ph.D., from the University of California at Davis. These four observers were selected by the Washington, D.C.-based American Horse Protection Association, whose mission is to protect and preserve wild horses and burros on U.S. public rangelands.

Other findings by the equine professionals, who observed gathers at the Owyhee Herd Management Area (Nevada), Stinking Waters Herd Management Area (Oregon), and Twin Peaks Herd Management Area (California), include:

- contractor and BLM personnel appeared to be gentle and knowledgeable, using acceptable methods for moving horses forward at the trap sites and the temporary holding facilities;
- chutes and pens were set up in a manner that reflected recommended handling practices for reducing animal stress in traps;
- horses were sorted appropriately at temporary holding facilities;
- horses were assessed by Federal veterinarians (from the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, or APHIS) to be capable of travel before transport to BLM holding facilities;
- APHIS veterinarians were open and candid regarding protocols for treating injured or ill horses. In the case of euthanasia or injuries, there was no attempt to minimize or hide any information or details related to the injuries or euthanasia procedures; and
- when faced with unexpected and extraordinary circumstances (such as water toxemia at the Owyhee gather), BLM, APHIS, and contractor personnel demonstrated the ability to review, assess, and adapt procedures to ensure the care and well being of the animals to the best of their ability.

The independent observers also made a number of recommendations to the BLM, which can be found in the full report posted on the BLM's Website. The Bureau will review and respond to each recommendation. The BLM will use the observations and findings of this report as it considers development of an independent observer program as part of the agency's ongoing effort to put the Wild Horse and Burro Program on a sustainable track.

**The BLM manages more land – more than 245 million acres – than any other Federal agency. This land, known as the National System of Public Lands, is primarily located in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The Bureau, with a budget of about \$1 billion, also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM's multiple-use mission is to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Bureau accomplishes this by managing such activities as outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, mineral development, and energy production, and by conserving natural, historical, cultural, and other resources on public lands.**