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# Wild Horses

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## Key Points

- The Pokegama herd is currently 40 percent over the maximum appropriate management level of 50 horses.
- The Pokegama herd relies primarily on private land within the Herd Management Area for forage and water.
- Alternative D, which would eliminate livestock grazing, would reduce competition for forage and provide the potential for increased growth of the Pokegama herd. Otherwise, the alternatives and the Proposed RMP would not differ in their effects on the Pokegama herd.

## Summary of Notable Changes from Draft RMP/EIS

- Analysis for the Proposed RMP/EIS includes added data on herd numbers resulting from direct counts conducted in the summer of 2015.

## Background

The Pokegama Herd Management Area (HMA) is the only HMA within the planning area. It encompasses a total of 85,022 acres in Oregon and California and includes private, state, and Federal lands. Approximately 83 percent of the HMA (70,550 acres) is within the planning area, with 23 percent of the HMA on BLM-administered lands managed by the Klamath Falls Field Office. The remainder of the HMA within the planning area is on private land. Most of the California portion of the HMA (95 percent, or 13,016 acres) is located on private and state land; only 5 percent is located on BLM-administered lands (outside of the planning area).

The Pokegama herd spends 94 percent of its time in meadows, open areas, and in tree cover on the edge of meadows (Gottlieb 1993). During the spring and summer, the horses are generally in the northern and central portions of the HMA. Due to the typically high winter snow accumulations in the northern and central portions of the HMA, the horses concentrate in the southern portion (California) from December through March, although they can be found in the northern and central areas at any time of the year.

The diet of the Pokegama herd is predominantly grasses and grass-like species. Their primary water sources include creeks, springs, and reservoirs. Most developed water sources for the Pokegama herd (70-80 percent) are on private land. The BLM and private landowners have constructed several exclosures to protect riparian areas from wild horses.

The Pokegama Wild Horse Herd Management Area Plan (USDI BLM 2002) identifies specific management objectives and actions for the management of the Pokegama HMA.

## Issue 1

*How would the alternatives affect BLM's ability to maintain the appropriate management level of 30 to 50 wild horses within the Pokegama Herd Management Area?*

## Summary of Analytical Methodology

The BLM qualitatively analyzed effects to wild horses within the Pokegama HMA, based on other resource management programs. Under all alternatives and the Proposed RMP, management of the Pokegama Herd and the HMA would continue as guided by the Pokegama Wild Horse HMA Plan (USDI BLM 2002). Wild horses in the Pokegama Herd would be managed the same under all alternatives and the Proposed RMP.

This analytical approach is a change from the Planning Criteria, which described analyzing changes in forage availability based on changes in forest structural stages (USDI BLM 2014, pp. 170–171). The alternatives and the Proposed RMP would result in negligible differences in the acreage of non-forested lands, and early successional and stand establishment stands within the HMA. In addition, a 2014 wildfire in the HMA has had a much greater influence on forest structure within the HMA than any changes that could occur under any of the alternatives or the Proposed RMP.

## Affected Environment

The Pokegama herd is currently 40 percent over the appropriate management level (AML) of 30 to 50 horses, based on the Pokegama Wild Horse HMA Plan. Since designation of the HMA in 1971, census counts of the Pokegama wild horse population have ranged from 25 in 1972 to 71 in 2015<sup>156</sup> (Figure 3-205). The BLM has periodically completed captures to reduce herd numbers to within AML when needed. In 1996 and 2000, the BLM removed 20 and 18 horses, respectively. Continued captures would occur under all alternatives and the Proposed RMP to manage herd AML as guided by the Pokegama Wild Horse HMA Plan.

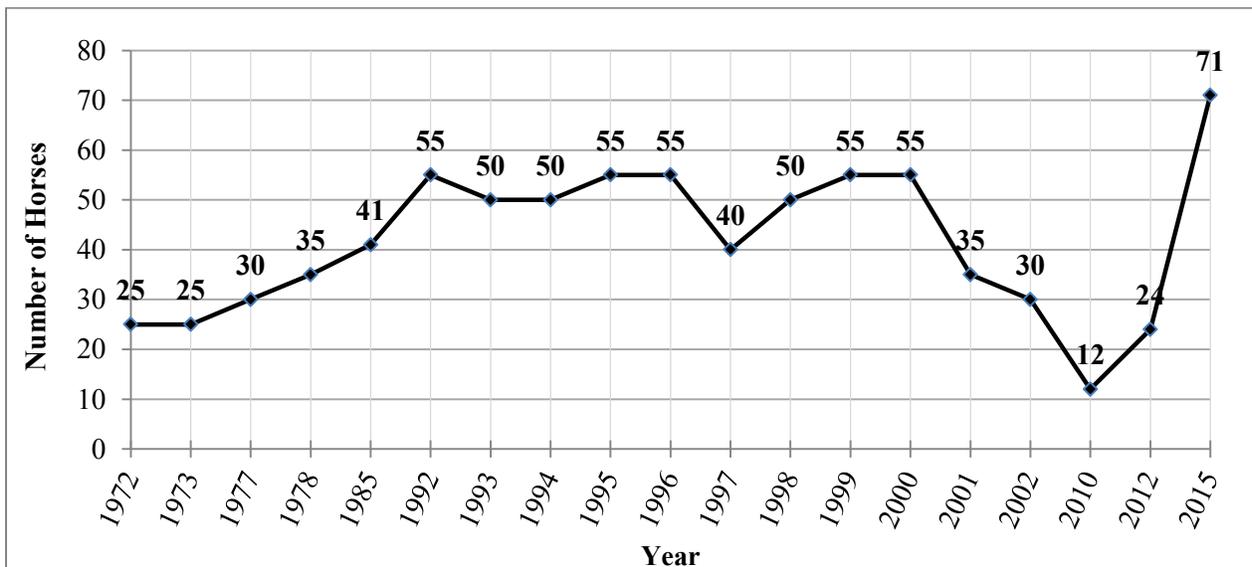


Figure 3-205. Pokegama herd census, 1972–2015

The average growth rate for the Pokegama herd is typically 4-5 percent per year, which is below the average rate of 20 percent for other wild horse herds. The lower growth rate for the Pokegama herd may be related to a higher ratio of male to female horses than is normally found in wild horse herds (Gottlieb

<sup>156</sup> 2015 data incorporated represents direct count numbers using simultaneous double-blind count methodologies. Census numbers are currently being processed for the 2015 data. The final census number may increase to account for horses obscured by canopy cover in forested habitats.

1993). The lower growth rate may also be related to young horses being killed by mountain lions during the winter or being illegally removed (USDI BLM 2002). The overall condition of the herd is excellent (USDI BLM 1996 and 2002). The current high population number may be attributed to a number of privately owned, unauthorized horses in the area being included in the wild horse count (personal communication, Alec Bryan, BLM, 2015).

The portion of the HMA within the planning area lies within the boundaries of two grazing allotments: the Dixie and Edge Creek allotments. The BLM allocates forage for livestock, wild horses, deer, and elk (USDI BLM 1994), and there is abundant forage and available water within the two allotments in the HMA. The BLM currently allocates 150 animal unit months of forage on BLM-administered lands within the planning area to the Pokegama herd. The remaining forage needs for the herd within the planning area are provided for on private lands. The Oregon Gulch Fire (2014) occurred entirely within the HMA and burned 41 percent of the acres within the HMA, but did not reduce available forage for the herd.

## **Environmental Consequences**

Under all alternatives and the Proposed RMP, management of the Pokegama Herd and the HMA would continue as guided by the Pokegama Wild Horse HMA Plan (USDI BLM 2002), which currently manages the Pokegama herd unit to maintain a viable herd of approximately forty healthy animals - the mid-point of the determined AML range of 30 to 50 head. Wild horses in the Pokegama Herd would be managed the same under all alternatives and the Proposed RMP. As such, this analysis focuses on describing potential changes in forage availability based on changes in forest structural stages.

Vegetation management actions under the alternatives and the Proposed RMP would have very little if any effect on wild horses in the HMA. The Proposed RMP and all alternatives would manage all or most of the forested areas in the HMA with uneven-aged management. Unlike the Proposed RMP and all other alternatives, Alternative C includes a small portion of the High Intensity Timber Area, totaling 2,330 acres, within the HMA in which timber management actions would include clearcuts. This increased intensity of timber management under Alternative C could result in some increases in forage for a time within clearcut units within the High Intensity Timber Area. However, the small portions of the High Intensity Timber Area that would be within early-successional and stand establishment stages in any given decade would render these overall temporary increases in forage negligible in the context of the abundance of existing forage within the entire 85,022-acre HMA.

Vegetation management actions, road maintenance and construction, recreation areas, and travel management designations for public motorized access could affect wild horse movements, the habitat they occupy, and associated available forage. These activities would have only temporary and localized effects on horse distribution and movement with the HMA, which cannot be quantified at this scale of analysis with the data available.

The Alternatives A and D, and the Proposed RMP would designate the Upper Klamath River and Upper Klamath River Addition ACECs located within the herd management area. The designation of these ACECs would not affect the wild horse herd as the horses have little to no access to the areas. These ACECs are located within the steep confines of a canyon with limited access by horses.

There are two BLM-managed recreation sites located along the eastern boundary within the Pokegama HMA: the Klamath River Campground and Spring Island River Access. Both of these sites are located within the Klamath River Wild and Scenic River ERMA and in the confines of the canyon where horses are not known to occur. Designation of these sites as Special Recreation Management Areas would have no effect to the Pokegama herd.

Alternative D would eliminate livestock grazing throughout the planning area, including the Dixie and Edge Creek allotments, and would reduce competition for forage within the HMA. Alternative D would increase the animal unit months of forage available to horses on BLM-administered lands within the planning area by 627. This increase in forage would provide sufficient forage to support a horse population at the high end of the appropriate management level on BLM-administered lands in the planning area alone. This elimination of direct competitions for forage within the HMA would provide for the potential for an increased growth rate of the Pokegama herd greater than the current long-term average of 20 percent.

## References

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