

# Questions & Answers for Three Fingers Gather

***Q. Why is this gather necessary?***

- A1. It is to maintain the appropriate management level for the Three Fingers Herd Management Area.
- A2. Protect rangeland resources from further deterioration associated with the current overpopulation.
- A3. Restore a thriving ecological balance and multiple use relationships on public lands.

***Q. How many horses will be gathered and how many will be removed from the range?***

- A. The round-up will gather up to 250 horses and 175 horses will be removed from the range

***Q. What will the remaining herd population of this Herd Management Area be?***

- A. The herd population will be 75 horses with 60% male (45) and 40% female (30).

***Q. Is the BLM removing horses to make room for more cattle grazing?***

- A. No. The removal of wild horses and burros from public rangelands is carried out to ensure rangeland health, in accordance with land-use plans that are developed in an open, public process. These land-use plans are the means by which the BLM carries out its core mission, which is to manage the land for multiple uses while protecting the land's resources. Authorized livestock grazing on BLM-managed land has declined by nearly 50 percent since the 1940s; actual (as distinguished from authorized) livestock grazing on public rangelands has declined by 30 percent since 1971.

***Q. Why is the BLM removing horses when there are already more than 35,000 animals in holding?***

- A. The BLM must remove thousands of wild horses and burros from the range each year to protect public lands from the environmental impacts of herd overpopulation – such as soil erosion, sedimentation of streams, and damage to wildlife habitat. Currently, the Western rangeland free-roaming population of more than 38,000 (as of February 2010) *exceeds by nearly 12,000* the number the BLM has determined can exist in balance with other public rangeland resources and uses. Although the BLM tries to place as many removed animals as possible into private care through adoption or sales, the public's demand for adoptable wild horses has declined sharply in recent years, leaving the agency in the unsustainable position of gathering excess horses while its holding costs spiral upward. Interior Secretary Salazar and BLM Director Bob Abbey announced a set of proposals in October 2009 that are aimed putting the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program on a sustainable track (see [www.blm.gov](http://www.blm.gov) for detail).

***Q. Why is the BLM removing horses that appear to be or are in good condition?***

- A. The BLM gathers horses with different bodily conditions, including some that appear to be or are in good condition. The agency pro-actively gathers excess animals from overpopulated herds on a three-to-five year cycle to prevent worst-case scenarios in which removed horses would be emaciated because of insufficient forage on the range.

***Q. Where do the removed horses go?***

- A. Excess wild horses removed from the range will be shipped to a short-term holding facility in Burns Oregon, where they will be prepared for the BLM's adoption program or long-term holding in Midwestern pastures.

***Q. What happens to horses that are not adopted?***

A. Unadopted horses are fed and cared for in either short-term corrals or long-term Midwestern pastures. Wild horses over 10 years old and those passed over for adoption at least three times become eligible for sale, a transaction in which the title of ownership to the animals passes immediately from the Federal government to the buyer. (In the adoption process, the title of ownership passes from the Federal government to the adopter after the individual provides one year of humane care.) While a December 2004 law granting the BLM sale authority authorizes the agency to sell sale-eligible animals “without limitation,” the Bureau has not been and is not selling any wild horses to slaughterhouses or to “killer buyers.” All horses in holding retain their status as “wild” animals and remain under the BLM’s protection.

***Q. Will any of the horses be sent to slaughter?***

A. No. As noted above, while a December 2004 amendment to the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act authorizes the BLM to sell sale-eligible animals “without limitation,” the BLM has not been and is not selling any wild horses to slaughterhouses or to “killer buyers.”

***Q. What veterinary treatment will the removed horses receive?***

A. The horses will be aged (based on the condition of their teeth), de-wormed, vaccinated, blood-tested, and freemarked (marked with a cold brand).

***Q. Will there be any designated public observers at the trap site?***

A. Public Observation will be available each day that horses are gathered; information will be posted to ????? website with meeting times and place of meeting. Observers will be selected on a first come first serve basis each day at the meeting location. Not all trapsites lend themselves to observers being as close as they would like (topography, visibility to the horses as they approach the trap location, and safety for the horses, employees and contractors). Another consideration is Federal aviation rules; the public cannot be within 2000 of a helicopter when in operation.

***Q. How far, in relation to the trap site, are the horses and foals being herded?***

A. **(We won’t know this until the contractor decides on the trap site on August 7)**

***Q. Why does the BLM use helicopters to gather horses?***

A. Helicopter-driven gathers have proven to be more humane, effective, and efficient than other types of gather methods when large numbers of animals need to be removed over wide areas or rugged terrain. Helicopters are able to move horses and burros at a proper pace; moreover, helicopter pilots can keep mares and foals together better than a horseback rider and can also better move the animals around such barriers as deep ravines, fences, or roads.

***Q. Does the BLM use whips to move the horses through the pens and chute?***

A. The BLM uses flags or noise making paddles to move horses through the pens and chutes. The flags are usually made by attaching a plastic grocery bag to the end of a sorting stick or buggy whip. The flag prevents the stick or whip from hitting the horse with any sort of impact or sting to it. Seeing and hearing the plastic flag motivates the animal to move away from the source of the stimulus. This technique is similar to those used for domestic and wild horses being trained using resistance-free methods.

***Q. How many of the mares gathered during this roundup will the BLM treat with the fertility-control vaccine PZP?***

**A.** None of the mares that will be released back into the Jackies Butte Herd Management Area will be treated with PZP.

***Q. How does PZP affect the mares?***

**A.** The PZP application doesn't interfere with a mare's pregnancy if the vaccine is applied while she is pregnant. The foal will be born normal and healthy. The PZP vaccine will start to take effect while the mare is pregnant, so after the foal is born, the mare will be less likely to become pregnant for about the next two years.

Indications from research conducted on Assateague Island National Seashore (managed by the National Park Service) suggest that PZP does not affect the foaling seasonality. While it remains to be seen if this will hold true on Western rangelands, there is no indication that there are any negative effects on foal survival following treatment of a herd.

***Q. Will the entire Jackies Butte Herd Management Area be closed to public access?***

**A.** The BLM routinely imposes area closures in the vicinity of wild horse gathers to provide the largest margin of safety for the helicopter pilot, the public and the horses themselves. All aviation operations are inherently dangerous. Horse gathers are especially high risk to helicopter pilots due to the low elevation flying, technical maneuvers, and an abundance of collision hazards present in any given gather area. The sudden appearance of members of the public could cause a distraction to the pilot or cause the pilot to execute an avoidance maneuver which would not otherwise be executed, placing the pilot and helicopter at greater risk of a mishap. The sudden appearance of members of the public could also startle horses as they are being herded by the helicopter, causing them to deviate from the planned route and perhaps cause them to pick another route which could pose a greater threat of injury to the horses. In a confined area, encounters between the public and horses could result in human injury if the horses have no escape route except over or around an individual or group of individuals. Area closures are not meant to preclude members of the public from viewing the gather, but rather are a risk management tool to provide for maximum pilot, public and horse safety. Viewers will be stopped on the road at a spot that does not interfere with gather operations and forwarded to a Public Affairs Officer in charge of public viewing. If someone needs through a road where the gather operation is occurring the BLM will have them pass through when the helicopter is shut down or when it is at a safe distance so they can pass without disrupting the gather.

***Q. Where may I learn more about the Wild Horse and Burro Program?***

**A.** Please visit the BLM's Website at [www.blm.gov](http://www.blm.gov).