

Adopting a Wild Horse or Burro

Providing a home for a wild horse or burro is a challenging and rewarding experience. For qualified individuals, this is a unique opportunity to care for, then own, a "Living Legend" -- a symbol of American history -- a wild horse or burro. This document answers the most frequently asked questions about adopting a wild horse or burro. Additional information will be provided to adopters of a wild horse or burro at the adoption site.

Why does the BLM offer wild horses and burros for adoption?

The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 gave the Department of the Interior's BLM and the Department of Agriculture's USFS the authority to manage, protect, and control wild horses and burros on the nation's public rangelands to ensure healthy herds and healthy rangelands.

Federal protection and a lack of natural predators have resulted in thriving wild horse and burro populations that grow in number each year. The BLM monitors rangelands and wild horse and burro herds to determine the number of animals, including livestock and wildlife, that the land can support. Each year, the BLM gathers excess wild horses and burros from areas where vegetation and water could become scarce if too many animals use the area.

These excess animals are offered for adoption to qualified people through the BLM's Adopt-a-Horse-or-Burro program. After caring for an animal for one year, the adopter is eligible to receive title, or ownership, from the Federal Government. While the challenges to adopting enough animals, is greater than ever, the program is a popular one. In fact, the BLM placed more than 207,000 wild horses and burros into private care from 1973 through Fiscal Year 2005.

What are wild horses and burros like?

Every wild horse or burro is different. They come in all shapes and sizes, and each animal has its own personality. They are of no particular breed, although some exhibit characteristics associated with certain breeds. A typical wild horse stands about 13 to 15 hands high (52- 60 inches) and weighs about 700 to 1,000 pounds. Wild burros average 11 hands high (44 inches) and weigh about 500 pounds. Because the BLM only recently removed them from public lands, wild horses and burros put up for adoption are not accustomed to people. As an adopter, your challenge will be to develop a trusting relationship with your wild horse or burro.

How can I qualify to adopt a wild horse or burro?

To adopt a wild horse or burro, you must:

- be at least 18 years of age (Parents or guardians may adopt a wild horse or burro and allow younger family members to care for the animal.);
- have no prior conviction for inhumane treatment of animals or for violations of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act;
- demonstrate that you have adequate feed, water, and facilities to provide humane care for the number of animals requested; and,
- show that you can provide a home for the adopted animal in the United States.

What facilities must I have to adopt a wild horse or burro?

You must provide a minimum of 400 square feet (20 feet x 20 feet) for each animal adopted. Horses less than 18 months of age should be kept in corrals with fences 5 feet high. Fences must be at least 4.5 feet high for ungentled burros and 6 feet high for ungentled horses more than 18 months of age. You should not release an ungentled animal into a large open area, such as a pasture, since you may not be able to recapture the animal for training or to provide veterinary care. However, once the animal is gentled, you may release it into a pasture or similar area.

The acceptable corral must be sturdy and constructed out of poles, pipes, or planks (minimum 1.5 inch thickness) without dangerous protrusions. Barbed wire, large-mesh woven, stranded and electric materials are unacceptable for fencing.

Posts should be a minimum of 6 inches in diameter and spaced no farther than 8 feet apart. Horizontal rails should be 3-inch minimum diameter poles or planks at least 2 feet x 8 feet. If you use poles, there should be a minimum of five horizontal rails, and when you use 2" x 8" planks, there should be at least four rails. No space between rails should exceed 12". You should fasten all rails to the inside of the post with either heavy nails or lag screws.

You must provide shelter from inclement weather and temperature extremes for your adopted wild horse or burro. Shelters must be a two-sided structure with a roof, well-drained, adequately ventilated, and accessible to the animal(s). The two sides need to block the prevailing winds and need to protect the major part of the bodies of the horse or burro. Tarps are not acceptable. Contact your administering BLM office for shelter requirements in your area.

How do I adopt a wild horse or burro?

If you meet the adoption qualifications requirements, complete the "Application for Adoption of Wild Horses or Burros" and mail it to the BLM office serving your area. The BLM will contact you during the application review process to verify that your facilities meet the minimum requirements for the number of animals you want to adopt. When you adopt, the BLM requires you to sign a Private Maintenance and Care Agreement. This agreement includes the following statement:

"Under penalty of prosecution for violating 18 U.S.C. 1001, which makes it a Federal crime to make false statements to any agency of the United States, I hereby state that I have no intent to sell this wild horse or burro for slaughter or bucking stock, or for processing into commercial products, within the meaning of the Wild and Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act, 16 U.S.C. 1331 et seq., and regulations 43 CFR 4700.0-5(c)."

You must agree to sign this statement at the time of adoption.

Application for Adoption of Wild Horses or Burros, *Adobe Acrobat pdf. Format* ([link to pdf file](#))

Link to 2006 BLM Wild Horse Adoption Schedule