

Warm Springs Wild Horse Gather Q&As (updated 11/17/10)

The helicopter was out for hours on Friday, November 5, and no horses came to the trap. It seems you are you bringing them in from too far away.

The horses located on the west side of the fence that divides the Herd Management Area (HMA) had moved to the far west side of the HMA, likely due to gathering operations on the east side of the fence earlier in the week. The BLM advised the contractor if he flew around (behind) the horses they would return to the center of the HMA near the fence. He did this, and the horses spent all day drifting back to the east, closer to trap location. The contractor was using the helicopter to monitor the progress the horses were making, not pushing them. At approximately 4 p.m., the contractor informed the BLM that there was not enough light left to get any horses to the trap, and he would leave them along the division fence and begin working with again the following day. The most distance any horse traveled was approximately 10 miles, with most traveling a much less distance. The horses determined their own pace.

Why/how did a horse die at the trap site on Saturday?

Unfortunately, a horse did perish at the trap site on Saturday, November 6. This horse came into the trap with two other horses and all were being moved into the crowding alley to create space for an additional group close behind. Two of the horses moved into the crowding alley with no problems; the third horse turned back into the receiving pen, made a lap or so in that area then ran into the panel fence, causing a terminal neck injury. The horse died instantly and was covered as soon as possible. Observers on site witnessed the incident and some were filming at the time. The APHIS vet observed the incident and stated the crew did not put any unnecessary pressure on the horse.

Why are the wings so short at the trap site?

Natural land features are often used at trap locations. In this case, the canyon walls in the area fell directly in line with the trap location and were used in combination with the jute wings to guide the horses.

Why did you not have jute on the entire trap?

It is standard procedure to not have jute on the entire trap location. The horses have to be able to see *through* the trap so they think they can escape, otherwise they would not run into the area because it would appear “enclosed.”

Why put so much pressure on the horses as you bring them into the trap? It seems like you could avoid issues by putting less pressure on the horses.

Some amount of pressure needs to be put on the horses in order to get them in the trap, generally the last ½ mile or few minutes. This pressure is not applied during the entire gathering process. The pilot will generally stay behind the herd with the objective of having the horses drift toward the location on their own. The majority of the time, once horses are brought into the trap location, they are left to settle before moving them into the crowding alley or sorting pens. On some occasions, small groups of horses are brought in shortly after another group has just arrived. In these cases, horses just received at the trap site have a shorter length of time to settle before being moved to the crowding alley.

Why is the trap pen configuration so small?

Larger sorting pens at the trap would increase the opportunity for injury to the horses because it increases their ability to run and make more movements dangerous to themselves and/or other horses.

What is the BLM Wild Horse and Burro National Strategy?

In October 2009, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar has proposed a national solution to put the Wild Horse and Burro program on a sustainable track. The initiative proposes three strategies to improve the protection and management of wild horses:

- Managing sustainable herds on Western rangelands through the aggressive application of fertility-control measures.
- Establishing new wild horse preserves, particularly in the Midwest and East, for horses that must be removed from Western rangelands.
- Providing special designations for selected treasured herds in the West.

The BLM received approximately 9,000 comment letters and e-mails on the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Strategy Development Document. The document described draft goals, objectives, and possible management actions for future wild horse and burro management and was released to the public on June 3, 2010, for a 60-day review and comment period. As part of the BLM's public engagement effort, the National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board also hosted a public workshop on key management issues on June 14, 2010. Because of the high degree of public interest in the Strategy Development Document, the BLM extended the public comment period on the document for another 30 days (to September 3).

In the weeks ahead, the BLM will be carefully considering all the comments received to develop a draft strategy for the future management of America's wild horses and burros. As part of this effort, the BLM is continuing to conduct a detailed analysis of all the comments received. When that analysis is complete, additional information about the breadth, scope, and diversity of the comments received will be accessible at www.blm.gov.

The BLM plans to make the draft management strategy available for a 30-day public comment and review period in about mid-December.

What does BLM do to ensure the safety of the horses?

During the gather operation, horses are guided, sometimes over long distances and over rough terrain, to temporary corrals that serve as a trap. The BLM recognizes the stress and potential danger to the horses inherent in a gather operation. Helicopter operators are experienced professionals who take reasonable measures to not overstress the traveling herds, maintaining pressure on the horses only as needed to keep them moving towards the trap. The mortality rate resulting from helicopter-driven gathers is less than one percent. In 2009, the number of gather-related fatalities (out of more than 7,500 horses gathered) was just over half a percent. This is a remarkable accomplishment, a tribute to the experienced, trained BLM staff and contractors who conduct the operation. The BLM takes many reasonable precautions during gathers to ensure the humane treatment of the horses and the safety of all involved personnel. An enhanced animal welfare program will definitely be part of our final National strategy, and in the interest of transparency the BLM is already allowing outside observers to monitor and report on gather activities.

Additional information about the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro program in Oregon and Washington is available online at:

<http://www.blm.gov/or/resources/whb/>

How many horses were actually gathered, removed, returned to the range, etc.?

The Warm Springs wild horse gather concluded on November 13 with 281 horses gathered.

- 12 stallions, 3 mares and 3 foals were located on the range but not gathered.
- Approximately 15 burros were also not gathered.
- 36 gathered stallions and 47 gathered mares were released back to the range.
- 32 of the gathered mares were treated with PZP.
- Approximately 10 stallions will be gelded at Oregon's Wild Horse Corral Facility in Hines and returned to the Warm Springs herd management area in the near future.