

Animal Evaluation and Response

A. Euthanasia for Reasons Related to Acts of Mercy, Health and Safety

The Authorized Officer (AO) will euthanize or authorize the euthanasia of a wild horse or burro when any of the following conditions exist:

- (1) A chronic or incurable disease, injury, lameness, or serious physical defect (includes severe tooth loss or wear, club foot, and other severe acquired or congenital abnormalities);
- (2) A Henneke body condition score of less than three with a poor or hopeless prognosis for improvement;
- (3) An acute or chronic illness, injury, physical condition, or lameness that cannot be treated or has a poor or hopeless prognosis for recovery;
- (4) An order from a state or federal animal health official authorizing the humane destruction of the animal(s) as a disease control measure;
- (5) The animal exhibits dangerous characteristics beyond those inherently associated with the wild characteristics of wild horses and burros; or
- (6) The animal poses a public safety hazard (e.g., loose on a busy highway) and an alternative remedy (capture or return to a herd management area (HMA)) is not immediately available.

B. Authorized Delegations and Required Training

I. Authority to Authorize Euthanasia

Decisions regarding the euthanasia of a wild horse or burro rest solely with the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) AO, defined in 43 C.F.R. 4700.0-5 as "any employee of the Bureau of Land Management to whom has been delegated the authority to perform the duties described herein," and further defined by BLM Manual – 1203 or the Authorized Officer's Representative (AR) (persons designated by the AO as described in 43 C.F.R. 4730.1). In some cases, the decision to euthanize an animal must be made in the field and cannot always be anticipated. To minimize suffering by providing euthanasia in a timely manner, managers should have a sufficient number of individuals trained to perform euthanasia that meet the state director's firearm standards, the requirements outlined in 43 C.F.R. 4700, and in this Instruction Memorandum. When possible, a veterinarian should be consulted prior to euthanasia unless circumstances necessitating euthanasia are obvious (e.g., a broken leg or other severe injury) and a logistical delay in obtaining this consultation would only prolong an animal's suffering.

II. Authorization to Perform Euthanasia

Authorized Officers may delegate the authority to perform euthanasia in writing to anyone known to the AO to have the required training, skill, experience, and equipment to perform

euthanasia described in this policy (See Section D, How Euthanasia Will Be Performed). Individuals to whom the AO may consider delegating this authority include: BLM employees, veterinarians, individuals under contract with the BLM, individuals performing duties under assistance agreements with the BLM, federal or state wildlife management officers, animal control officers, and law enforcement officers.

On gathers, at preparation facilities (facilities where animals are prepared for transport or adoption), at short-term holding (STH) or long-term pasture (LTP) facilities, inmate training facilities and at eco-sanctuaries, the AO is responsible for ensuring trained personnel are available to perform euthanasia at appropriate times. This includes anytime when wild horses or burros are being captured, sorted, worked, or loaded for transportation, regardless of location. At adoptions and public events, the AO will ensure that a veterinarian is on-site or on-call to perform timely and discreet euthanasia if necessary as an act of mercy.

III. Training Requirements

Only persons trained by a veterinarian will be authorized to perform euthanasia. This training may be provided by any veterinarian known to the AO to have the necessary knowledge and experience to provide this guidance to lay persons. This training will not be required to be completed on an annual basis; however, the Washington Office (WO) may direct individuals to take refresher training if there are significant changes in the acceptable practices.

When a firearm is used to perform euthanasia by a non-BLM employee, that individual must have formal training or certification in firearms safety. Appropriate certification for non-BLM personnel would include a hunter or firearms safety qualification recognized as satisfying a state-mandated hunter safety requirement or a firearms safety class certified by the National Rifle Association, law enforcement, or military program.

BLM employees performing euthanasia must be authorized to use a firearm by the state director and meet all requirements specified in the state office firearms policy. If a state has not issued a firearms policy addressing Wild Horses and Burros (WH&B) euthanasia, the BLM employees performing euthanasia must complete annual training for certification in firearms safety and shooting proficiency in accordance with the BLM Handbook H-1112-2, Safety and Health for Field Operations.

C. Euthanasia Related to Specific WH&B Management Activities

I. Euthanasia During Gather Operations

This section sets euthanasia policy during WH&B gather operations. For a description of the Organizational Chain of Command at gathers as well as roles and responsibilities of all gather personnel and contractors, see IM No. 2013-060, Wild Horse and Burro Gathers: Management by Incident Command System.

During gather operations, the Lead Contracting Officers Representative (COR), as delegated by the AO prior to the gather, will authorize the release or euthanasia of any wild horse or burro that

they believe will not tolerate the handling stress associated with transportation, adoption preparation, or holding. No wild horse or burro should be released or shipped to a preparation or other facility with a preexisting condition that requires immediate euthanasia as an act of mercy. The Incident Commander (IC) or COR should, as an act of mercy and after consultation with the on-site veterinarian, euthanize any animal that meets any of the conditions described in A1 through A6 above.

II. Euthanasia On-The-Range

This section sets euthanasia policy for the BLM in field situations associated with on-the range WH&B management, including lands other than those administered by the BLM where WH&Bs are present.

The BLM WH&B specialist responsible for management of an HMA will evaluate the condition of wild horses and burros throughout the year during routine resource monitoring efforts. If an animal is found to be suffering from any of the conditions listed in A1 through A6 above, the animal should be euthanized, if possible, on the range as an act of mercy. If euthanasia is not possible, humane killing as described in Section D below may be performed as an act of mercy.

On the range, the euthanasia may be performed by any BLM employee or other qualified individual that has been delegated that authority by the AO, has had the required training in euthanasia and firearms safety as described above and has the appropriate equipment available.

III. Euthanasia at Short-Term Holding, and Preparation and Inmate Training Facilities

This section sets euthanasia policy for the BLM in short-term holding (STH) facilities. If euthanasia is necessary at a STH facility, it will be performed by a trained and qualified individual as authorized by the AO. The BLM employees and contractors follow comprehensive animal welfare guidelines to protect the health and welfare of wild horses and burros under their care. However, acute or chronic problems can develop during captivity and the handling of wild animals that are most humanely addressed by euthanasia. Some conditions may not immediately be apparent during gathers or other points of origin, require additional assessment or evaluation over time, or may best be addressed after an animal is moved to a STH or preparation facility. Euthanasia at all STH and preparation facilities will be applied as follows:

- (a) If an animal is affected by any of the conditions described in A1 through A6 above that causes acute pain or suffering and immediate euthanasia would be an act of mercy, the AO or AR must ensure the animal is immediately euthanized.

- (b) If an animal is affected by any of the conditions described in A1 through A6 above, but is not in acute pain, the AO should first consult a veterinarian. For example, if the animal has a physical defect or deformity that would adversely impact its quality of life if it were placed in the adoption program or in long-term pasture facilities, but acute suffering is not apparent, a veterinarian should be consulted prior to euthanasia. If the consultation confirms the animal meets a condition described in A1 through A6 above, the animal will be euthanized in a timely manner.

(c) If the AO or AR concludes, after consultation with a veterinarian, that an animal in a STH facility is affected by any of the conditions described in A1 through A6 or cannot tolerate the stress of transportation to another facility or adoption preparation, then the animal will be euthanized.

IV. Euthanasia at Long-Term Pasture Facilities or Eco-Sanctuaries

This section sets euthanasia policy for the BLM at LTP and eco-sanctuary facilities. For LTPs, the BLM COR or Project Inspector (PI), and for eco-sanctuaries, the Program Officer (PO) or PI responsible for oversight of the agreement will evaluate all horses and burros and establish their body condition periodically throughout the year, particularly if the facility is experiencing drought or some other event that might limit forage availability. During the year, if any animal is affected by any of the conditions listed in A1 through A6 above, the COR, PO, PI, contractor, partner or another person authorized by the AO and meeting the requirements found in Section B of this IM will euthanize that animal, if possible. On an annual basis, a team will formally evaluate the condition of each animal on the LTPs and eco-sanctuaries. The evaluation team will consist of a BLM WH&B specialist and a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) or other veterinarian acceptable to the BLM. The action plan for the formal evaluation is as follows:

(a) All animals will be inspected by field observation to evaluate their apparent health, overall condition and body condition, and identify animals that may need to be euthanized to prevent a slow death due to a deterioration of their condition. This evaluation will be based on a visual inspection and the Henneke body condition scoring system. The evaluations should be conducted prior to severe winter weather to identify horses with body condition scores of three or less.

(b) Animals with a body condition score of three or less that appear to be acutely suffering will be euthanized in the field by the PI or designated person such as the contractor, within 24 hours of the evaluation. Animals that are chronically affected with a body condition score of less than three will be euthanized within 2 weeks. Horses with a score of three will remain in the field and will be reevaluated by the contractor and the PI for that contract in 60 days to see if their condition is improving, staying the same or declining. Those that are declining in condition will be euthanized as soon as possible after the second evaluation.

(c) Arrangements for carcass disposal for euthanized animals will be in accordance with applicable state and county laws and ordinances.

V. Euthanasia During Transportation

Problems can develop during transport, or become exacerbated by transportation, of an animal. If emergency euthanasia is necessary during transportation for any of the conditions described in A1 through A6 above, the truck driver will immediately contact the AO, the COR, or other identified BLM representative. Under these circumstances, a veterinarian should be contacted immediately to evaluate the animal and perform euthanasia if indicated as soon as possible. If

necessary, the animal(s) may need to be off-loaded at the closest BLM or suitable livestock handling facility to ensure that euthanasia can be performed safely and effectively.

VI. Euthanasia at Adoptions or Public Events

The AO will ensure that a veterinarian is on-site or on-call and available to respond within 2 hours at any adoption or public event. If a veterinarian is unable to respond within that timeframe, the animal should be loaded on to a trailer and taken to the closest qualified veterinarian. The AO will consult with the veterinarian prior to deciding to euthanize an animal and the veterinarian will perform the euthanasia in a timely and discreet manner.

VII. Euthanasia of a Large Number of Animals

When the need for euthanasia of a large number of animals is anticipated for reasons related to acts of mercy, chronic or acute injury, disease or safety, the likely course of action should be identified and outlined in advance whenever possible. When field monitoring and pre-gather planning identify an increased likelihood that large numbers of animals may need to be euthanized during a gather, this should be addressed in the gather plan. In an on-the-range, preparation, STH, LTP, or eco-sanctuary facility situation, where a gather is not involved, advance planning should also be completed by the AO whenever possible. Arrangements should be made for a USDA APHIS or other veterinarian experienced with WH&B to visit the site and consult with the AO on euthanasia decisions. This consultation should be based on an examination of the animals by the veterinarian. It should include a detailed, written evaluation of the Attachment 2-6 conditions, circumstances or history of the situation and the number of animals involved. Where appropriate, this information should be specific for each animal affected. During this planning stage, it is critical that the AO include the state office WH&B program lead, appropriate state office, district office, and field managers, and any contractors that may be involved.

VIII. Euthanasia of Unusually Dangerous Animals

Unusually aggressive wild horses and burros can pose an unacceptable risk of injury to personnel when maintained in enclosed spaces where some level of handling is required. In rare cases, animals on the range can also be dangerous to domestic animals and/or people. When a horse or burro is unusually dangerous, it is reasonable to conclude that an average adopter could not humanely care for the animal as required by the regulations (e.g., provide proper transportation, feeding, medical care and handling, 43 C.F.R. 4750.1). The BLM cannot solve the problem by removing unusually dangerous animals from the adoption system and placing them in a LTP or eco-sanctuary facility because this resolution also poses significant risk of injury, both to animals in transport, and to the BLM personnel and LTP and eco-sanctuary operators. When deciding to euthanize an animal because it is unusually dangerous, the AO, in consultation with a veterinarian or other individuals with expertise in animal care, handling and behavior (as designated by the AO), must determine that the animal poses a significant and unusual danger to people or other animals beyond that normally associated with wild horses and burros. The AO must document the aspects of the animal's behavior that make it unusually dangerous and

include this documentation in a report that should be maintained in the appropriate HMA case file and recorded in the Wild Horse and Burro Program System (WHBPS).

D. How Euthanasia will be Performed

When necessary, euthanasia will be performed in a dignified and discreet manner that is recognized and approved by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) in their Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals: 2013 Edition. Two methods will be used as follows: 1) injection of a lethal dose of a barbiturate derivative such as sodium pentobarbital solution, or 2) gunshot to the brain of an animal that is calm and still, or humanely-restrained. Since this IM only pertains to euthanasia by firearms, lethal injection will not be addressed.

A properly placed gunshot to the brain of an animal that is calm and still, or humanely-restrained, instantly produces an unconscious state followed quickly by a painless and humane death. This method of euthanizing wild horses and burros requires only a minimum of handling and restraint; and, when performed on the range, drug residues that may poison wildlife or enter the environment following carcass disposal are not a concern. Only qualified and experienced persons skilled in the safe handling and use of firearms and trained by a veterinarian will perform the procedure. The optimal placement of a gunshot is from the front of the animal, perpendicular to the skull at a point 1 inch above the intersection of two imaginary diagonal lines drawn like an "X" from the eyes to the base of the ears. Typically, when euthanizing a wild horse or burro in this manner, the animal will be approached to within 5-to-6 feet and the gun will be held within a few inches or up to 2-to-3 feet from the animal.

For familiarity among operators, the preferred firearm for routine use will be a 22 magnum caliber revolver. A 22 long rifle caliber revolver may also be used and some other types and calibers of firearms typical for law enforcement or self-defense use (9mm, 38, 357, 40, or 45 calibers), if they are familiar to the operator. Carbine rifles in lieu of a handgun in these same calibers can also be effective when used at the same distances described above for handguns. The 22 magnum is highly effective, easily controlled and offers the lowest risk of ricochet or having the bullet exit the carcass. Only hollow point or other controlled expansion types of bullets should be used to maximize tissue destruction while minimizing the risk of ricochet or having the bullet exit the carcass. Animals may be euthanized while standing calmly on a trailer or confined in a small pen, portion of an alleyway or chute if the operator can get adequate visual and physical access to the animal. This is most easily and safely accomplished if the operator can be positioned above the animal. Animals that may be agitated, fractious or will not stand calmly may need to be placed in a chute or tied down for restraint; and this may be preferable for safety and reliability. Euthanasia should not be attempted when restraint is not adequate or the animal is not standing quietly. Animals moving freely in a large open pen are generally not adequately restrained and euthanasia should not be attempted. When more than one animal must be euthanized at one time, the procedure may be done at one time in the same trailer or chute, but they should be in separate compartments.

Following euthanasia, death must be verified prior to moving the carcass for disposal. The animal should be examined for cessation of vital signs including pulse and rhythmic breathing. Complete pupillary dilation and a lack of the corneal reflex are other indicators that death has

occurred. Unconscious animals should only be restrained, handled and moved as if they were conscious until death is confirmed. Carcass disposal should be in accordance with state and local requirements, where applicable.

As recognized by the AVMA, circumstances exist with free-roaming wild animals where capture and chemical or physical restraint may not be practical prior to euthanasia and may only serve to prolong or exacerbate the distress of an injured or suffering animal. Under these conditions, and when an animal cannot be approached within a few feet, humane killing may be indicated to end the animal's suffering as quickly and humanely as possible. In these instances, methods typically used when hunting big-game animals of North America (e.g., elk, moose) in an ethical and responsible manner will be employed. It is not appropriate in these instances to use smaller caliber (e.g., 5.56 mm) rifles or other weapons targeted at the brain from longer distances. High-powered rifles targeted at the heart/lung or shoulder areas of an animal standing still and at typical hunting distances will be used in this circumstance. For familiarity among operators, the recommended firearm for this routine use is a bolt-action scoped rifle in a 30-06 caliber. Other firearm types and calibers with similar killing power typical for hunting large North American big-game animals (7mm magnum, .270, .308, .338 Win Mag, etc.) may be used if they are familiar to the operator. However, a .30-06 bolt action scoped rifle sighted in for 200 yards offers a predictable and ethical means of quickly killing a large animal in the most humane manner possible under these circumstances. Only hollow point or other controlled expansion types of bullets should be used to maximize tissue destruction and minimize the risk of ricochet. It is not appropriate to substitute the use of a high-powered rifle from a distance for euthanasia using a gunshot to the brain when an animal can be restrained or in situations such as during gathers, or at temporary or STH facilities when restraint and use of a more conventional euthanasia technique can be applied.

As noted by the AVMA Panel on Euthanasia, the psychological response experienced by people when observing euthanasia or death in any form is an emotional one dependent on the background of the observer. Grief and distress over the loss of life are the most common reactions. Expert technique and maintaining a calm and professional atmosphere during the procedure can help minimize these reactions in the persons who must perform the procedures as well as co-workers or bystanders. For safety as well as discretion, only mission-critical persons should be nearby when euthanasia is performed. The BLM employees and contractors involved in or observing the process should behave in a dignified and discreet manner that avoids public spectacle. While these considerations should not outweigh the primary responsibility of using the most rapid and painless euthanasia method possible under the circumstances, animals should be euthanized and carcasses moved away from public view whenever possible; animals may need to be moved off-site prior to euthanasia. In some circumstances, the use of tarps or vehicles as a visual screen may also be appropriate. As noted by the AVMA, circumstances may arise that are not clearly covered by any policy or set of guidelines for euthanasia. Whenever such situations arise, a veterinarian experienced with wild horses and burros should be consulted for their professional judgment of acceptable techniques for euthanasia. The animal's species-specific physiologic and behavioral characteristics, size, approachability and degree of suffering will be taken into consideration. In all situations, the method of euthanasia that minimizes suffering and distress of the animal will be chosen.

E. Documentation and Reporting of Euthanized Animals

A record of an animal's death by euthanasia on the range, during a gather, during transport, at facilities or during an adoption event, will be maintained by the BLM within WHBPS. The death record will identify the animal by using a description (i.e., signalment key) and/or freeze mark if present, the date of the death, where the animal died and the reason(s) that euthanasia was performed. If the euthanasia was performed in the field or during a gather operation, then a copy of the death record should also be maintained in the appropriate HMA case file.

When euthanasia is performed at a gather, the lead COR or IC, in addition to the process detailed above, will report the actions taken during gather operations in the comment section of the Daily Gather Overview, and in the Final Gather Data Report (Attachment 4) in accordance with IM No. 2013-061, Wild Horse and Burro Gathers: Internal and External Communication and Reporting.

F. Planning and Communication

The WH&B specialist or the BLM employee responsible for an HMA, facility or public event is responsible for having a euthanasia plan of action in place at all times where there are federally protected wild horses and burros. The plan will address practical considerations such as (1) who will have designated authority to make decisions regarding euthanasia; (2) who will perform the procedure; (3) what method(s) of euthanasia will be used; and (4) how carcass disposal will be addressed.

When a large number of animals may need to be euthanized, a communications plan for internal and external contacts (including early alerts to state and Washington offices) should be developed in advance and implemented concurrently while addressing the situation at-hand. The communications plan should address the need for the action, as well as the appropriate messages to the public and the media, including why animals are being euthanized and how the action is consistent with the BLM's responsibilities and policy.

All operation plans for gathers, adoptions and public events where it is possible that animals may need to be euthanized will include contingency plans that address the capability for performing the function. Each state will develop and implement a training and certification plan for those employees that will be tasked with euthanizing animals. A veterinarian will be present or on-call for all gathers, adoptions, and public events.