



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Report to Congress: An Analysis of Achieving a Sustainable Wild Horse and Burro Program

Fact Sheet

The Bureau of Land Management submitted a Report to Congress for achieving healthy and sustainable populations of wild horses and burros on public lands on May 8, 2020

- The report was first requested by Congress through its Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2019 and associated House Report 115-765.
- In addition, report language attached to the Fiscal Year 2020 Appropriations Act also asked BLM to provide additional information regarding the Wild Horse and Burro Program.
- This analysis follows a similar report BLM submitted to Congress on April 26, 2018.

The BLM outlined management activities and funding needed to achieve appropriate management level on public lands over 15-18 years through a combination of gathers, holding, and fertility control treatments

- To begin immediately addressing record levels of overpopulation in wild horse and burro herds, the BLM proposes gathering between 20,000 and 30,000 animals annually using a combination of bait-trap and helicopter assisted gather methods.
- Of those gathered each year, between 3,500 and 9,000 animals would initially be treated with fertility control and released back to the range.
- Approximately 18,000-20,000 animals would be removed from the range annually and placed into the Adoption and Sale Program and off-range holding until appropriate management level is reached.
- The BLM would continue to support the Adoption Incentive Program, which launched in March of 2019 and provides up to \$1,000 to adopt an untrained wild horse or burro.
- In coordination with effective public-private partnerships, the BLM anticipates placing a total of approximately 7,000 animals into private care each year.
- The BLM would work to identify partner organizations able and willing to facilitate private care placements and house/care for as many animals as possible. Animals that are not adopted or sold to good homes would be cared for by the BLM for the duration of their lives in off-range pastures.

The BLM supports innovative, non-lethal management of wild horses and burros by pairing proven management tools with promising new methods for protecting herd and habitat health

- Gathering and removing excess animals remains the best, most effective tool for quickly and humanely reducing overpopulation and protecting herd and rangeland health.
- With animals living 20-30 years on the range, a fully non-reproducing herd that is just 100 percent above appropriate management level could take 15 or more years to reach AML through natural mortality alone.
- Available fertility-control treatments like *Porcine Zona Pellucida* are only effective at preventing pregnancy in wild mares for 1-2 years, and treatments are expensive: the BLM must gather twice as many animals as those treated (50 percent of the population are mares and 90 percent of those are of treatable age), which costs approximately \$2,900 per treated mare per year.

- Capitalizing on the agency's successful research and development efforts, the BLM intends to increase the use of *Gonakon*, a longer-term vaccine that can prevent pregnancy for 4-5 years.
- As part of a sustained fertility control program, the BLM supports humane methods of spaying some wild horses and burros as a method of slowing population growth and reducing the need for gathers.
- Sterilizing some wild horses in herds where it's infeasible to use short-lasting fertility control treatments [is supported by the American Association of Equine Practitioners and American Veterinary Medical Association](#) – two of the largest equine veterinarian associations in the world.

The plan includes early investments to reduce overpopulation and expand fertility control efforts, after which costs are projected to decrease as populations stabilize

- Because overpopulation is at record levels, it will take a sustained investment from Congress to implement a strategy that will be effective at achieving appropriate management level within a timeframe consistent with Congressional direction and protecting range and herd health.
- Under the strategy included in the Report, annual program costs are expected to rise from \$116.81 million in Year 1 to an estimated \$238 million by Year 5, continuing to increase thereafter until appropriate management level is achieved.
- The rise in program costs are primarily driven by inflation, additional animals in off-range holding facilities and management actions related to fertility control.
- The cost of doing nothing would be high: wild horse and burro populations on BLM-managed public lands could reach 2.8 million by 2040. However, well before reaching this level, the population levels would likely become unsustainable for the lands within and adjacent to herd management areas, leading to catastrophic harm to the land, to other species, and to wild horses and burros themselves.

The analysis included in the report represents the BLM's best plan for preventing runaway population growth and damage to public rangelands and herd health

- At the time the report was drafted, more than 88,000 wild horses and burros were estimated to be roaming BLM-managed public rangelands as of March 1, 2019 – the highest level since receiving federal protection in 1971 and more than three times what is healthy and sustainable for the land. New population estimates now suggest the population exceeds 95,000.
- Without any natural predators that can significantly control growth, wild horse and burro herds increase exponentially at 15-20 percent each year, which can double herd size every 4-5 years.
- Overpopulated herds are already damaging grazing lands and sensitive water sources, and these issues are expected to significantly increase as the population continues to grow exponentially.
- A boom-bust population cycle is not only inhumane and immoral, but it also perpetuates the destruction of healthy habitat and the spread of invasive weeds on public lands.

The primary features of the plan – gathers and fertility control treatments to reach appropriate management level – reflect provisions in recent proposals from private organizations, external experts and BLM's National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board.

To access the report to Congress or to learn more about the BLM or the Wild Horse and Burro Program, including the latest population estimates and other program data, visit www.BLM.gov/WHB.