

“2020 Buffalo Hills and Granite Range HMAs Wild Horse and Burro Gather” Questions and Answers

Q. What is the official name for this gather?

A. 2020 Buffalo Hills and Granite Range HMAs Wild Horse and Burro Gather

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

A. Yes. A PAO will meet the public each morning at a specified location to escort them to the gather sites. Limitations will only be imposed to ensure safety and accomplishment of the mission. A “Know Before You Go” handout will also be posted on the BLM website so observers are adequately prepared for the conditions on the gather sites.

All media and/or visitors wanting to go to the gather site will need to call the “Buffalo Hills / Granite Range Wild Horse Gather information hotline” at 775-861-6700 for daily meeting times as the time to meet is subject to change. The meeting location will be at Bruno’s Country Club located at 445 Main Street in Gerlach, Nevada.

Q. Why is this gather necessary?

A. The helicopter gather is necessary to prevent undue or unnecessary risk to motorists travelling Highways 34 and 447 with excess wild horses, and to restore a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship on public lands, consistent with the provisions of Section 1333(b) of the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act. The BLM strives to be a good neighbor in the communities we serve; ensuring public safety within and outside of the HMAs is not at risk due to the overpopulation of wild horses and providing opportunities for other wildlife, such as pronghorn antelope and Elk, to have a thriving ecosystem.

The Buffalo Hills HMA is over-populated, wild horses are congregating near Squaw Valley Reservoir near Highway 447, and wild burros (HMA is not managed for wild burros) have moved into the HMA from the Twin Peaks HMA. Regular monitoring has occurred in the complex to observe wild horse and burro body condition; most animals observed have a Body Condition Score (BCS) of [3-5], based on the Henneke Body Condition Chart.

The Granite Range HMA has horses leaving the HMA boundary in search of reliable forage and water near Highway 34 and the Granite Creek Ranch causing undue risk to motorists travelling this area.

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

A. The BLM will gather and remove up to 100 excess wild horses and 175 wild burros from in and around the Buffalo Hills and Granite Range HMAs, located in Pershing and Washoe counties, about 10-40 miles north of Gerlach, Nevada.

Q. How many horses will be released back to the range during this gather operation?

A. There is no plan to release any horses or burros back into the HMAs – this gather is to address over-population of the animals and public health and safety issues as horses are entering main highways.

Q. What will the remaining herd population of these HMAs be?

A. Approximately 423 wild horses will remain in the Buffalo Hills HMA. Approximately 155 wild horses will remain in the Granite Range HMA.

Q. Is there livestock grazing in this area?

A. Yes, the Buffalo Hills and Granite Range HMAs includes portions of the Buffalo Hills livestock grazing allotment, allocated for both cattle and sheep. Livestock grazing permittees have voluntarily reduced their use based on drought, limited forage, wild horse and burro numbers in excess of Appropriate

Management Level (AML) and horse impacts to existing limited water sources. Livestock use complies with the grazing system outlined in the final multiple use decisions, agreements and term permit conditions that provide for periodic rest and deferment of key range sites.

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

A. No. The BLM carries out removal of wild horses and burros from public rangelands to ensure rangeland health and in accordance with land-use plans that were 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-administered lands 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. Does the wild horse overpopulation impact wildlife and plants?

A. Common wildlife species within the HMAs include coyote, black-tail jackrabbit, desert cottontail, bobcat, Greater Sage Grouse, and numerous raptors, reptiles and other small mammal species. Mule deer, Big Horn Sheep and pronghorn antelope are common big game species in the area. Currently, the overabundant population of wild horses is adversely affecting valuable habitat needed to support both wildlife and wild horses.

Wild horses often graze the same area repeatedly throughout the year. Forage plants in those areas receive little rest from grazing pressure. Continuous grazing by wild horses does not allow plants sufficient time to recover from grazing impacts. Such overgrazing results in reduced plant health, vigor, reproduction, and ultimately to a loss of native forage species from natural plant communities. Over time, this greatly diminishes habitat quality as abundance and the long-term production of desired plant communities is and will be compromised. If wild horse populations are not controlled in this area, forage utilization will exceed the capacity of the range.

Q. What are some of the effects of wild horse overpopulation on Threatened and Endangered Species?

A. Maintaining the existing wild horse over-population, which would increase with each successive foal crop, (approximately 15-20% annually in the HMAs) would result in continued and increasing impacts to threatened and endangered species populations and habitats. Upland habitats would continue to see locally heavy levels of utilization associated with wild horse use, in which areas of heavy use would continue to expand as wild horse populations continue to grow. Continued heavy grazing would occur on spring meadow systems and creeks adversely effecting Sage grouse, and Lahontan Cutthroat Trout Habitats.

Q. Why is the BLM removing horses when there is already nearly 47,000 animals currently 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.

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 over the last 10-plus years, leaving the federal agency in the unsustainable position of gathering excess horses while its holding costs spiral upward.

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

A. That will be determined by the Lead COR and the contractor but varies depending on health of the animals, terrain and weather.

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. What Contractor will be used for this Gather?

A. Cattoor Livestock Roundup Inc. of Nephi, Utah

Q. How much will this gather cost?

A. The BLM will calculate costs at the end of the gather.

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

A. The BLM gathers horses with different body 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.

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 for EIA, and freeze-marked (marked with a cold brand).

Q. Where do the removed horses go?

A. Excess wild horses, removed from this gather, will be shipped to the Litchfield Off-Range Corrals located 21 miles east of Susanville, Calif., where they will be prepared for the BLM's adoption and sales programs or long-term holding facilities located in Midwestern pastures.

Q. What happens to horses that are not adopted?

A. Un-adopted horses are fed and cared for in either short-term corrals or long-term 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.

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

A. No. 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. Where may I learn more about the Wild Horse and Burro Program?

A. The BLM's Website is located at www.blm.gov/whb.