

Questions and Answers

Pine Nut Mountains Wild Horse Gather

(HMAs to be gathered: Pine Nut Mountains)

July 2019

Q. Why is this gather necessary?

A. The helicopter-gather is necessary to prevent undue or unnecessary degradation of the public lands associated 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 is not at risk due to the overpopulation of wild horses and providing opportunities for economic growth with space for traditional uses. The Pine Nut Mountains Herd Management Area (HMA) is over populated and animals are foraging outside of the HMA boundaries for food and water. Regular monitoring has occurred in the HMA to observe wild horse body condition. Most animals have been observed to be in adequate body condition (a score of 3, thin, or above).

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. Due to the size of the HMA, number of animals needing to be removed, Terrain, topography and limited access to water sources. A helicopter gather is the best option for this area.

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

A. Total number of wild horses gathered in the Pine Nut Mountains HMA: 148 gathered and 109 removed.

Q. What will the remaining herd population of this HMA Area be?

A. Approximately 119 horses will remain in and around the HMA, which includes wild horses in the Fish Springs area. The Fish Springs area is not part of this gather operation.

Q. Is there livestock grazing in this area?

A. Yes, the Pine Nut Mountains HMA includes portions of nine livestock grazing allotments, but only two allotments have been grazed in the past 10 years. One livestock grazing permittee has voluntarily reduced their use based on drought, limited forage, wild horse numbers in excess of

AML, and horse impacts to existing limited water sources. The six other allotments have not been grazed because there are no permits assigned. Livestock use is in compliance 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 removal of wild horses and burros from public rangelands is carried out to ensure rangeland health, in accordance with land-use plans that are 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-managed land 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 HMA include coyote, black-tail jackrabbit, desert cottontail, bobcat and numerous raptors, reptiles and other small mammal species. Mule deer and pronghorn antelope are common big game species in the area. The HMA also contains proposed Critical Habitat for the Bi-state sage grouse, which is currently proposed for listing as Threatened. Currently, the overabundant population of wild horses is adversely affecting valuable habitat needed to support both wildlife and wild horses and is adversely impacting habitat for the Bi-state sage grouse

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 long-term production of desired plant communities is 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, would result in continued and increasing impacts to threatened and endangered species populations and habitats. Wild horse populations would increase (about 15-25% each year that a gather is postponed). Upland habitats would continue to see locally heavy levels of utilization associated with wild horse use, and these 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 affecting Bi-state sage-grouse, which are currently proposed for listing. There are no known populations of T&E species within the HMA; however, there is one known population of threatened Webber's ivesia located south of the HMA, within the Pine Nut range, and there is potential habitat for the plant located within the HMA. There is very little known about the species, but it is suspected that trampling of the plant and impacts to its habitat would occur as a result of wild horses.

Q. Why is the BLM removing horses when there are already nearly 46,000 animals 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.

The current estimated on-range wild horse and burro population (as of March 1, 2019) is 81,951, a 13 percent increase over the 2017 estimate of 72,674. That means the current West-wide on-range population exceeds AML by nearly 55,000. (This year's 13 percent increase compares to an eight percent increase from 2016 to 2017, which is consistent with the BLM's finding that wild horse and burro herds double in size about every four or five years.)

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 years, leaving the agency in the unsustainable position of gathering excess horses while its holding costs spiral upward.

Q. How much will this gather cost?

A. The costs for the gather will be calculated at the end of the gather and estimates are unavailable at this time. Due to the rules and regulations governing contract oversight, we are unable to provide the amount the contract was awarded for at this time.

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. This area was last gathered in 2010.

Q. Where do the removed horses go?

A. Excess wild horses, removed from the range, will be shipped to the National Wild Horse and Burro Center at Palomino Valley just north of Reno, Nevada where they will be prepared for the BLM's adoption program or long-term holding 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 Midwestern 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.) 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. Will any of the horses be sent to slaughter?

A. No. As noted above, while a December 2004 amendment to the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act authorizes the BLM to sell sale-eligible animals "without limitation," the BLM has **not been and is not selling any wild horses to slaughterhouses or to "killer buyers."**

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

Q. Will there be any designated public observation?

A. Yes, we are currently looking at locations accessible to the public.

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

A. The final location for trap sites will be determined in the field based on conditions and access.

Q. What Contractor will be used for this Gather?

A. Sampson Livestock out of Meadow, UT.

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. How many of the mares gathered during this roundup will the BLM treat with the fertility-control vaccine PZP?

Approximately 16

Q. How does PZP affect the mares?

A. The PZP application doesn't interfere with a mare's pregnancy if the vaccine is applied while she is pregnant. The foal will be born normal and healthy. The PZP vaccine will start to take effect while the mare is pregnant, so after the foal is born, the mare will be less likely to become pregnant for about the next two years.

Indications from research conducted on Assateague Island National Seashore (managed by the National Park Service) suggest that PZP does not affect the foaling seasonality. While it remains to be seen if this will hold true on Western rangelands, there is no indication that there are any negative effects on foal survival following treatment of a herd.

Q. Will horses be gathered outside the HMA within the Fish Springs Area?

The BLM is currently working with the Pine Nut Advocacy group on the PZP project in this area. No horses will be gathered from this area during the helicopter gather.

Q. Where may I learn more about the Wild Horse and Burro Program?

A. Please visit the BLM's Website at www.blm.gov.