

# **Bureau of Land Management**

## **Visitation Protocol and Ground Rules for the West Douglas Herd Area Wild Horse Gather**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recognizes and respects the right of interested members of the public and the press to observe the West Douglas Herd Area (WD HA) wild horse gather. At the same time, BLM must ensure the health and safety of the public, BLM's employees and contractors, and America's wild horses. Accordingly, BLM developed these rules to maximize the opportunity for reasonable public access to the gather while ensuring that BLM's health and safety responsibilities are fulfilled. Failure to maintain safe distances from operations at the gather and temporary holding sites could result in members of the public inadvertently getting in the path of the wild horses or gather personnel, thereby placing themselves and others at risk, or causing stress and potential injury to the wild horses and burros.

- The [CDC](#) has offered guidance to help people visiting public lands prevent the spread of infectious diseases. We will continue to monitor all functions to ensure that visitors adhere to CDC guidance for mitigating risks associated with the transmission of COVID-19 and take any additional steps necessary to protect public health.
- Public observation opportunities and gather operations may be suspended if bad weather conditions create unsafe flying conditions. A Wild Horse Gather Info Line has been set up at (970) 673-7768 for an update on the next day's gather activities, meeting times, and location.
- Every effort is made to maximize viewing opportunities while ensuring safe and effective gather operations. Once an observation area is determined, it CANNOT be moved during that day's activities unless otherwise directed by the BLM.
  - Individuals will be directed to the designated observation area by BLM personnel and informed of behavioral rules (such as remaining quiet and still to ensure a safe and effective gather operation).
  - Visitors are NOT permitted to walk around the gather site and must be always accompanied by their BLM representative.
- BLM will establish one observation area, in the immediate area of the gather and possibly holding sites; BLM staff will escort individuals to each location. This area will be placed to maximize the opportunity for public observation while providing for a safe and effective wild horse gather. The utilization of such observation areas is necessary due to the use and presence of heavy equipment and aircraft within the gather operation and the critical need to allow BLM personnel and contractors to fully focus on attending to the needs of the wild horses while maintaining a safe environment for all involved. In addition, observation areas will be sited to protect the wild horses from being spooked, startled, or impacted in a manner that results in increased or unnecessary stress.
- Observers must provide their own 4-wheel drive high clearance vehicle, appropriate shoes, clothing, food, water, and extra gas.
- Observers are prohibited from riding in government and contractor vehicles and equipment.
- Observers are prohibited from climbing on to or trespassing into the BLM or Contractor's vehicles, equipment, or corrals.

- When BLM is using a helicopter or other heavy equipment in close proximity to a designated observation area, members of the public may be asked to stay by their vehicle for some time before being escorted to an observation area until the use of the helicopter or the heavy machinery is complete.
- When given the signal that the helicopter is close to the gather site bringing wild horses in, visitors must sit down in areas specified by BLM representatives and must not move or talk as the horses are guided into the corral.
- Visitors must direct their questions and or comments to either their designated BLM representative or the BLM spokesperson on-site. Visitors may not engage other BLM or contract staff disrupting their gather duties and responsibilities - professional and respectful behavior is expected of all.
- The BLM may make other BLM and contractor staff available during down times for a Q&A session.
- Individuals attempting to move outside a designated observation area will be requested to move back to the designated area. Failure to do so may result in being asked to leave the gather operation and/or receive a citation and/or arrest. It is important to stay within the designated observation area to safely observe the wild horse gather.
- Visitors who do not cooperate and follow the rules will be escorted off the gather site by BLM law enforcement personnel and will be prohibited from participating in any subsequent observation days.
- BLM reserves the right to alter these rules based on changes in circumstances that may pose a risk to health, public safety, or the safety of wild horses (such as weather, lightening, wildfire, etc.)