

### **Attachment 3: Questions and Answers (for the Public and Media)**

***Q. What is the official name for this gather?***

**A.** 2021 Four Mile HMA Wild Horse Gather

***Q. Why is this gather necessary?***

**A.** The wild horse 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.

Forage is allocated for 37 wild horses or 444 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) in the Four Mile Herd Management Area (HMA). Monitoring data indicate that when the total horse population begins to reach the upper limit of 60 animals (720 AUMs), resource conditions begin to decline, especially in areas near water sources.

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

**A.** The BLM will gather approximately 189 wild horses and remove approximately 173 excess wild horses from in and around the Four Mile HMA, located in portions of Washington, Payette and Gem Counties, Idaho. It is located approximately 20 miles north of Emmett, ID.

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

**A.** It is estimated that following the gather, approximately 37 wild horses will remain in the Four Mile HMA.

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

**A.** Approximately 16 of the captured wild horses would be released; of these, about eight would be mares treated with fertility control and about eight would be stallions to maintain the proposed 50% male/50% female sex ratio and slow population growth. Stallion characteristics selected for release will maintain a diverse age structure, herd characteristics and body type (conformation). Approximately two mares (of the eight mares released and treated with fertility control) would be selected from another HMA and released into the Four Mile HMA to enhance herd genetics.

***Q. When was the last time that AML was achieved in this HMA?***

**A.** The last time AML was achieved was following a helicopter gather in October 2009, when 123 horses were captured, 112 horses were removed, and 11 horses were released back into the Four Mile HMA. There were no mares treated with the fertility control prior to being released.

***Q. What are the horses from the Four Mile HMA like? What should I expect if I adopt one?***

**A.** Feedback received by the BLM about adopted Four Mile HMA horses has been positive. There is not a lot of historical knowledge about the wild horses within this HMA. Wild horses in the Four Mile HMA are descendants of domestic horses that were released into the wild in the 1800s and early 1900s.

For many years, local residents captured the wild horses and bred them with a variety of private stock. Wild horses in the HMA represent a variety of colors and coat patterns, including grey, bay, sorrel, black, appaloosa, and pinto. Adult horses in the HMA weigh an average of 1,000 pounds and stand between 14 and 15.5 hands, with some individuals standing 16 hands and weighing over 1,200 pounds. Animals in the herd are healthy, with high reproductive rates.

***Q. Are there livestock grazing in this area?***

**A.** Yes. Cattle grazing occurs throughout the Four Mile HMA; the HMA perimeter is fully fenced and encompasses three of the ten pastures of the Willow Ridge Allotment #ID00005 (Joe Hollow #05, Coonrod Gulch #06, and George Way #07 (See Map in Attachment 2). The current permittee, AL Cattle Inc. #1100063, holds the authorization for grazing within the allotment as shown in Tables 2 and 3. The allotment consists of approximately 45,302 total acres, 35,204 acres of BLM, resulting in an approximate stocking rate of 8 acres/AUM.

***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 and animal health, in accordance with land use plans 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% since the 1940s; actual (as distinguished from authorized) livestock grazing on public rangelands has declined by 30% since 1971.

***Q. Does the wild horse overpopulation impact wildlife and plants?***

**A.** Yes, wild horse overpopulation impacts wildlife and plants. Common wildlife species within the Four Mile HMA include coyote, black-tail jackrabbit, desert cottontail, bobcat, and numerous raptors, reptiles and other small mammal species. Mule deer, elk and pronghorn antelope are common big game species in the area.

The Land Use Plan (LUP) allocated forage for different multiple uses, such as wild horses and wildlife. However, when one of those uses— horses in this case—exceeds the population levels and the forage allocated in the LUP, additional impacts to wild horses and other species occur. What our data have shown is that when wild horse populations exceed the high AML of 60, additional utilization and trampling impacts occur in upland areas and around water sources, which are also habitat to several wildlife species. Additional use by wild horses reduces the amount of food for elk and deer, as well as the amount of hiding cover for 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 in 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 continue to be, compromised.

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

**A.** Maintaining the existing wild horse overpopulation, which would increase with each successive foal crop, (approximately 18% annually in the Four Mile HMA) would result in continued and increasing impacts to threatened, endangered, and sensitive species and their habitats. Upland habitats would continue to see 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 springs adversely affecting habitat important to the Greater Sage-grouse as well as a host of other species. An overpopulation of excess horses reduces plant matter compromising watersheds, causing increased soil erosion. BLM sensitive species associated with desert habitats that have been documented to occur in or near (within 5 miles) the HMA include southern Idaho ground squirrels. There is a golden eagle nesting territory about 2.5 miles outside the southeast boundary of the HMA, and a Swainson's hawk nest in the riparian area associated with Four Mile Creek.

The HMA is within the Mountain Valleys Conservation Area for Greater sage-grouse, a BLM special status species, and fully within a General Habitat Management Area designated through the Idaho and Southwestern Montana Greater Sage-grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment (USDI BLM, 2015). There is one lek with undetermined status within the HMA and three leks with undetermined status just outside the western perimeter. However, few areas within the HMA meet the criteria of 15-25 percent canopy cover considered to provide high quality Greater Sage-grouse habitat.

***Q. Why is the BLM removing horses when, as of March 2021, there are already over 51,000 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.

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 continue to rise.

***Q. How much will this gather cost?***

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

***Q. Where do the removed horses go?***

**A.** Excess wild horses removed from the 2021 Four Mile HMA gather, will be transported to the Boise Off-Range Corral Facility, where they will be prepared for the BLM adoption and sales programs.

***Q. What veterinary treatment will the removed horses receive?***

**A.** The horses will be aged (based on the condition of their teeth), dewormed, vaccinated, blood-tested (for Equine Infectious Anemia), and freeze-marked (marked with a cold brand).

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

A. That will be determined by the Lead Contracting Officer Representative (COR) and the contractor but varies depending on health of the animals, terrain and weather. It is anticipated that most groups will be gathered from under 5 miles away from trap sites. The COR and on site APHIS Veterinarian will observe and monitor the horses as they are gathered and make appropriate determinations on travel distances and speeds.

*Q. What Contractor will be used for this Gather?*

A. Sampson Livestock.

*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 more effectively than a horseback rider and can also better move the animals around such barriers as deep ravines, fences or roads.

*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 happens to horses that are not adopted?*

A. Unadopted horses are fed and cared for in either off-range corrals or off-range pastures. Wild horses more than 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. This process differs from adoption, in which 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. Where may I learn more about the Wild Horse and Burro Program?***

**A.** Visit the BLM's Website at [www.blm.gov/whb](http://www.blm.gov/whb).