

## “Questions and Answers” for the FY2022 Fox-Lake Range HMA Wild Horse Gather

The number of media and public in the gather observation site may be limited to allow for social distancing. 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. During the gather, the observants should follow local area health orders including Governor Sisolak’s [standards](#) for individuals, businesses and employers, practice [Leave No Trace](#) principles, practice social distancing and avoid high-risk outdoor activities.

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

**A.** FY2022 Fox & Lake Range HMA Wild Horse Gather

***Q. Where is the HMA located?***

**A.** The Fox-Lake Range HMA is located in Washoe County, approximately 60 miles north of Reno and 20 miles south of Gerlach in Northwest Nevada, and is administered by the BLM Winnemucca District, Black Rock Field Office. The Fox-Lake range consists of 172,692 acres of BLM land and 5,032 acres of a mix of private and other public lands for a total of 177,724 acres.

The HMA is ~10 miles wide at the widest point by ~25 miles long, bound by the Smoke Creek Desert to the north and west and Nevada State Highway 447 to the east and Pyramid Lake Reservation to the south. The Fox Range forms the western boundary while the Lake Range forms the eastern boundary with the San Emidio Desert bisecting the two mountain ranges. Portions of the Fox and Pole Canyon Wilderness Study Areas are included within the HMA, but not the gather area. Elevations across the valley floor range from 4,300 to 5,300 feet, while the surrounding mountain ranges vary between 8,400 and 8,700 feet.

***Q. What is the appropriate management level (AML) of the herd management area (HMA)?***

**A.** The AML is 122-204 wild horses.

***Q. Where and how will we know when to go and where to meet each day?***

**A.** Visitors to the gather, including all media and members of the public, must **RSVP** by calling **(775) 623-1567** – **you must make your reservation by 5:30 p.m. the night before you intend to visit the gather activities.** If you have RSVP’d, no later than 5:30 p.m. the night before, you will receive a call back on meeting time and location no later than 9:00 p.m. that evening.

***Q. Will there be any designated public observers at the gather site locations?***

**A.** Yes. A Public Affairs Specialist or designated BLM employee will meet the public **each morning** at a specified location and time to escort them to gather sites and/or temporary holding facilities. Limitations will only be imposed to ensure safety and accomplishment of the mission. The “Visitation Protocol”, “Know Before You Go”, “Q & A’s” and “Map” handouts will also be posted on the BLM website, so observers are adequately prepared for the conditions during the gather.

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

**A.** 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 burros and providing opportunities for other wildlife to have a thriving ecosystem.

The purpose of the gather is to prevent undue or unnecessary degradation of the public lands associated with excess wild horses, 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 Horses Act. By balancing herd size with what the land can support, the BRFO aims to implement a maintenance gather to apply fertility control to released mares with minimal removal to achieve low end of AML for the HMA.

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

A. The BLM plans to gather up to 88 excess wild horses and remove up to 20 excess wild horses.

***Q. Will the BLM implement any population suppression techniques? If so, what method or fertility control drug will be used and how many mares will be treated?***

A. Yes, GonaCon Equine will be administered to up to 34-40 mares. A primary and booster is planned to be administered.

***Q. When will the mares be released back out on the range and will the public have the opportunity to observe the release?***

A. Yes, to ensure the best rate of efficacy, once mares are treated with the primary dose of GonaCon Equine population suppression vaccine, the BLM will hold the mares for an estimated 30-days, treat them all with a booster and then release them back to the range. When the BLM is able to determine the date of release, a News Release will be sent out 3-5 days prior to the release.

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

A. Approximately 136 wild horses.

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

A. No more than 10 miles.

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

A. Cattoor Livestock Roundup, Inc located in Nephi, Utah.

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

A. The costs for the gather will be calculated at the end of the gather operations following all payables are entered into the systems.

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

A. The BLM gathers animals 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 future worst-case scenarios for both the range and the animals.

***Q. Does the BLM use whips to move the animals through the pens and chute?***

A. No. The BLM may use flags or noise-making paddles to move animals 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 animal 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 like those used for domestic animals being trained using resistance-free methods.

***Q. Why is the BLM removing animals when, as of October 2021, there are already over 56,000 animals in holding?***

**A.** The BLM must remove thousands of wild horses & 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 other wildlife habitat.

In the case of the FY2022 Fox-Range HMA, excess animals exist outside the HMAs, and the gather is needed not only to ensure balance on the range related to appropriate management levels and reversal of downward trends, but to also conform to the directives in the Handbooks and guidance from Resource Advisory Council.

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. Where do the removed animals go?***

**A.** Excess wild horses removed will be shipped to the Palomino Valley Center, Off-Range Wild Horse and Burro Corrals, located in Reno, Nevada, where they will be prepared for the BLM's adoption and sales programs, or long-term holding facilities located in Midwestern pastures.

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

**A.** Once the animals arrive at the Off-Range Corrals, BLM staff will allow them to acclimate to domestic feed and monitor them for a period of time. Following, the animals will be aged (based on the condition of their teeth), de-wormed, vaccinated, blood-tested (for Equine Infectious Anemia), freeze-marked (marked with a cold brand) and stallions will be gelded.

***Q. What happens to animals that are not adopted?***

**A.** Un-adopted animals are fed and cared for in either short-term corrals or long-term pastures. Animals usually 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 animals 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 and burros to slaughterhouses or to "kill buyers."** All animals in holding retain their status as "wild" animals and remain under the BLM's protection.

***Q. Is there any livestock grazing in this area?***

**A.** The Rodeo Creek and Pole Canyon Allotments encompasses the HMA. The annual permitted use for the allotment is 5,796 AUMs. The permittee for these two allotments voluntarily ran reduced livestock numbers since 2015, and the gather area was closed to livestock grazing from 2013 to 2016 in relation to wild horse use and drought impacts.

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

**A.** No. The BLM carries out removal of wild horses & burros from public lands to ensure public land health and in accordance with land-use plans that were developed in an open, public

process. These land-use plans direct how 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 lands has declined by 30-percent since 1971.

***Q. Describe the terrain and vegetation of the HMA?***

**A.** The terrain in the area consists of north-south trending mountains separated by broad valleys. Elevations within the HMA range from 3,897 feet along the Smoke Creek Desert to 7,608 at Pah Rum Peak. Climate is characterized by warm dry days, cool nights and low yearly precipitation that ranges from 4 to 6 inches at lower elevations to approximately 12 inches at higher elevations.

Vegetation varies from salt desert shrub communities at lower elevations to big sagebrush/grass communities at upper elevations. Typical species in the salt desert shrub community include shadscale, budsage, winterfat, black greasewood, indian rice grass, squirrel tail and Sandbergs bluegrass. Species typical of the sagebrush/grass communities include low sage, Wyoming and mountain big sagebrush, bitterbrush, rabbit brush, Utah juniper, needlegrasses, basin wild rye, squirrel tail, indian paintbrush and phlox.

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

**A.** Typical wildlife species found in the area include mule deer, pronghorn antelope, chukar partridge, coyote, and various rodents. The area is used as winter range for deer and provides valuable forage during migration periods. Currently, once the gather is completed, the HMA is expected to be at the targeted appropriate management level which is critical to the valuable habitat needed to support both native 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 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. Where may I learn more about the Wild Horse and Burro Program?***

**A.** Please visit the BLM's website at <https://www.blm.gov/whb>