



## Red Desert Complex Wild Horse Gather Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

### **Why is this gather necessary?**

The gather is necessary to return wild horse populations to within appropriate management levels (AMLs) and ensure long-term viability of sage-grouse populations within the complex. This is a continuation of a gather that initially began in August 2018 but concluded early when off-range temporary holding facilities reached maximum capacity.

The BLM is tasked with managing for healthy horses and sustainable, working public lands. Excess animals cause undue pressure on limited rangeland resources. As wild horse and burro populations rise, there are serious consequences for the animals and the land. Horses and burros starve, dehydrate and wander onto private property or highways. Land health and habitat for sage-grouse and other wildlife is being compromised.

The BLM manages the nation's public lands for multiple uses (wild horses, wildlife habitat, livestock grazing, etc.), in accordance with the 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act. Under the authority of the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, the BLM manages, protects and controls wild horses and burros. This law requires the BLM to remove excess wild horses and burros from the range to sustain the health and productivity of public lands.

### **How many horses will be removed from, and returned to, the range?**

The BLM will remove approximately 2,400 horses and return approximately 300 horses to the range.

### **What are the current population estimates and appropriate management levels?**

<b>Herd Management Area</b>	<b>Appropriate Management Level</b>	<b>Estimated Total Population</b>
Green Mountain	170-300	394
Crooks Mountain	65-85	893
Antelope Hills	60-82	568
Stewart Creek	125-175	570
Lost Creek	60-82	648
<b>Totals</b>	<b>481-725</b>	<b>3,073</b>

## **Where will the removed horses go?**

Excess wild horses removed from the complex will initially be shipped to short-term holding facilities located in Rock Springs, Wyoming, and other locations to be determined where they will be aged, dewormed, blood tested for Equine Infectious Anemia (known as EIA or Coggins Test), vaccinated, freeze marked and prepared for either the BLM's adoption program or long-term holding pastures in the Midwest.

After being prepared for adoption, some horses will be taken to the Wyoming Honor Farm in Riverton or the Mantle Adoption and Training Facility in Wheatland for gentling in order to have a better chance of being adopted.

## **How will this gather affect wildlife?**

The removal of excess wild horses from public rangeland is carried out to maintain rangeland health. Excess animals cause undue pressure on limited rangeland resources. With overpopulation on the range, the risk to the animals due to forage and/or water starvation increases significantly each year. Wildlife benefit from the management of wild horses by balancing forage and water sources so all species utilizing public rangelands will be healthier.

Because the Red Desert Complex lies completely within Greater Sage-grouse habitat, removing excess wild horses will have a direct and beneficial effect on Greater Sage-grouse habitat. Of the 753,000 acres making up the complex, 68 percent are within priority sage-grouse habitat. As a result, the area contains important breeding, nesting and early and late brood rearing habitat.

## **Why is BLM removing horses that appear to be or are in good condition?**

The BLM gathers horses with different body conditions, including some that appear to be or are in good condition. We gather excess animals from overpopulated herds to prevent worst-case scenarios in which removed horses would be emaciated because of insufficient forage on the range. When a herd management area population is within its appropriate management level, healthy and viable wild horses are able to survive and thrive during severe winters or drought.

## **What happens to horses that are not adopted?**

Unadopted horses are fed and cared for in short-term corrals, long-term Midwestern pastures or public 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 animal 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.) All horses in holding retain their status as "wild" animals and remain under the BLM's protection

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*The BLM manages more than 245 million acres of public land located primarily in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The agency's mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America's public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. Diverse activities authorized on these lands generated \$75 billion in sales of goods and services throughout the American economy in fiscal year 2016—more than any other agency in the Department of the Interior. These activities supported more than 372,000 jobs.*

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

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 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-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.

### **What veterinary treatment will the removed horses receive?**

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). During the gather, an animal and plant inspection service (APHIS) veterinarian will be on-site to examine animals and make recommendations to BLM for care and treatment of wild horses.

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

The trap site locations have not been determined at this time, but BLM strives to minimize the distance wild horses must be herded. Under normal circumstances this travel should not exceed 10 miles and is usually much less dependent on existing conditions (i.e. ground conditions, animal health, extreme temperature (high and low), etc.).

### **Why does BLM use helicopters to gather horses?**

Agencies were granted the authority to use helicopters with the passage of FLPMA in 1976 with the assumption that gathers could be conducted more efficiently and effectively. But more importantly today, the use of helicopters has proven to be more humane 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.

### **Why doesn't the BLM use more fertility control?**

The National Academy of Sciences found that no highly effective fertility-control methods are currently available. Research is being conducted by scientists from universities, state agencies, non-governmental organizations and the U.S. Geological Survey in cooperation with the BLM. At the same time, the BLM is using existing short-lasting contraceptives to slow population growth where possible.

### **Will BLM spay mares or geld stallions in the future?**

The BLM is trying to find alternative ways to keep horse populations within the AML and will continue to explore these topics. For several years, the BLM has been investing in research to find safe and effective methods to neuter and spay wild horses and develop longer-lasting contraceptive vaccines.

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### **How many wild horses are in Wyoming?**

BLM Wyoming has 16 HMAs statewide with a high AML of 3,725 wild horses. As of March 2020, the population estimate is approximately 8,706 wild horses.

### **Will there be any public viewing opportunities at the trap sites?**

Yes, public viewing of gather operations are available on public land. To view the gather, you must contact Sarah Beckwith, public affairs specialist, at [sbeckwith@blm.gov](mailto:sbeckwith@blm.gov) to add your name to the interested observers list. Those on the list will be informed where and when to meet each morning to be escorted to the designated safety zone near the trap site. This will allow visitors instant notification if a trap site needs to be moved, or gather operations suspended due to weather or logistics. Social distancing and other COVID-19 guidelines will apply.

### **Where may I learn more about the Wild Horse and Burro Program?**

Please visit the BLM's Website at [www.blm.gov/whb](http://www.blm.gov/whb).