

“2020 Jakes Wash Emergency Wild Horse Gather” Questions and Answers

Q. What is the official name for this gather?

A. 2020 Jakes Wash Emergency Wild Horse Gather

Q. Will there be any designated public observers at the trap site?

A. No. Due to the nature of the bait and water trap method, wild horses are reluctant to approach the trap site when there is too much activity; therefore, only essential gather operations personnel will be allowed at the trap site during gather operations.

Q. Why is this gather necessary?

A. The action is needed due to lack of water resulting in declining health of the wild horses - the Jakes Wash Herd Area (HA) has a history of water issues during dry spring and summer months. Fiscal year 2020 has been unusually hot and dry with very little precipitation.

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.

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

A. The BLM will gather and remove approximately 60 excess wild horses from around Deadman Well and Blackjack Spring located within the Jakes Wash HA in White Pine County, about 30 miles west of Ely, Nevada.

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

A. None.

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

A. The BLM Ely District manages the Jakes Wash HA for zero horses in accordance with the 2008 Ely District Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan.

Q. Is there livestock grazing in this area?

A. The Jakes Wash HA includes all of the Indian Jake Allotment, and portions of the Badger Spring, Giroux Wash, and Tom Plain allotments.

Over the past ten years, due to inadequate forage and water, the permittees have used only a small fraction of their authorized AUMs.

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 health and in accordance with land-use plans that were developed in an open, public process. These land-use plans are the means through 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-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. Vegetation in the HA consists primarily of Wyoming big sagebrush, low sagebrush, black sagebrush, winterfat, shadscale, budsage, sickle saltbush, black greasewood, rabbitbrush, Indian ricegrass, Sandburg bluegrass, bluebunch wheatgrass, bottlebrush squirreltail, needlegrass and assorted forb species in the lower elevations. Plant species dominating the higher elevations include Wyoming big sagebrush, mountain sagebrush, black sagebrush, antelope bitterbrush, Utah serviceberry, snowberry, golden and squaw current, piñon pine, Utah juniper, curl-leaf mountain mahogany, limber pine, white fir, bluebunch wheatgrass, needlegrass and assorted forb species.

The area is also utilized by domestic livestock and numerous wildlife species. Typical wildlife species found in the area include mule deer, pronghorn antelope, bighorn sheep, coyote, and various rodents.

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 the long-term production of desired plant communities is and will be 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, (approximately 15-20% annually in the HMAs) would result in continued and increasing impacts to threatened and endangered species populations and habitats. Upland habitats would continue to see locally 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 creeks adversely effecting Sage-grouse habitat.

Q. Why is the BLM removing horses when there is already over 47,000 animals currently 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 of the 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. Why does the BLM use helicopters to gather horses?

A. The BLM will conduct gather operations utilizing temporary water and/or bait traps consisting of a series of corral panels stocked with water and hay; no helicopters will be used.

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 as those used for domestic and wild horses being trained using resistance-free methods.

Q. What Contractor will be used for this Gather?

A. Warner Livestock of Spanish Fork, Utah

Q. How much will this gather cost?

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

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.

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

Q. Where do the removed horses go?

A. Excess wild horses, removed from this gather, will be shipped to the Palomino Valley Center Wild Horse and Burro Corrals, 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 happens to horses that are not adopted?

A. Un-adopted horses are fed and cared for in either short-term corrals or long-term 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.

Q. Will any of the horses 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 to slaughterhouses or to "killer buyers." All horses in holding retain their status as "wild" animals and remain under the BLM's protection.

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

A. The BLM's Website is located at www.blm.gov/whb.