

Questions and Answers about the Humboldt Herd Area (HA) Wild Horse Gather

Q. Why is the BLM gathering in the Humboldt HA?

BLM has determined that approximately 200 excess wild horses (adults and foals) are currently present within the Humboldt HA and need to be removed in order to be in compliance with the Wild Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 and the 1982 Sonoma-Gerlach Land Use Plan (LUP). This assessment is based on:

- Private landowners contacting the BLM about wild horses damaging private fences, harassing domestic horses, and grazing on private lands.
- Public safety issues exist. Heavy traffic occurs in this area due to the local mines and eight vehicle collisions with wild horses have been documented. These have resulted in deaths of wild horses, and have the potential to cause the loss of human life and damage to private vehicles.
- Wild horses may have moved into the Humboldt HA from neighboring Herd Management Areas (HMAs) in search of forage, water, and space. An aerial population survey conducted in December, 2014, revealed approximately 200 adult wild horses in the Humboldt HA gather area. There is no Appropriate Management Level (AML) for the Humboldt HA since this area has not been designated to be managed for wild horses due to the “checkerboard” lands.
- Water sources are on private lands and the BLM has no water rights in this area. Several springs and seeps are found in the HA, but water is unreliable and often unavailable as springs/seeps are affected by years of drought.
- The proposed gather and associated management actions are anticipated to sustain healthy rangeland resources by managing the public rangelands for multiple use activities.

Q. The Decision Record for the Humboldt HA Wild Horse Gather was issued in “full force and effect.” What does that mean?

- The Decision Record was issued in full force and effect on May 28, 2014, which allowed a water-bait gather to commence on June 23, 2014. The same decision applies to the helicopter gather scheduled for January 26-29 because it provided for operations over a ten-year period to reduce the HA population to zero and to maintain that level.
- The gather decision was being issued in accordance with 43 CFR 4770.39(c): “The authorized officer will issue gather decisions effective upon a date established in the decision in situations where the removal is required by

applicable law, or is necessary to preserve or maintain a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship.”

Q. What is BLM doing to prevent health problems with wild horses during the gather?

The BLM is taking the following added measures during the gather to address the potential for pregnant mares:

- Additional pen space will be provided for weaker animals to keep them separated from stronger ones for added care.
- Water will be available at the trap location in the event animals cannot be loaded immediately and taken to temporary holding corrals.
- A veterinarian will be on call to address unforeseen issues.

GATHER PROCESS QUESTIONS

Q. Where is the BLM gathering the wild horses?

- The Humboldt HA Wild Horse Gather Plan encompasses an area of 431,544 acres of which 219,085 acres are public lands (50.8% of project area). The public land is interspersed with private land in a checkerboard pattern. The gather area is located in Pershing County with the north boundary being about 30 miles south of Winnemucca, NV and extends along the eastside of Interstate 80 to Lovelock, Nevada. The HA is bordered to the northeast by the East Range HA and by the North Stillwater HMA to the southeast.
- Actual locations for the trap site, temporary holding, and other gather operations will depend on the location of the wild horses when the gather process begins. For the 2015 gather, wild horses have been observed primarily on the south end of the HA from Limerick Canyon to Packard Flat.

Q. When did BLM last gather in this area?

- The last gather occurred in the summer of 2014 when 101 wild horses were gathered and removed.

Q. How many wild horses will be removed during this gather?

- The BLM has been approved to remove all wild horses from the HA. There are approximately 200 excess wild horses to be removed.

Q. What is a “public outreach and education day?”

- The pre-gather tour is a public outreach and education opportunity for those interested in learning more. The media and public are welcome to attend the tour on January 16, which will begin at the Courthouse in Lovelock, Nevada at 10 a.m. On this day, BLM will have additional interpretive opportunities and staff available to answer questions. Interested observers can call the gather hotline number at **775-861-6700, option 1** for further information and to RSVP.

Q. How does the BLM gather wild horses?

- The BLM uses a gather contractor to gather wild horses from HAs where the BLM has determined that excess animals exist. The contractor will set up panels and let the wild horses get accustomed to them. Once the wild horses are captured, they will be sorted and loaded onto trailers for transport to Oregon’s Wild Horse Corral Facility in Burns, Oregon. If needed, the ground crew may assist by roping the wild horses from horseback.

FERTILITY CONTROL QUESTIONS

Q. Will the BLM use fertility control on this gather?

- This gather will not use fertility control since the Humboldt HA is not designated for managing wild horses.

LOCATION AND ENVIRONMENT OF HA QUESTIONS

Q. What is the environment like in the HA?

- Terrain varies from level valleys to steep, rugged mountains, with elevations ranging from 3,930 feet in Packard Wash to 8,917 feet at Indian Peak. Climate within the HA is characterized by warm dry days (as high as 105°F), cool nights (as low as -20°F) and low yearly precipitation that averages from 4 to 6 inches at the lower elevations and around 15 inches at upper elevations. Drought conditions occur as frequently as 6 out of every 10 years.

Q. Does wild horse overpopulation impact wildlife and plants?

- Yes. Wild horses often graze the same area repeatedly throughout the year. Forage plants in those areas receive little rest from grazing pressure, and continuous grazing 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. A variety of wildlife species can be found on the HA: mule

deer, pronghorn antelope, coyote, black-tail jackrabbit, desert cottontail, bobcat, and numerous raptors, reptiles, and other small mammals. As part of its multiple-use mission, the BLM is mandated to protect habitat to support these wildlife species. BLM is also required to comply with the Endangered Species Act. Federally listed, proposed, or candidate species found within the HA includes only the Greater sage-grouse.

Q. Why don't you just make more land available to the wild horses?

- The BLM would need approval from Congress to expand herd areas for wild horses and burros. By law, wild horses and burros can only be managed on areas of public lands where they were known to exist in 1971, at the time of the passage of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971.

CONTRACTOR QUESTIONS

Q. How does the BLM select its gather contractors?

- The BLM's national gather contracts were awarded in 2010 following an in-depth technical review of the proposals received from the prospective contractors. Among the key elements of the technical review was evaluation of the prospective contractor's knowledge, skill, and ability to gather and handle wild horses and burros in a safe, effective, and humane manner.

Q. What contractor will be conducting the Humboldt HA Wild Horse Gather?

- Cattoor Livestock of Nephi, Utah.

Q. Does the contractor use whips to move the wild horses through the pens and chute?

- The BLM uses flags or noise-making paddles to move wild 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.

POST GATHER QUESTIONS

Q. What happens to the wild horses after they are gathered?

- They will be transported to Oregon's Wild Horse Corral Facility in Burns, Oregon, where they will be prepared for the BLM adoption program, or for long-term holding. The animals will be checked by a veterinarian, receive vaccinations and freeze marks, and will be made available for adoption within a few weeks of arriving at the facility. Per population estimates as of March 1, 2014, the BLM estimates that about 49,209 wild horses and burros (about 40,815 horses and 8,394 burros) are roaming on BLM-managed rangelands in 10 Western states and 25,035 in Nevada alone. Off the range, as of April 2014 there are 48,194 other wild horses and burros that are fed and cared for at short-term corrals and long-term pastures.

Q. Will any of the wild horses be sent to slaughter?

- No. A December 2004 amendment to the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act authorizes the BLM to sell sale-eligible animals "without limitation," however the BLM **has not** and **is not** selling any wild horses to slaughterhouses or to "killer buyers."

Q. Why is the BLM still removing wild horses when there are already 48,194 wild horses and burros in holding?

- The BLM removes 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 in recent years, leaving the agency in the position of gathering excess horses while its holding costs spiral upward.

RANGE/GRAZING QUESTIONS

Q. Is there livestock grazing in this area?

- Yes. Livestock grazing is authorized within the Humboldt HA. The Prince Royal, Humboldt House, Rye Patch, Coal Canyon-Poker, South Rochester, Rawhide, and Star Peak Allotments are managed for livestock grazing but portions of these allotments also overlap with HA boundaries.
- The Humboldt HA Wild Horse Gather Plan encompasses an area of 431,544 acres of which 219,085 acres are public lands (50.8 percent of the project area). The annual total permitted use for these permittees combined is 15,009 Animal Unit Months in the seven allotments, including non-HA lands. The breakdown is as follows:

Coal Canyon-Poker Allotment = 3,144 AUMs
Star Peak Allotment = 3,075 AUMs
Rawhide Allotment = 2,740 AUMs
South Rochester = 3,186 AUMs
Prince Royal Allotment = 153 AUMs
Humboldt House Allotment = 728 AUMs
Rye Patch Allotment = 1,981 AUMs

Q. Has BLM issued decisions to remove livestock from allotments within the Humboldt HA?

- No, not at this time. The permittees within the Coal Canyon-Poker Allotment have taken voluntary non-use in the pasture where the wild horses are located.

Q. Is the BLM removing wild horses and burros 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. 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. There is no Appropriate Management Level (AML) for the Humboldt HA since this area has not been designated to be managed for wild horses. The proposed gather and associated management actions, over the life of the proposed plan, are anticipated to bring the population back to zero as was intended through the 1982 Sonoma-Gerlach Land use Plan (LUP). Authorized livestock grazing on BLM-managed land has declined by nearly 50 percent since the 1940s. Of that authorized use, actual livestock grazing use on public rangelands has declined by 30 percent since 1971.
- The permittees within the Coal Canyon-Poker Allotment have taken voluntary non-use from October 2013 through the 2015 grazing year:
 - Duncan Family Trust
 - Bingo G. Wesner
 - John Olagary

ADOPTION QUESTIONS

Q. How can I adopt one of the wild horses?

- The excess wild horses removed from the range are offered for adoption to qualified people through the BLM's Adopt a Wild Horse or Burro Program. Potential adopters must have the proper facilities and financial means to care for

an adopted animal, and we always hope that they have experience working with a wild horse or burro, which will help ensure the gentling process. During the first year, the government retains title to the animal(s), and will conduct compliance checks throughout the year in an effort to ensure as much as possible that the animal is properly being cared for and has gone to a good home. At the end of the first year, if the adopter has complied with all the adoption stipulations and has properly cared for their mustang or burro for one year, he or she is eligible to receive title, or ownership, from the Federal government.

- Since 1971, when Congress passed the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, the BLM has adopted out more than 230,000 horses and burros.
- To apply to adopt a wild horse or burro on-line, please go to the BLM's adoption website at:
http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/wild_horse_and_burro/What_We_Do/wild_horse_and_burro0.html.
- If you are interested in adopting directly from one of the BLM's holding facilities, please visit the agency's facilities page.
- For more information about the BLM's Adopt-A-Horse or Burro program, please visit http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/wild_horse_and_burro.html, or you may call 1-800-4Mustangs with any questions about the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program.