

Fact Sheet

Fall (Red Desert/Divide Basin) Wild Horse Gatherers

Fall 2011 Gather Schedule

The schedule for the fall 2011 wild horse gathers has changed. Rather than beginning in the Rock Springs Field Office Divide Basin HMA, as was originally scheduled, the fall gathers will begin in early October in the Lander Field Office portion of the Red Desert Complex. The contractor will then move south to gather in the Divide Basin HMA and then back to gather in the Rawlins Field Office portion of the Red Desert Complex, completing the fall gathers in late December.

The schedule was changed to ensure that gather operations will be complete in the high country of the Green Mountain area before early winter storms blanket it with snow. Gather operations will then move to the lower elevation HMAs.

Mid-point Versus Low-point AML

Each herd management area has what is called an appropriate management level (AML). That is the number of horses that can thrive in a particular area in balance with other resources and uses. When a herd exceeds its appropriate management level, it becomes necessary to remove some of those horses to ensure the health of the rangeland, wildlife and the horses themselves.

The AML of the Red Desert Complex is 480-724 horses. Gather operations include removing a limited number of horses inside the complex, down to the **mid-point AML**: 602 horses. The AML of the Divide Basin HMA is 415-600 horses. Gather operations include removing horses down to the **low-point AML**: 415 horses.

Horses are being removed down to the mid-point AML in the Red Desert Complex because this is considered a maintenance gather. The Red Desert Complex is part of a pilot program to maintain herd size primarily by the use of fertility control. In the first phase of the pilot program, mares from the complex were treated with the fertility control drug PZP in the fall of 2009. A recent inventory flight shows that reproduction rates have decreased to 12-15 percent, down from the national average of 20 percent per year. The second phase of the pilot project is to treat the mares first treated in 2009 with a PZP booster and to treat all other mares to be released with their first dose of PZP. Because data shows that the PZP is effective in decreasing reproductive rates, the complex can be maintained at the mid-point AML with catch, treat and release gathers every two years.

Horses are being removed down to the low-point AML in the Divide Basin HMA because fertility control through PZP treatments has not been used in the past in this HMA. Mares will be treated with PZP for the first time during the fall 2011 gather, setting the stage for a transition to catch, treat and release management of the HMA, similar to the Red Desert Complex. This transition will take time. Until data shows that PZP treatments have begun to decrease reproductive rates, the HMA will be gathered to the low-point AML.

Sex Ratio Adjustments

In the Red Desert Complex, 200 mares and 200 stallions will be returned to the HMAs. The sex ratio will not be adjusted. In the Divide Basin HMA, the sex ratio of returned horses will be adjusted to 60 percent stallions and 40 percent mares. The sex ratio in the Red Desert Complex does not need to be adjusted because of the effectiveness of the fertility control pilot program outlined previously. Sex ratio adjustment in the Divide Basin HMA is another tool, in addition to the initial PZP treatments of the mares, available to help manage the HMA within the AML until data shows that PZP treatments have become effective at decreasing reproductive rates.

