

Fact Sheet

Red Desert Wild Horse

Herd Management Areas Complex

BLM

Key Statistics and Facts

The Red Desert Complex of wild horse herd management areas (HMA) encompasses about 753,000 acres of land. About 49,500 acres within the HMAs (about six percent) is privately or state owned.

The BLM Lander and Rawlins Field Offices cooperatively manage the Red Desert Complex which includes the Antelope Hills, Crooks Mountain, Green Mountain, Lost Creek and Stewart Creek HMAs. The Complex is located in Sweetwater, Carbon, Fremont and Natrona counties west and south of Wyoming highway 789/287.

The AML in the Red Desert HMA Complex is 480 to 724 wild horses. As of February 2011 the population had grown to an estimated 1,197 adult animals. Inside the HMAs the population is estimated to be 827 adults and outside the HMAs the population is estimated to be 370 adults. During a census flight to inventory the population in August 2011, the reproduction rate was found to have been 10-15 percent, versus the standard 20-25 percent rate, indicating that the fertility control administered during the 2009 gathers is working.

Gather operations will consist of removing 100 percent of the wild horses outside the HMAs and removing a limited number of animals inside the HMAs, down to the mid-point AML of 602. Every mare gathered and returned to the range will be treated with fertility control.

How are the individual HMAs found within the Complex unique?

The **Antelope Hills HMA** encompasses 57,000 acres, of which 54,600 are BLM-administered public lands. The appropriate management level (AML) for this HMA is 60-82 adult horses. The area is located approximately 15 miles south/southeast of Atlantic City, Wyoming. Elevations in the HMA range from 7,100 to 7,250 feet along Cyclone Rim. The HMA is bisected by the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail. The area receives 5-7 inches of precipitation annually. The predominate vegetation type is sagebrush/grass. Riparian zones are infrequent but very important to wild horses, wildlife and livestock. The topography ranges from rolling flatlands south of Cyclone Rim, uplifted ridges along Cyclone Rim, and abrupt rocky zones interspersed with rolling lands north of the rim to the Sweetwater River.

Red Desert Complex Gather



The **Crooks Mountain HMA** is located directly southeast of Sweetwater Station, Wyo., and encompasses about 51,000 acres. The AML for this HMA is 65-100 adult horses. Elevations in the HMA range from 6,900 to 8,100 feet. The lower elevations receive approximately 10-14 inches of precipitation annually, and the upper elevations receive 15-20 inches annually. The major vegetation types are sagebrush/grass, woodland, and riparian. Topography within the HMA is generally rolling hills and slopes to the north and south of Crooks Mountain. The Crooks Mountain portion of the herd area is quite steep and broken with mountainous terrain. The area supports significant wildlife populations of elk, deer, and antelope. Livestock graze the area from May to December.

The **Green Mountain HMA** encompasses 88,000 acres, of which 74,000 acres are BLM-administered public lands. Topography within the herd area is generally gently rolling hills and slopes north and south of Green Mountain. Green Mountain itself is quite steep with mountainous terrain and conifer/aspen forests. Elevations range from 6,200 to 9,200 feet with grand vistas of the Red Desert, Sweetwater Rocks and Oregon Trail from the higher elevations. Precipitation ranges from 10-14 inches at the lower elevations to 15-20 inches at the upper elevations. Most of the precipitation is in the form of snow. The AML for this HMA is 300 horses. A full range of colors is present. Most horses are solid in color, but a noticeable number of tobiano paints are present. The horses range from 11 to 15 hands and 750-1,000 pounds mature weight. Health is good with few apparent problems. Domestic cattle and sheep utilize the area in all seasons with summer cattle use predominating. Vegetation around the mountain is dominated by various sage, grass, woodland, and riparian species. The area supports significant wildlife populations of elk, deer, antelope, and moose.

The **Lost Creek HMA** encompasses 250,000 acres, of which 235,000 acres are BLM-administered public lands. The HMA lies within the Great Divide Basin, a closed basin out of which no water flows. Some desert playa and vegetated dune areas are interspersed throughout the HMA. Several sensitive desert wetland riparian areas occur throughout the area, including both intermittent and perennial lakes and streams. Elevation ranges from 6,500 to 6,800 feet. Winters are long and severe. Annual precipitation averages a little less than six inches. The Lost Creek HMA is joined on the east by the Stewart Creek HMA, on the north by the Antelope Hills HMA, and on the west by the Divide Basin HMA. The AML for this HMA is 70 horses. A full range of colors is present. The present population has been influenced by the routine escape of domestic saddle stock from the surrounding populated areas. The horses range from 14 to 15 hands and 800-1000 pounds mature weight. Genetic testing on horses in the Lost Creek HMA shows them to be closely identified with the Spanish Mustang breed.

The **Stewart Creek HMA** encompasses 231,124 acres, of which 215,369 are BLM-administered public lands. The Continental Divide (eastern boundary of the Great Divide Basin) traverses the HMA in a north-south direction in its eastern portion along Lost Soldier and Bull Springs rims. Adjacent to these rims on either side are strongly rolling uplands. These areas transition to the gently rolling uplands which comprise the majority of the HMA. Elevation ranges from 6,500 to 7,900 feet. The most abundant plant community is sagebrush/grass. The climate in the Great Divide Basin is fairly harsh, with long, severe winters. Annual precipitation ranges from less than seven inches at the lower elevations to more than ten inches at some of the higher elevations. Most of the precipitation occurs as snow. The AML for this HMA is 150 horses. The horses exhibit a full range of colors but most are solid in color. A noticeable number of tobiano paints are present, usually as entire bands. The present population has been influenced by the routine escape of domestic saddle stock from the surrounding populated areas. The horses range from 14 to 15 hands and 800-1,000 pounds mature weight.

Consequences of Postponing/Not Removing Wild Horses

The BLM is gathering and removing the excess wild horses in accordance with the Rawlins and Lander Resource Management Plans, approved December 12, 2008 and June 9, 1987 respectively.

Removing the excess wild horses will help to prevent deterioration of the range, and achieve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship as required under the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, and Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976.

The proposed management actions are also needed to be in conformance with the August 2003 Consent Decree upheld by the United States District Court of Wyoming. The Consent Decree is an out of court settlement agreement between the State of Wyoming and United States Department of the Interior, BLM. This agreement specifies that when information is gathered that indicates an HMA within the State of Wyoming is determined to be over the established AML, the BLM has one year from discovery to remove wild horses to within range of AML.

The implementation of the gather is necessary to retreat mares that were treated in the fall of 2009 so that the remaining population levels are consistent with the AML for the HMAs. Implementing fertility control measures will slow the growth rate of the population that is returned to the HMAs.

Wild Horse Overpopulations Impact Wildlife and Plants

There are a wide variety of wildlife species common to the ecosystem within the Red Desert Complex, including big game (pronghorn antelope, mule deer and elk), fur bearers, birds (both migratory and year-round resident, including raptors, Greater Sage-grouse and neo-tropical migrants), amphibians, reptiles, and small mammals. The Red Desert Complex consists of yearlong, winter-yearlong, and crucial winter range for both mule deer and pronghorn antelope.

BLM threatened, endangered, proposed and candidate animal and plant species potentially inhabiting the Red Desert Complex include: Desert Yellowhead, Ute Ladies'-Tresses, Blowout Penstemon, Black-Footed Ferret, Greater Sage-grouse and Mountain Plover.

BLM sensitive species inhabiting the Red Desert Complex include: Wyoming Pocket Gopher, Pygmy Rabbit, Swift Fox, Spotted Bat, Long-Eared Myotis, Fringed Myotis, Townsend's Big-Eared Bat and White-Tailed Prairie Dog.

Sensitive bird species that may occur in the area include: Northern Goshawk, Ferruginous Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Long-billed Curlew, Burrowing Owl, Sage Thrasher, Loggerhead Shrike, Brewer's Sparrow, Sage Sparrow, White-faced Ibis and Trumpeter Swan.

Because wild horses often repeatedly graze in the same area year-round, forage plants in the affected area receives little rest from grazing pressures. The result is a reduction in plant health, vigor, reproduction and loss of native forage species, which diminishes habitat quality.

How does BLM balance wild horses with livestock management?

Livestock actual use levels have declined as permittees and the BLM have tried to manage the rangelands within the HMAs to maintain an ecological balance between use and available forage. Forage is allocated by Animal Unit Months (AUMs). An AUM is the amount of forage consumed in a month by an adult horse, a mare and foal, an adult cow or cow and calf, or five sheep. The following table shows permitted livestock AUMs within the Complex.

HMA	Allotment Name	Permitted Cattle AUM	Permitted Sheep AUM
Stewart Creek	Stewart Creek	8,432	0
Antelope Hills, Lost Creek	Cyclone Rim	15,553	11,739
Green Mt., Antelope Hills & Crooks Mt.	Green Mountain	35,910	11,451
Green Mt.	Whiskey Peak	5,451	2,294
	Total Permitted AUM:	65,346	25,484