

McCullough Peaks Bait Trap Removal

Q&As

Why is the BLM removing horses in the McCullough Peaks herd?

The removal is necessary to achieve a thriving natural ecological balance and maintain multiple use relationships including a variety of resources and uses, such as wildlife, wilderness values, recreation, grazing, cultural, as well as wild horses in the McCullough Peaks Wild Horse Herd Management Area (HMA) over the next several years. Monitoring data shows the HMA does not have the capacity to sustain the current wild horse population over the long-term with their current use patterns on healthy rangelands. After analyzing the monitoring data collected since the 2009 gather, the BLM has determined that excess wild horses are present in the HMA. The BLM is prohibited from allowing a “deterioration of the range associated with an over-population” (Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 as amended).

When could the gather take place?

The gather is tentatively scheduled to begin Jan. 17, 2013, and continue at intervals, if necessary, through 2018, and only if adult horse numbers are above the upper appropriate management level (AML) of 140.

What is the current population of the herd?

The current wild horse population on the McCullough Peaks HMA is approximately 153 adult wild horses. Therefore, the population exceeds the established AML of 70-140 horses, excluding the current year foals. Think about the amount of hay and pasture your horse at home goes through and you begin to understand why adhering to the established AML is critical.

How many excess wild horses are anticipated to be removed?

The BLM’s goal would be to get the current number of animals within the AML. With the current population at 153 horses, this number to be removed will be approximately 20 horses.

How do you propose to gather the excess wild horses?

The preferred alternative of the environmental assessment described a combination of bait and water trapping, along with some possible herding to move congregated animals away from or towards traps, in January and February 2013. Multiple trap sites will be used to capture the wild horses. The traps would consist of portable panel pens set up either at water sources or areas frequented by wild horses. Certified weed-free hay or other attractants (such as mineral or processed cubes) will be used to lure horses to the area. Prior to any wild horses being captured, the trap or bait may be in place to acclimate wild horses to their presence. When a band of horses or individuals enters the trap, the gate will be closed by BLM or contract personnel.

Why is a helicopter gather not being proposed?

The current number of excess horses within the herd is not at a level that requires the need for a helicopter gather – yet. In subsequent years, if the BLM cannot successfully gather wild horses using an alternative to a helicopter, this method may become necessary.



What will happen to the excess horses once you gather and remove them?

Removed wild horses will be offered for adoption to only qualified and BLM-approved adopters. Before the adoption, the horses will be examined by veterinarians, freeze-marked, and vaccinated. The adoption will be announced at least 2-3 weeks prior to the adoption, but is currently scheduled for April 26-27 in Powell. *Note: The BLM does not sell any wild horses or burros to slaughterhouses or to "killer buyers."*

Will all horses trapped be sent for adoption, or will certain categories of horses be re-released into the HMA?

The BLM proposes to capture individual horses and bands; then, selectively remove 20 excess wild horses, targeting the 1-5 year old cohorts that are over-represented in the population. The 20 excess 1-5 year old horses will all be made available for adoption and any animals not identified for removal would be released back onto the range.

Will the removal affect the genetic viability of the herd?

Genetic testing conducted by Dr. Gus Cothran in 1992, 1999 and 2004 show that the current levels of genetic diversity within the McCullough Peaks herd are relatively high for a wild horse population and are well above the mean for domestic breeds. These results occurred after several years of gathers on the range.

When was the last gather in the McCullough Peaks and how many horses were returned during that gather?

October 2009. At that time, 110 horses were returned to the range (47 studs, 50 mares and 13 foals).

How does the BLM use fertility control in the McCullough Peaks?

Of the 50 mares returned to the range in 2009, 33 were treated with the fertility control drug PZP, and 16 adult mares were not treated. Annual fertility control treatments, via dart gun, began in March 2011. During 2011, 60 mares were treated with either primer and booster doses or booster shots, depending upon their previous treatment history. During 2012, 72 mares were treated with the one-year fertility control drug, ZonaStat-H (native pzp) via dart gun.

What is the effect of the current drought on the HMA's ability to support the herd?

Since the end of June 2012, the BLM and partners have been hauling water to the wild horses. Water trucks are only able to travel on certain roads to deliver water—mainly in the southwestern portion of the HMA. This has resulted in overuse of the southern one-third of the HMA. At this time the horses appear healthy, however, if an unusually cold winter sets in with lots of snow cover the condition of the horses may decline.