

Example – Questions and Answers (Q and As)

Proposed Calico Mountains Complex Gather

What is the BLM proposing?

The BLM is proposing to gather approximately 2,700 wild horses and remove about 2,500 excess wild horses from the Calico Mountains Complex (Complex) in northwestern Nevada. The gather would begin about December 28, 2009. The Complex is located northeast of Gerlach, Nevada (in portions of Washoe and Humboldt Counties) and includes 5 Herd Management Areas (HMAs): Black Rock Range East, Black Rock Range West, Calico Mountains, Granite Range, and Warm Springs Canyon. The area comprises about 542,100 acres of public and private land. A portion of the area is located within the BLM's Black Rock Desert High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area (NCA) and associated wilderness.

What is the current total population of the herd?

The current population of 3,040 wild horses for the Calico Mountains Complex is based on an aerial census completed in September 2009. The current population is about 5.5 times the low range of the AML (572 head) or about three times over the high range AML of 952 head which is the maximum level at which a thriving natural ecological balance can be maintained.

Will BLM remove all the horses that are gathered?

No, a post-gather target population of approximately 572 wild horses would remain within the Complex.

Will the BLM apply fertility control to horses released back to the range following the gather?

Yes, if gather efficiency exceeds 80 percent (2,476 head), then mares selected for release, including those previously treated with fertility control, would be treated with PZP-22, or a similar vaccine. Immunocontraceptive research would be conducted in accordance with the approved standard operating and post-treatment monitoring procedures. Mares would be selected to maintain a diverse age structure, herd characteristics and conformation.

How will the BLM gather the horses?

The BLM will use a Federal gather contractor to gather the wild horses. The contractor uses a helicopter to locate and herd horses towards a set of corrals where the horses are gathered. The helicopter is assisted by a ground crew and the use of a Parada, a domesticated horse, to move the excess horses into the corrals. If needed, the ground crew may assist the helicopter by roping the horses from horseback.

Why is this herd being gathered in the winter?

Winter gathers in this area are preferred as foals are older and wild horses are located at lower elevations, reducing the travel distance to the trap site. Oftentimes, wild horses are located at the highest elevations during the summer months, and therefore, would have to travel over steep terrain to the trap sites. Dense tree cover further increases the difficulty of gathering wild horses during summer months. The terrain is also rocky, and past experience indicates that fewer injuries to hooves and legs occur during winter gathers in this area. Winter gathers typically result in less stress to wild horses as the cold and snow does not affect horses during the gather to the degree that heat and dust would during summer gathers.

Is this an emergency action?

It is not currently, but could become one, due to limited forage and water resources. If this population management action is not completed in the near future, the likelihood of an emergency situation increases

due to limited winter forage and reduced water availability caused by excess wild horses, drought conditions or severe weather.

What will happen to the horses that don't go back to the range?

Wild horses removed from the Complex will be shipped to the short-term holding facility in Fallon, Nevada, to be prepared for the BLM wild horse adoption program or for long-term holding (grassland pastures located on private lands in the Midwest). At the Fallon facility, the animals will be checked by a veterinarian and receive vaccinations and freeze marks. We are not sure when these particular horses would be available for adoption, but the short-term holding facility outside Reno, the Palomino Valley Center, is full to capacity with horses available for adoption right now.

Why doesn't the BLM gather to the high range of AML?

The foal crop that will arrive in the spring will increase the herd sizes 20-27 percent on average, pushing the herd populations once again over AML within weeks of the gather. The rangelands will continue to worsen and the need to gather to AML will arise again.

How did the population go from 600 to 3,000 in 5 years?

The last gather in the Calico Complex occurred in the winter of 2004-2005 and at that time, the BLM believed they had achieved the low range of the AML, which is 572 wild horses. Data from a direct count aerial population survey in March 2008 suggests that BLM under-estimated the number of horses remaining in the Calico Complex following the 2005 gather. The wild horse count that occurred prior to the 2005 gather took place during poor weather conditions which may have led to an under-count of the actual wild horse population (and number of excess horses to be removed). This, combined with population growth over the past five years, resulted in horse population growing to the current population of over 3,000 wild horses. The census data collected for the Complex in March 2008 and September 2009 is considered to be highly reliable, based on use of more accurate techniques than were used in earlier counts.

Is there livestock grazing in this area?

Yes, there are four allotments in the Calico Mountains Complex. However, the permittees have voluntarily reduced their use based on drought, limited forage, and wild horses in excess of AML with negative impacts to existing water projects.

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. 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 horse populations are not controlled in this area, forage utilization will exceed the capacity of the range.

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

The BLM would need approval from Congress to expand herd areas for wild horses. By law, wild horses 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.

How can I adopt one of the horses?

For 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, call 1-800-4Mustangs with any questions about the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program.