

“2020 Shawave Mountain HMA Wild Horse and Burro Gather” Questions and Answers

Q. What is the official name for this gather?

A. 2020 Shawave Mountain HMA Wild Horse and Burro Gather

Q. Will there be any designated public observers at the trap site?

A. Yes. A PAO will meet the public each morning at a specified location to escort them to the gather sites. Limitations will only be imposed to ensure safety and accomplishment of the mission. A “Know Before You Go” handout will also be posted on the BLM website so observers are adequately prepared for the conditions on the gather sites.

All media and/or visitors wanting to go to the gather site will need to call the “Shawave Mountain Wild Horse Gather information hotline” at 775-861-6700 for daily meeting times as the time to meet is subject to change.

The number of media and public in the gather observation site may be limited in order to allow for social distancing. The [CDC](#) has offered guidance to help people visiting public lands prevent the spread of infectious diseases. We will continue to monitor all functions to ensure that visitors adhere to CDC guidance for mitigating risks associated with the transmission of COVID-19 and take any additional steps necessary to protect public health. During the gather, the observants should follow local area health orders including Governor Sisolak’s [standards](#) for individuals, businesses and employers, practice [Leave No Trace](#) principles, practice social distancing and avoid high-risk outdoor activities.

Q. Why is this gather necessary?

A. To restore a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship on public lands, consistent with the provisions of Section 1333(b) of the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act. The BLM strives to be a good neighbor in the communities we serve; ensuring public safety within and outside of the HMAs is not at risk due to the overpopulation of wild horses and providing opportunities for other wildlife, such as pronghorn antelope, to have a thriving ecosystem.

The Shawave Mountain HMA is over-populated with wild horses and wild burros (this HMA is not managed for wild burros). The wild burros have moved into the HMA from the Blue Wing and Seven Troughs HMA’s. Regular monitoring has occurred in the HMA to observe wild horse and burro body condition; most animals observed have a Body Condition Score (BCS) of [3-5], based on the Henneke Body Condition Chart.

The Shawave Mountain HMA has horses leaving the HMA boundary in search of reliable forage and water.

Q. How many horses will be gathered and how many will be removed from the range?

A. The BLM will gather and remove up to 1,650 excess wild horses and 200 wild burros from in and around the Shawave Mountain HMA, located in Pershing and Washoe counties, about 30 miles east of Lovelock, Nevada.

Q. How many horses will be released back to the range during this gather operation?

A. up to 50 mares could be treated with GonaCon and released back into the HMA.

Q. What will the remaining herd population of these HMAs be?

A. Approximately 423 wild horses will remain in the Shawave Mountain HMA.

Q. Is there livestock grazing in this area?

A. Yes, the Shawave Mountain HMA is in the Blue Wing Seven Troughs grazing allotment, allocated for both cattle and sheep. Livestock grazing permittees have voluntarily reduced their use based on drought, limited forage, wild horse and burro numbers in excess of Appropriate Management Level (AML) and horse impacts to existing limited water sources. Livestock use complies with the grazing system outlined in the final multiple use decisions, agreements and term permit conditions that provide for periodic rest and deferment of key range sites.

Q. Is the BLM removing horses to make room for more cattle grazing?

A. No. The BLM carries out removal of wild horses and burros from public rangelands to ensure rangeland health and in accordance with land-use plans that were developed in an open, public process. 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. Authorized livestock grazing on BLM-administered lands has declined by nearly 50-percent since the 1940s; actual (as distinguished from authorized) livestock grazing on public rangelands has declined by 30-percent since 1971.

Q. Does the wild horse overpopulation impact wildlife and plants?

A. Vegetation varies from salt desert shrub communities at lower elevations to big sagebrush/grass communities at upper elevations. Typical species in the salt desert shrub community includes shadscale, budsage, winterfat, black greasewood, indian rice grass, squirrel tail and desert needlegrass. Species typical of the sagebrush/grass communities include low sage, Wyoming sagebrush, desert peach, rabbit brush, needlegrasses, basin wild rye, squirrel tail, indian paintbrush and phlox.

The area is also utilized by domestic livestock and numerous wildlife species. Typical wildlife species found in the area include mule deer, pronghorn antelope, California bighorn sheep, chukar partridge, coyote, and various rodents.

Wild horses often graze the same area repeatedly throughout the year. Forage plants in those areas receive little rest from grazing pressure. Continuous grazing by wild horses 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 the long-term production of desired plant communities is and will be compromised. If wild horse populations are not controlled in this area, forage utilization will exceed the capacity of the range.

Q. What are some of the effects of wild horse overpopulation on Threatened and Endangered Species?

A. Maintaining the existing wild horse over-population, which would increase with each successive foal crop, (approximately 15-20% annually in the HMAs) would result in continued and increasing impacts to threatened and endangered species populations and habitats. Upland habitats would continue to see locally heavy levels of utilization associated with wild horse use, in which areas of heavy use would continue to expand as wild horse populations continue to grow. Continued heavy grazing would occur on spring meadow systems and creeks adversely effecting Sage-grouse habitat.

Q. Why is the BLM removing horses when there is already over 47,000 animals currently in holding?

A. The BLM must remove thousands of 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 of the removed animals as possible into private care through adoption or sales, the public's demand for adoptable wild horses has declined sharply over the last 10-plus years, leaving the federal agency in the unsustainable position of gathering excess horses while its holding costs spiral upward.

Q. Why does the BLM use helicopters to gather horses?

A. Helicopter-driven gathers have proven to be more humane, effective, and efficient than other types of gather methods when large numbers of animals need to be removed over wide areas or rugged terrain. Helicopters are able to move horses and burros at a proper pace; moreover, helicopter pilots can keep mares and foals together better than a horseback rider and can also better move the animals around such barriers as deep ravines, fences, or roads.

Q. How far, in relation to the trap site, are the horses and foals being herded?

A. That will be determined by the Lead COR and the contractor but varies depending on health of the animals, terrain and weather.

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

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

Q. What Contractor will be used for this Gather?

A. Cattoor Livestock Roundup Inc. of Nephi, Utah

Q. How much will this gather cost?

A. The BLM will calculate costs at the end of the gather.

Q. Why is the BLM removing horses that appear to be or are in good condition?

A. The BLM gathers horses with different body conditions, including some that appear to be or are in good condition. The agency pro-actively gathers excess animals from overpopulated herds on a three-to-five-year cycle to prevent worst-case scenarios.

Q. What veterinary treatment will the removed horses receive?

A. The horses will be aged (based on the condition of their teeth), de-wormed, vaccinated, blood-tested for EIA, and freeze-marked (marked with a cold brand).

Q. Where do the removed horses go?

A. Excess wild horses, removed from this gather, will be shipped to the Indian Lakes Off-Range Corrals near Fallon, Nevada, where they will be prepared for the BLM's adoption and sales programs or long-term holding facilities located in Midwestern pastures.

Q. What happens to horses that are not adopted?

A. Un-adopted horses are fed and cared for in either short-term corrals or long-term pastures. Wild horses over 10 years old and those passed over for adoption at least three times become eligible for sale, a transaction in which the title of ownership to the animals passes immediately from the Federal government to the buyer. In the adoption process, the title of ownership passes from the Federal government to the adopter after the individual provides one year of humane care.

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

A. No. While a December 2004 law granting the BLM sale authority authorizes the agency to sell sale-eligible animals "without limitation," the Bureau has **not been and is not selling any wild horses to slaughterhouses or to "killer buyers."** All horses in holding retain their status as "wild" animals and remain under the BLM's protection.

Q. Where may I learn more about the Wild Horse and Burro Program?

A. The BLM's Website is located at www.blm.gov/whb.