

Research Update for the WHB Advisory Board September 2020 Meeting

The Advisory Board received a detailed table of BLM-funded and permitted WHB research projects, and a related presentation, at the October 2019 meetings in Washington, DC. The following updates reflect projects that have had notable changes in status.

USDA APHIS National Wildlife Research Center, “Evaluation of a vaccine against oocyte growth factors (OGF) as a single dose, long-lasting immunocontraceptive.” Status update: BLM prepared a draft environmental assessment in December 2019. The final EA included responses to public comments; the Decision Record was issued in March 2020. The study is at the Northern Nevada Correctional Center. Sixteen mares were inoculated with the 1-dose OGF vaccine in May 2020, and 16 other mares in the study are untreated ‘controls.’ Researchers are ‘blinded’ as to which mares did or did not receive treatment. In monthly ultrasound monitoring, many mares appear to have limited follicle development and seem not to be cycling (unpublished data). In August 2020, each group of eight mares (4 treatment, 4 control) received one fertile stallion. The study is planned to last 3 years.

US Geological Survey and Oklahoma State University, “Evaluating the efficacy and safety of silicone intrauterine devices as a horse contraceptive.” Status update: Having found that Y-shaped silicone IUDs are effective at preventing pregnancies, stay in at acceptable rates, and are safe for uterine health, the researchers have a manuscript in peer review.

US Geological Survey and Colorado State University, “Evaluating behavior and ecology of geldings among a breeding population.” Status update: Researchers recently concluded data collection at Conger HMA, and are preparing manuscripts for peer review.

US Geological Survey, “Development of a population model and cost analysis for managing wild horses (‘PopEquus’).” Researchers are adding flexible modeling scenarios that include multiple management actions (i.e., removals + GonaCon treatment). Beta testing expected to start in October.

Aerial Surveys Update

Between October 2019 – August 2020, aerial surveys were completed at 33 HMAs, 7 HAs, and 2 USFS Wild Horse Territories, using the simultaneous double-observer method. SOPs for the method were published in March 2020, as a USGS open-file report. Coronavirus safety concerns led to delay or cancellation for a number of other aerial surveys in fiscal year 2020.