

2020 Antelope Valley HMA Emergency Wild Horse Gather “Questions and Answers”

Q. Why is this gather necessary?

A. The bait/water gather is necessary to address emergency conditions within the Antelope Valley HMA that threaten wild horse health and well-being, as well as crowding out wildlife that also compete for these limited resources. If a sufficient number of excess wild horses are not promptly removed from the area where water resources have become extremely limited, it is anticipated that individual wild horse body condition will continue to decline and that the most vulnerable horses - mares and foals in particular – are in danger of perishing.

The Antelope Valley HMA is overpopulated and animal conditions are declining due to range degradation and lack of sustainable water resources. Regular monitoring has occurred in the HMA to observe wild horse body condition and range and water conditions. Dependent on the location within Antelope Valley HMA animals body conditions have been observed in the range of 1.5-4.

In order to alleviate the competition for the limited water resources and prevent body condition decline and/or death of the most vulnerable horses, the BLM, Wells Field Office has hauled water to Deer spring until an emergency gather operation could be conducted and approximately 50 excess wild horses could be removed from the Antelope Valley HMA. BLM has determined the situation within Dolly Varden Range is an emergency because area springs have either gone dry or produce insufficient water to sustain the numbers of wild horses in the area. The current water resources are insufficient for the overpopulation of wild horses residing within the Antelope Valley HMA. The situation is too extreme to be addressed through the normal gather cycle (BLM Handbook 4.7.2).

In addition to the emergency situation, gathering these vulnerable horses will help in preventing further undue or unnecessary degradation of the public lands associated with excess wild horses, in order to work towards 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 is concerned that the overpopulation of wild horses is impacting wildlife, such as mule deer, elk and pronghorn antelope.

Q. What is the Appropriate Management Level and the current population estimate?

A. The Appropriate Management Level is 155-259 wild horses, based on the March 1, 2020 population estimate stats, the current population estimate is 1,144 wild horses

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

A. 50 wild horses from around the Deer Springs

Q. What will the remaining herd population of this herd management area be?

A. The estimated post 2020 foal crop wild horse population in the Antelope Valley HMA would be 1,094 wild horses.

Q. Is there livestock grazing in this area?

A. No. Although there are allotments within the area, there has been no grazing since the early 1980's in the Deer spring area.

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

A. Common wildlife species within the Antelope Valley HMA include coyote, black-tail jackrabbit, desert cottontail, bobcat and numerous raptors, reptiles and other small mammal species. Mule deer, elk, and pronghorn antelope are common big game species in the area. Currently, the overabundant population of wild horses is adversely affecting valuable habitat needed to support both native wildlife and wild horses.

The current population estimate of 1,144 wild horses has strained the very limited water resources within the Antelope Valley HMA. This is also currently affecting the health of native wildlife found within HMA, such as pronghorn antelope, mule deer and elk. In the Antelope Valley HMA, most of the waters within the boundaries of the range are have very limited flows in the summertime. The current estimated flow at Deer spring is 8 gallons/hour and with the evaporative conditions in the summertime it cannot support wildlife and the excess wild horses in the area. In addition, it is not unusual for Deer spring to go dry in the later part of the summer. Wild horses congregating around the spring are trying on the meet their basic needs of water during the hot summers experienced in Northern Nevada. Forage resources within a 1-3-mile radius of Deer spring are severely impacted due to the loitering of the excess wild horses, forcing both native wildlife and the wild horses to roam farther and farther in search of adequate forage. An emergency gather was last conducted in the Deer spring area in July of 2018, removing 262 animals. This emergency gather was conducted due to lack of water within the Antelope Valley HMA.

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 long-term production of desired plant communities is 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 will increase with each successive foal crop, will result in continued and increasing impacts to wildlife species populations and habitats. Wild horse populations will continue to increase about 15-25% each year that a gather is postponed. Valley bottom habitats would continue to see locally heavy levels of utilization associated with wild horse use and areas of heavy use would continue to expand as wild horse populations continue to grow.

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

A. No. Because of the nature of the bait and water trap method, wild horses are reluctant to approach the trap site when there is too much activity; therefore, only essential gather operation personnel will be allowed at the trap site during operations.

Q. What Contractor will be used for this Gather?

A. Cattoor Livestock Roundup Company out of Nephi, Utah.

Q. How much will this gather cost?

A. The costs for the gather will be calculated at the end of the gather.

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

A. Since this gather is a bait/water trap gather no herding of the animals will occur.

Q. What veterinary treatment will the removed horses receive?

A. Once the horses arrive at the Bruneau Off-Range Corrals, the crew will allow the horses to acclimate to domestic feed and monitor them for a period of time. Following, the horses will be aged (based on the condition of their teeth), de-wormed, vaccinated, blood-tested (for Equine Infectious Anemia), and freeze-marked (marked with a cold brand).

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

A. The BLM may use 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. Will the BLM implement any population suppression techniques? If so, what method or fertility control drug will be used and how many animals will be treated and released?

A. No, this is an emergency gather based on lack of water therefore, all animals gathered will be removed.

Q. Why is the BLM removing horses when, as of July 2020, there are already over 47,000 animals 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. In the case of the Antelope Valley HMA, excess horses the gather is needed not only to ensure balance on the range and reversal of downward trends.

Although the BLM tries to place as many 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. Where do the removed horses go?

A. Excess wild horses, removed will be shipped to the Bruneau Off-Range Wild Horse and Burro Corrals, located in Bruneau, Idaho, 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 Midwestern 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.) 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. Will any of the horses be sent to slaughter?

A. No. While a December 2004 amendment to the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act authorizes the BLM to sell sale-eligible animals "without limitation," the BLM has **not been and is not selling any wild horses to slaughterhouses or to "killer buyers."**

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

A. Please visit the BLM's website at <https://www.blm.gov/whb>