

**Veterinary Evaluation Report  
(Follow-up #2)**

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**Report Date:** 1/28/22

**Location/Event:** Canon City Facility

**Exam Date:** 1/18/22

**Animal ID:** current population of horses at Canon City

**History/Background:** This is a follow-up visit to two earlier visits (10/6/21 and 11/16/21) in response to concerns about the condition of horses at the Canon City facility, Steve Leonard (BLM Facility Manager and WH&B State Lead for CO) requested the follow-up visit. Jerrie Bertola (BLM Coordinator of the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program) accompanied me during the visit. It was anticipated that we would also be meeting with a group of interested persons from the Governor's Office, but they had cancelled their plans a few days prior to our visit.

During this visit we reviewed the horses and housing conditions at the facility, and discussed our findings with Brian Hardin (CCI Agriculture Division/WHB Supervisor). The Henneke 1-9 body condition scoring system (attached) was used to evaluate body condition.

The goals of this visit were as follows:

- 1) to observe and review the condition of the majority of the horses at the facility,
- 2) examine and consult with BLM on any animals found to have a Henneke body condition score (BCS) of less than 3,
- 3) examine and consult with BLM on any animals identified by on-site staff as a concern due to body condition or other health concerns,
- 4) summarize and quantify my observations for CO BLM.

**Examination/Results:** On arrival at the facility we reviewed pen sheets showing the number of animals in each pen and how much hay was being fed to each pen (average of 25lbs/head). It was noted that some pens with smaller (yearling) horses were being fed closer to 16lbs per head per day and other pens with mares previously identified as thin being fed 32bs per pair per day.

Steve Leonard and Jerrie Bertola accompanied me during my walk through, and Brian Hardin was available in the office for questions. Weather was clear and cool, dry, little wind with temperatures in the 50s. I was given complete access to the facility, free to enter any pens and talk with any staff present. Various management activities were observed during my visit including feeding and sorting. The hay fed was examined and found to be of three types: good quality, green, weed free alfalfa, a higher grade of excellent quality (likely "premium") leafier alfalfa and a good quality grass hay (fed to one pen only). The amounts that were sun bleached were small, mostly attributable to bale surfaces and no spoiled or poor quality hay was observed. The hay was being fed as

scattered on the ground throughout the pens. The distribution was more than adequate for all animals to eat simultaneously plus additional space allowing them to change position during feeding. Fighting among the animals was not observed at any time including during feeding.

We walked through 43 pens and assessed body condition at a pen level for approximately 2428 of the horses in residence. The horses in residence include those from the Red Desert gather in WY, recent West Douglas and Sand Wash Basin gathers, horses recently shipped in from recent gathers in WY, weanlings from these areas and a mixed group called "past agreement horses". The classes of horses included nursing (wet) mares, dry mares, stallions, geldings, yearlings, weanlings and a small number of burros (in good condition housed near the main road and not otherwise included in this report).

Almost all of were in good condition (Henneke BCS of 4 or greater) with most having a BCS of 4 or 5, no obese (BCS 7-9) horses were observed. *Two of the 2428 horses observed (less than 1/10 of 1 %) were found to have a Henneke BCS of 3 or less. This included one BCS 2.5 weanling in the sick barn with an apparent respiratory infection and one BCS 3 weanling in Pen 20 (recently arrived from WY).*

At the start of our visit we discussed the approximately 40 thin horses that had previously been sorted off for supplemental feeding. All but three of these had responded by returning to a BCS of at least 4. They were being sorted and returned to groups from which they originated during our walk through. I observed these animals and agreed they were now in good condition and should return to their original pens. Three very thin horses that had not responded to supplemental feeding (one 20+ YO grey horse, one horse missing most of its lower incisors, and one with broken and missing teeth) were evaluated and found to have a poor prognosis for recovery. These horses were euthanized in accordance with BLM policy.

Other observations made during my visit included the following:

- 1) The older colts from the Red Desert and Sand Wash Basin groups had been weaned, and they were doing well receiving excellent quality alfalfa hay in sufficient quantity with less competition at the feedline.
- 2) Horses recently arrived from Wheatland that were reported to have a generalized skin fungus had been treated several times and were almost completely recovered.
- 4) Hoof condition overall was good – it was evident that some hoof trimming was being done but also that much more would be needed in the next few months. Large groups of recently captured horses had been brought in recently and they will all come due in short windows of time.
- 5) Few of the pens had much if any residual hay left from the previous day's feeding. (see below for recommendations regarding this)
- 6) One horse in the sick pens was awaiting euthanasia by the attending veterinarian. It had arrived from the Red Desert gather last year with a chronic, severe spinal deformity. I concur with the assessment of this horse as these

conditions are untreatable, progressive in nature and have a hopeless prognosis for recovery. (see below for recommendations regarding this type of condition)

7) Only three other lame horses were observed. Two had been evaluated by the attending veterinarian and were awaiting a decision based on their progress toward improvement over the subsequent 30 days. One in the general population had no apparent limb deformity or injury, most likely got kicked recently and would be observed for improvement or later sorted for examination by the facility veterinarian.

8) Several gates from pens to alleyways were noted to be missing visual barriers (particularly those recently put back into use near the RxR tracks, 8A-9). Other pens were noted to have broken rails, broken welds and be in need of repair. This could affect future CAWP assessments and should be addressed soon to help prevent injury.

**Discussion:** As previously discussed the goal for BLM management in facilities is to maintain horses in good body condition (BCS of 4 or greater). Unlimited, free-choice feeding of all horses in large groups tends to overfeed the majority of animals with many becoming overly fat. Sorting thin horses into groups identified for supplemental (free choice alfalfa) feeding works and is the most efficient and effective way of putting weight on thin horses.

One should expect 1-3% of horses in any large group of wild horses that are limit fed to be thin (BCS=3 to 4). No wild horses should be maintained long term with a BCS<3. Animals that are thin (BCS=2-3-4) should be sorted and offered *free choice* good quality alfalfa hay for at least 30 days with no apparent competition for bunk space. Those that do not recover to a BCS of 3 should be individually evaluated to assess their prognosis for recovery to an acceptable body condition, and those with a poor prognosis for recovery should be euthanized in accordance with BLM policy (PIM2021-007). Those with a BCS of 3-4 may need supplemental, free choice feed on an ongoing basis to achieve and maintain an acceptable body condition. Those with a BCS of at least 4 can be returned to a general population and observed to see if they maintain that good condition. Guidelines for feeding 2-2.5% of body weight are good guidelines to begin with, but ultimately the quality and amount of feed provided to all horses must be adequate to maintain horses in good condition (BCS≥4), regardless of what that amount may be.

### **Conclusion(s)/Recommendation(s):**

The wild horses and burros currently in residence at the Canon City facility are in very good condition. The quality of the alfalfa hay being fed and the manner in which the horses are fed is appropriate for the conditions present. Current recommendations include the following:

- 1) *On an ongoing basis*, thin horses should continue to be identified by staff (working as pen riders), sorted and offered free choice alfalfa as supplemental feed and managed as described above.

- 2) Gates and panels should be monitored and maintained in good condition or repaired as needed to maintain function, safety and visual barriers to conform with CAWP guidelines for BLM facilities.
- 3) The descriptor “WY Horses” currently used to characterize groups of horses will need to be modified to account for the multiple different groups of horses now at the facility from WY.
- 4) Sometimes medical and physical conditions get worse over time or are exacerbated by shipping. However, horses with severe obvious deformities (limb or spinal deformities, severely broken and missing teeth) and existing medical conditions should not be shipped between facilities. Those received from gathers *known to have serious deformities or medical conditions with a poor prognosis for recovery when shipped* should be euthanized as soon as possible (within a few days of arrival). Horses received from gathers or other facilities discovered in this in this condition or found to develop these conditions over time should be identified, sorted, documented, evaluated by an attending veterinarian within a week or so of discovery and either treated or considered for euthanasia if they have or develop a poor prognosis for recovery.