

# COMPREHENSIVE ANIMAL WELFARE PROGRAM

## STANDARDS

### OFF-RANGE PASTURES



Developed by

The Bureau of Land Management  
Wild Horse and Burro Program

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## Table of Contents

I.	PASTURE PERSONNEL.....	3
A.	General.....	3
II.	OFF-RANGE PASTURE DESIGN.....	3
A.	General.....	3
B.	Corral Facility.....	3
C.	Acclimation Pasture.....	5
D.	Pastures.....	5
III.	RECEIVING WILD HORSES AND BURROS.....	6
A.	Loading and Unloading Areas.....	6
B.	Receiving Procedures.....	6
IV.	CARE OF WILD HORSES AND BURROS.....	7
A.	Health Care.....	7
B.	Biosecurity.....	7
C.	Feed and Water.....	8
D.	Observations and Inventory.....	9
E.	Preparation Procedures.....	9
F.	Euthanasia Procedures.....	10
G.	Carcass Disposal.....	11
V.	HANDLING WILD HORSES AND BURROS.....	11
A.	Willful Acts of Abuse.....	11
B.	General Handling.....	12
C.	Handling Aids.....	12
VI.	PUBLIC VISITATION or TOURS.....	13
A.	Public Visitors.....	13
B.	Adoption/Sale at Off-Range Pastures.....	13

# **ANIMAL WELFARE STANDARDS OFF-RANGE PASTURES**

## **I. PASTURE PERSONNEL**

### **A. General**

1. The off-range pasture operator must establish and implement standards of care, treatment, and handling of wild horses and burros, and communicate these expectations to all personnel to ensure the humane care and treatment of all wild horses and burros at the off-range pasture.
2. The off-range pasture operator must have enough employees or volunteers with training, skills, and experience to observe, move, and handle the wild horses and burros on the off-range pasture.
3. The off-range pasture operator must have personnel that can properly maintain the working chute system and facility infrastructure to provide for the safe housing, movement, and prepping of the wild horses and burros.
4. The off-range pasture operator should maintain necessary and appropriate records.

## **II. OFF-RANGE PASTURE DESIGN**

### **A. General**

1. Off-range pastures must be free of hazards such as unfenced paved public highways, junk, spools of wire or other stored fencing materials, old cars, or any other hazards that could cause injury. They must not be located in areas with unfenced paved highway or high traffic areas.
2. Off-range pastures must be operated in a manner to provide a safe, clean, and supportive environment for all wild horses and burros.
3. Non-essential personnel and equipment must be located to minimize disturbance of wild horses and burros.
4. Trash, debris, and reflective or noisy objects should be eliminated from the off-range pasture.

### **B. Corral Facility**

1. The corral facility must be constructed of stout materials and must be maintained in proper working conditions with gates that swing freely and latch easily.
2. The sorting corral facility must have a minimum of three sorting corrals with a minimum of 2,500 square feet each for holding wild horses and burros for short-term (up to 5 days prior to shipment).

3. In addition to the sorting corrals and small acclimation pastures, pasture/dry lot space must be available for close-up holding of 20% of the wild horses and burros at the off-range pasture for periods up to 90 days.
4. The off-range pastures must have enough corrals to sort wild horses and burros according to sex, age, temperament, health status, or physical condition as needed.
5. The off-range pastures must furnish a concrete or graveled area and electricity (120 volts) for a hydraulic chute provided by the BLM.
6. All corrals and pens must always have water available for animals maintained therein.
7. The off-range pasture corral facility fences must be of stout design, materials, and be maintained in proper conditions with no holes, gaps, opening, protruding surfaces, or sharp edges present which could result in wild horses and burros being injured or that may cause escape. The off-range pasture corral facilities may be permanent or temporary (portable panels).
8. The off-range pasture corral facilities must be not less than 6 feet high for wild horses and 5 feet high for burros, and the bottom rail must not be more than 12 inches from the ground level.
9. Barbed wire fencing must not be used in the construction of the off-range pasture corral facility.
10. Mesh wire is allowable if openings are not larger than 2 inches by 4 inches. Mesh wire fences must be equipped with at least 3 wooden sight boards (2 inches by 8 inches), located on the upper portion of the fence. The three sight boards must be spaced no more than 12 inches apart.
11. Off-range pasture corrals constructed of pipe or wood must have opening of not more than 12 inches between horizontal members.
12. Soil type in corrals must be well-drained and non-alkaline in nature; slopes within corrals must provide adequate drainage.
13. Corral gates must be constructed of wood or pipe and be the same height as the fences.
14. Gates in corrals must be visible to the wild horses and burros either from the materials used in construction or by using materials such as plywood, or plastic mesh placed on the gate creating a visual barrier.
15. The design of the pens used for crowding wild horses and burros during handling should be oval or constructed with rounded corners.
16. Chutes and crowding alleys must be available to facilitate gathering, preparing, and shipping animals and must be solidly constructed of steel or lumber.
17. Single-file alley runways must have at least three sliding gates, be solidly constructed of steel or lumber, be at least 36 feet in length, 28-32 inches wide, and at least 6 feet tall.

## **C. Acclimation Pasture**

1. At least two or more acclimation pastures must be available to maintain 100 wild horses and burros while adapting to feeding and equipment before release into large pastures, to hold foals during the weaning process, or to maintain wild horses and burros prior to shipment (30 days or more).
2. Small acclimation pasture(s) must be available for adaption to feeding and equipment before release into large pastures. Acclimation pastures may also be used for holding wild horses and burros awaiting shipment.
3. Acclimation pastures must have water available at all times for wild horses and burros maintained therein.
4. Acclimation pastures fences must be constructed low to the ground, the bottom wire must not be more than of 12 inches off the ground to prevent foals from going under the fence.
5. Barbed wire fencing is allowed in the construction of the acclimation pasture(s) if the following guidelines are followed:
  - a. Fences must be a minimum of 48 inches high.
  - b. Fences must have a minimum of 4 wires.
  - c. Fences must have spaces not more than 12 inches between wires.
  - d. When new animals are introduced to the acclimation pasture, fencing must be marked with at least 8 inches of flagging and/or other visual aids attached to the top wire every 20 feet.

## **D. Pastures**

1. Pastures must be of sufficient size to allow wild horses and burros freedom of movement and ability to exercise for good health and natural hoof wear to maintain hoof condition.
2. Pastures must have sufficient rock and soil types to maintain proper hoof size and shape without the need for trimming. Manmade enhancements that cause natural wear of hooves may be acceptable, especially around water sources or feed areas.
3. All pasture fences and division fences must consist of a minimum of 4 strands of barbed wire or other acceptable fencing materials with a minimum height of 4 feet.
4. Gates, rather than cattle guards, must be used at road crossing or fence openings to keep wild horses and burros in pastures.
5. Shelter from wind must be provided in each pasture by topography (e.g., canyons, hills, etc.), other natural features such as trees, or manmade structures.

### **III. RECEIVING WILD HORSES AND BURROS**

#### **A. Loading and Unloading Areas**

1. The areas for loading and unloading wild horses and burros must be maintained in a safe and proper working condition, including gates that swing freely and latch or tie easily. The off-range pasture must have a loading chute(s) sufficient to safely unload and load semi-trailer trucks and small stock trailers.
2. Supplemental lighting must be provided to facilitate visibility during low light conditions.
3. Access to the loading and unloading chute must be available during inclement weather.
4. Loading and unloading ramps must have a non-slip surface and be maintained in a safe and proper working condition to prevent slips and falls. Examples of non-slip floors would include, but not be limited to, rubber mats, sand, shavings, and steel reinforcement rods built into the ramp. There must be no holes in the flooring or items that can cause an animal to trip.
5. Trailers must be properly aligned with loading and unloading chutes and panels such that no gaps exist between the chute/panel and floor and sides of the trailer creating a situation where a wild horse and burro could injure itself.
6. The side panels of the loading chute must be a minimum of 6 feet high and have solid sides a minimum of 5 feet high covered with materials such as plywood or metal without holes, gaps, or openings, protruding surfaces, or sharp edges that may cause escape or possible injury.
7. For loading, a single alley is required.
8. The design of the pens used for crowding wild horses and burros during handling should be oval or constructed with rounded corners.
9. Working area fencing must be at a minimum of 6 feet high for wild horses and 5 feet high for burros, stoutly constructed and made of lumber, pipe or steel.
10. All gates and doors must open and close easily and latch securely.
11. Stock trailers should be positioned for loading or unloading such that there is no more than 12 inches clearance between the ground and floor of the trailer for burros and 18 inches for wild horses.

#### **B. Receiving Procedures**

1. All unloading of wild horses and burros must be performed during daylight hours except when unforeseen circumstances develop, and the Authorized Officer approves the use of supplemental light.

2. At the time of unloading, wild horses and burros must be inspected by the off-range pasture operator to look for signs of infectious disease, sickness or injury and take appropriate steps if these conditions are observed including reporting them back to BLM.
3. Wild horses and burros must be unloaded, sorted, and separated as needed upon their arrival at the off-range pasture.
4. An authorized, properly trained, and experienced person, as well as euthanasia equipment and supplies, must be available immediately following unloading if the emergency euthanasia of an animal is required. Euthanasia must be done in compliance with BLM Euthanasia policy.
5. The off-range pasture operator must document any wild horse and burro that is recumbent or dead upon arrival at the destination and notify the COR and/or PI.
6. Newly arrived wild horses and burros must immediately be provided hay of good quality and water upon unloading.
7. All neck tags must be removed if present before wild horses and burros are turned out into acclimation pastures or pastures.

#### **IV. CARE OF WILD HORSES AND BURROS**

##### **A. Health Care**

1. Off-range pastures must be free-roaming environments and individual animal health care will not be routinely provided.
2. Treatment or euthanasia of sick or injured animals as an act of mercy must be authorized by the COR/PI.

##### **B. Biosecurity**

1. The off-range pasture operator must consult with the COR/PI to establish and review biosecurity and health care protocols and decisions.
2. Wild horses and burros newly arrived from gather operations, off-range corrals, or other off-range pastures must not be co-mingled with resident animals at the off-range corral for a minimum of three weeks.
3. Domestic horses must not be stocked adjacent to or with wild horses and burros.
4. Working chutes and tub systems should be routinely cleaned and disinfected to reduce the risk of disease transmission, especially after moving contagious wild horses or burros through the system.
5. Pens must be provided to segregate sick, infectious, injured, or weak wild horses or burros from other healthy individuals in the facility when possible. These pens must have shelter from wind such as dense hedgerows of trees and shrubs, solid fences, or other manmade windbreaks.

## **C. Feed and Water**

1. Before wild horses and burros show an unacceptable body condition (Henneke BSC less than 4), specific supplemental feeding practices appropriate for wild horses and burros must be developed and implemented in consultation with the COR/PI.
2. Supplemental feed must be accessible for pastured wild horses and burros during times when natural forage will not maintain the wild horses and burros in at least moderately thin to moderate condition (Henneke Body Condition Score (BCS) 4-5), and/or when inclement weather prevents grazing.
3. Supplemental feed must not be fed to individual wild horses or burros in declining health resulting from age and natural causes.
4. Supplemental feed must be provided to wild horses and burros in a clean, well-drained area free of mud and standing water.
5. Supplemental feed must be of such quality and fed in sufficient quantity to sustain wild horses and burros in moderately thin to moderate condition (Henneke Body Condition Score (BCS) 4-5).
6. Wild horses and burros in corrals, pens, or acclimation pasture areas must be fed hay daily in sufficient quantity to sustain wild horses and burros in moderately thin to moderate condition (Henneke Body Condition Score (BCS) 4-5).
7. Hay used as supplemental feed must be leafy, green, well cured, and free of dust, mold, weeds, and foreign material.
8. Feeding sites must allow for all wild horses or burros within the corral or acclimation pastures simultaneous access to hay with an additional 20% of space to allow wild horses or burros to move about and change position while eating.
9. Granulated, rock or block salt and trace minerals must be accessible to all wild horses and burros in each pasture.
10. The available standing vegetation in pastures must be of sufficient nutritive quality and quantity with pasture stocking rate adjusted as necessary to assure the majority of wild horses and burros are maintained in at least moderately thin to moderate conditions (Henneke Body Condition Score (BCS) 4-5) at all times.
11. A Henneke Body Condition Score of four or better should be maintained for a minimum of 95% of the animals present at all times. No greater than 5% of the animals should have a body condition score of three at any time, and no animals should be maintained at the body conditions score of two or less. Animals with a body condition score less than 3 must be individually evaluated with a prognosis for recovery considered as referenced in the BLM Euthanasia policy (PIM 2021-007).
12. No wild horses or burros should have a body condition greater than 7.



13. Vegetative monitoring must be completed annually in each approved off-range pasture as specified by individual wild horse and burro management agreements or contracts.
14. The maximum distance to water in any pasture must be 2 miles.
15. Watering systems in wild horse and burro holding corrals, pens, acclimation pastures and pastures must always provide a continuous supply of clean water appropriate for livestock.
16. Water troughs and watering systems in holding corrals, pens, acclimation pastures and pastures must be checked daily to ensure a continuous supply of clean water.

## **D. Observations and Inventory**

1. Wild horses and burros must be observed by the off-range pasture operator at a minimum of one time per week to determine the overall condition of the wild horses and burros and record any deaths that may occur.
2. Observations must be conducted by the off-range pasture operator more frequently when conditions warrant such as during flooding, tornados, blizzards, and fires to ascertain the safety and well-being of the wild horses and burros and to assure fences are properly maintained.
3. Observations by the off-range pasture operator must be carried out on foot, from a vehicle, or horseback. In emergency situations, such as deep snow, etc., aircraft may be used with prior approval of COR/PO.
4. Any problems or concerns observed by the off-range pasture operator must be reported to COR/PO within 24 hours of discovery.
5. The off-range pasture operator must maintain an inventory that identifies the location of each wild horse and burro occupies and the death of any wild horse and burro with probable cause. The 4-digit freeze mark on the hip, the angle freeze mark on the left side of the neck or a microchip implanted into the left side of the neck (for animals prepped after 2019) will be used to identify each wild horse and burro.

## **E. Preparation Procedures**

1. Gathering for the purpose of weaning foals or removing animals must not be conducted more than three times per year. The gather time will be determined by the COR/PO.
2. Gathering or movement of wild horses and burros from pastures must be done with the concurrence of the COR/PO, except in emergency conditions when the off-range pasture operator determines an immediate gather or movement is necessary for the safety and welfare of the wild horses and burros. The off-range pasture operator must notify the COR/PO within 24 hours after such movement.

3. Foals born at the off-range pasture must be gathered by the off-range pasture operator from pastures and made available upon BLM request. Shipment of foals will occur within 12 months but not before 4 months of age.
4. The off-range pasture operator must gather and trim hooves of wild horses and burros if needed to keep their feet in good shape, as identified the COR/PO.
5. The off-range pasture operator must assist the COR/PI or veterinarian in the handling and movement of wild horses and burros to administer booster vaccinations, trimming of hooves, drawing blood for Coggins test and de-worming if wild horses and burros are designated to leave the off-range pasture.
6. Aggressive wild horses and burros in corral areas should be separated or processed in a timely manner to prevent or minimize injury to other wild horses and burros.

## **F. Euthanasia Procedures**

1. Euthanasia must be done in compliance with BLM Euthanasia Policy PIM No 2021-007, Euthanasia of Wild Horses and Burros Related to Acts of Mercy, Health, or Safety.
2. Animals that are severely injured or acutely suffering must be immediately euthanized.
3. A properly trained and experienced person or persons authorized by the Authorized Officer and meeting the requirements found in Section II. C. of the Euthanasia policy will be available on site or on call within 72 hours to perform euthanasia as needed at an off-range pasture.
4. Firearms and ammunition suitable for field euthanasia, must be available at off-range pastures at all times in the event that the emergency euthanasia of an animal is required.
5. The BLM COR/PI responsible for oversight of the off-range pasture will evaluate all wild horses and burros and establish their body condition periodically throughout the year, particularly if the facility is experiencing drought or some other event which might limit forage availability.
6. At any time during the year, if any wild horse and burro is acutely suffering from any of the qualifying conditions A-F Euthanasia policy as described in the Policy the COR, PO, PI, contractor, partner, or another person as described in IV. F. 2. above will euthanize that wild horse and burro, within 24 hours of identification.
7. On an annual basis, a team including a BLM Wild Horse and Burro Specialist and a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) or other veterinarian acceptable to the BLM will formally evaluate the condition of each animal on the off-range pasture prior to the onset of severe winter weather to identify animals with physical, or health problems or concerns related to body condition.

8. Wild horses and burros that are chronically affected with a body condition score of less than 3 or that have a poor prognosis for improvement to a body condition score greater than 3 will be euthanized within 72 hours.
9. Wild horses and burros with a body condition score of three, or less that do not appear to be acutely suffering or have a fair or better prognosis for improvement will be rechecked in 30 days. Those that remain below body condition score 3 will be euthanized within 72 hours of the second evaluation.
10. Any wild horse and burro that dies or is euthanized must be documented including the circumstances, freeze mark ID if present, a description of the age, sex, color of the animal and the reason the animal died or was euthanized. The COR/PI must be notified within 24 hours, and a death record must be entered into the WHBPS. In general terms a reason for euthanasia should never be unknown.
11. If the cumulative mortality from all causes for any month has more than doubled from the historical numbers for that premises (typically 0.0025 of the population or ¼ % per month) the COR/PI should review the history and death records for that facility in consultation with a veterinarian including postmortem physical examinations or necropsies if indicated to understand the causes of mortality and potentially limit future losses.

## **G. Carcass Disposal**

1. The COR/PI and the off-range pasture operator must ensure that appropriate procedures are in place for the timely disposal of carcasses, when necessary, at off-range pasture facilities.
2. Compensation for disposing of the carcass must not be received by any BLM personnel or person associated with the off-range pasture.
3. Disposal of carcasses must be in accordance with applicable state and local laws.

## **V. HANDLING WILD HORSES AND BURROS**

### **A. Willful Acts of Abuse**

1. Hitting, kicking, or beating any wild horses and burros in an abusive manner is prohibited.
2. Dragging a recumbent wild horses and burros without a sled, slide board or slip sheet is prohibited. Ropes used for moving the recumbent animal must be attached to the sled, slide board, or slip sheet.
3. There should be no deliberate driving of wild horses and burros into other animals, closed gates, panels, or other equipment.
4. There should be no deliberate slamming of gates and doors on wild horses and burros.
5. There should be no excessive noise (e.g., constant yelling) or sudden activity

causing wild horses and burros to become unnecessarily flighty, disturbed or agitated.

## **B. General Handling**

1. All sorting, loading, or unloading of wild horses and burros must be performed during daylight hours except when unforeseen circumstances develop, and the Authorized Officer approves of the use of supplemental light.
2. Halters and ropes tied to a wild horse and burro may be used to roll, turn, position, or load a recumbent animal, but a wild horse and burro must not be dragged across the ground by a halter or rope attached to its body while in a recumbent position.
3. Wild horses and burros should be moved into and out of pens in a manner that will minimize stress and injury.
4. When possible, wild horses and burros should be allowed to move at their own pace to new pens or sorting/handling locations.
5. Wild horses and burros should be handled to enter runways or chutes in a forward direction.
6. No wild horse or burro should remain in single-file alleyways, runways, or chutes longer than 30 minutes.
7. No equipment should be operated in such a manner as to cause flighty behavior or injury to wild horses and burros.

## **C. Handling Aids**

1. Handling aids such as flags and shaker paddles must be the primary tools for driving and moving wild horses and burros during handling and transport procedures. Contact of the flag or paddle end of primary handling aids with a wild horse and burro is allowed. Ropes looped around the hindquarters may be used from horseback or on foot to assist in moving an animal forward or during loading.
2. Electric prods must not be used routinely as a driving aid or handling tool. Electric prods may be used in limited circumstances only if the following guidelines are followed:
  - a. Electric prods must only be a commercially available make and model that uses DC battery power with batteries fully charged at all times.
  - b. The electric prod device must never be disguised or concealed.
  - c. Electric prods must only be used after three attempts using other handling aids (flag, shaker paddle, voice, or body position) have been tried unsuccessfully to move the wild horses and burros.

- d. Electric prods must only be picked up when intended to deliver a stimulus; these devices are not constantly carried by the handlers.
- e. Space in front of an animal must be available for the wild horse and burro to move forward prior to application of the electric prod.
- f. Electric prods must never be applied to the face, genitals, anus, or underside of the tail of a wild horse and burro.
- g. Electric prods must not be applied to any one wild horse and burro more than three times during a procedure (e.g., sorting, loading) except in extreme cases with the approval of the Authorized Officer. Each exception must be approved at the time by the Authorized Officer.

## **VI. PUBLIC VISITATION or TOURS**

### **A. Public Visitors**

1. All visitors must be advised to maintain a safe distance from wild horses and burros.
2. Visitors must not be allowed to feed wild horses or burros other than gentled animals for demonstration or display purposes.
3. Visitors must not haul in outside horses for the purpose of getting in close contact with wild horses or burros at off-range pastures. No horses, other than those managed by the off-range pasture operator, will be allowed to come in contact with wild horses and burros at off-range pasture.
4. Facility infrastructure (building restroom, parking lots, etc.) must be separated from wild horse and burro pastures via fencing. Wild horses and burros must not “roam” amongst areas of concentrated visitors.
5. Off-range pasture tours must not intentionally chase or harass wild horses and burros at off-range pastures.

### **B. Adoption/Sale at Off-Range Pastures**

1. All facilities for Adoption/Sale at off-range pastures must be operated in a safe, clean, and supportive environment for all wild horses and burros.
2. The facility must have enough pens available to sort wild horses and burros according to sex, temperament, or physical needs.
3. The off-range pasture corrals, fences, gates, alleys, and working chutes must be constructed of stout materials and must be maintained in proper working condition.
4. Fences in adoption pens, alleys, and working chute systems must not be less than 6 feet high for wild horses and 5 feet high for burros.
5. Adoption pen fences must be of stout design and must be maintained in proper condition with no holes, gaps, or sharp edges that could result in wild horses and

burros being injured.

6. Watering systems in wild horse and burro adoption holding pens must always provide unlimited access to clean water appropriate for livestock.
7. Adoption pen feeding areas must be accessible to all wild horses and burros in the pen at the same time plus an additional 20% of room for reshuffling position while eating.
8. Ground surfaces in adoption pens should promote drainage to reduce wet ground conditions.
9. Wild horses and burros in pens at the facility should be maintained at a stocking density such that when at rest all wild horses and burros occupy no more than half the pen area.