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The US Forest Service continues to struggle to get recognition that the agency shares responsibilities in the Wild horse and burro regulatory arena with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The FS has approximately 20% of the lands and 20% of the free-roaming horses and burros protected by the Wild Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971. The two agencies partner in management of these animals, but the Congress allocates specific funds to the BLM but not the FS.



Figure 1 Devil's Garden mare and foal

Territories and Populations

The Forest Service has 53 Wild Horse and Burro Territories located on Forest Service lands. These territories are in 9 states, with 34 active territories and the remainder listed as inactive because they are unsuitable for a thriving horse population. There are 19 territories that adjoin BLM HMAs, and so

termed Joint Management Areas (JMAs). 12 of the JMAs are characterized by a majority of FS land, so the FS takes priority responsibility. This includes leading in completing NEPA evaluations, any gather or census operations, and joined management operations. Each forest is responsible for developing the cooperative relationships and guidelines for handling the JMA.

Populations are currently above the appropriate management levels of 2200 horses and 300 burros. There are estimated to be 1250 burros and 9100 horses on Forest Service lands. Additional complications include releases of domestic horses by irresponsible owners and free roaming horses that may cross borders with tribal lands. These unauthorized domestic horses may mingle with the true federally protected stock and are often impossible to distinguish from the true wild horses (burros are not implicated in the issue of domestics being released).

2023 Management Statistics and Plans

Modoc National Forest:

In compliance with a settlement reached in 2020 the Modoc National Forest gathered 292 horses in 2023, fewer than the plan to remove 500-600 horses. Some of the horses in the territory are expressing habituation to capture techniques, particularly helicopters.



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Options are being discussed, including the use of targeted trapping in other months to increase the number of removals. There was also a noticeable decrease in the number of foals this year, attributable to the harsh winter of 2022-2023. All animals are processed and adopted from the Double Devil's Garden Wild Horse Corrals. There is a NEPA and an updated Territory Plan underway to include the "middle section" that was previously privately owned. Under the revised plan contraceptive management will be applied to horses on the range. AML is expected to be reached in 2025.

The Double Devil's Garden corrals placed 96%+ of the horses from the corrals this past year. In the spring they received 34 young horses that had been processed at the BLM corrals near Fallon. All the transferred horses have been adopted. They plan to receive further shipments of FS assigned animals from BLM as space allows to facilitate moving animals as quickly as possible into private holding.

The Double Devil's Garden corrals have also processed and adopted horses removed from Gavin's Peak and will be taking animals from other forests as room allows. The staff from the corrals have developed a plan to provide horses for a Mustang Spectacular event in Tennessee and have supplied 36 horses for trainers taking part in

that event. Adoptions are increasing in the Eastern US as people become familiar with the program in the FS and the quality of the horses that come off the range.

The Double Devil's Garden corrals utilize many hours of volunteer time in a cooperative agreement to make progress on marketing animals to the public from the Modoc National Forest.

The Corrals have been able to cooperate with Wildlife Services and NRCS on research projects that have funding from other sources. These include a stallion project looking at the effects of GonaCon while simultaneously investigating the efficacy of various adjuvants. NRCS has also been able to place tracking collars on horses that can be released back into the territory to provide data on natural behaviors, etc..

Inyo National Forest:

An updated NEPA and Territory Plan are underway. The harsh winter of 2022-2023 had some effects with increased visibility of natural losses near Mono Lake. There are plans to trap horses that are off the territory on state and private lands when the Plan is in place. The removed animals will be accepted at the Double Devil's Garden corrals.

Malheur National Forest:



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An updated NEPA and Territory Plan are in process and have been released for scoping to the public. Trapping of nuisance horses continues as needed. The BLM and Fs have worked together to complete a new Territory Plan and to move forward in solving an excess issue with the Murder Creek Territory.

Ochoco National Forest:

A territory Management Plan is expected to be approved by the end of the year. A lawsuit recently concluded which will allow the forest to move forward with their plans. Contraceptives are administered and planned for future management when AML is reached. There are plans to build a Wild Horse Interpretive and Teaching Center in conjunction with partners to facilitate better education and awareness of the issues surrounding wild horses and to promote adoptions. There will be corrals included with a capacity to hold and process 35 horses at a time.

Heber Wild Horse Territory:

There are currently about 1700 horses on the territory plus around 1000 feral horses in the adjoining Apache National Forest requiring removal and management. A NEPA and Territory Plan should be approved when sufficient personnel can be available to provide edits, and The Fish and Wildlife can

complete their analysis. There is a plan to gather as many as 600 horses in 2024 if the plan is approved. A corral facility to hold horses as they are removed from the Forest is planned to facilitate processing, transfer to larger facilities and adoptions. Funding is needed to move the process forward in a timely manner.

Carson National Forest:

The Wild Horse corrals in Bloomfield, New Mexico are available for continual trapping, processing and adoption of horses and burros. Homeland Habitat is active in partnering with Forest Service to trap and transport animals and facilitating adoptions. The Bloomfield Corrals also accept horses and burros from other areas if approved by the Forest Supervisor. Active use of PZP continues at the Jarita Mesa and Jicarilla Territories.

San Bernadino National Forest:

The Black Bear Burro Territory is planning to trap and remove up to 100 excess burros if funding becomes available.

Johnnie, Little Fish Lake, Red Rock, Shoshone, and Spring Mountain Territories are in the process of updating NEPAs and developing Territory Plans.



Figure 2 A group of burros captured from Big Bear Territory

Region 4 (Utah and Nevada): All territories, in conjunction with tribal lands, are administering census flights in 2024. Multiple gathers and trappings are planned, particularly in association with BLM.

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Figure 3 Denver, a former mustang trained as a FS pack horse

All areas are affected by continuing drought conditions. There is an acknowledgement that AML estimates may have to be modified to reflect the declining range conditions.

Contraceptive Use

Contraceptives are in use in some territories. Updated NEPAs and Territory Plans will include the use of PZP, GonaCon, and possibly IUDs. They will also be written to allow use of new products that will be developed through ongoing equine research.