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# Wednesday, December 13, 2023

## Welcome and Call to Order

**Bryant Kuechle, Facilitator, The Langdon Group**

*Mr. Kuechle welcomed attendees to the Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board meeting and introduced himself and his role as a neutral third-party facilitator.*

**Ms. Celeste Carlisle, Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board Chair**

*Ms. Carlisle welcomed the Advisory Board members (Table 1). She called the meeting to order. The members of the Board then introduced themselves.*

TABLE 1 - NATIONAL WILD HORSE & BURRO ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS	
	Representing
<b>Dr. Ursula Bechert, DVM, PhD</b>	Wild Horse & Burro Research
<b>Ms. Celeste Carlisle</b>	Wild Horse & Burro Advocacy
<b>Commissioner James French</b>	Natural Resource Management
<b>Commissioner Varlin Higbee</b>	Livestock Management
<b>Dr. Gwenllian Iacona, PhD</b>	Wildlife Management
<b>Dr. Tom Lenz, DVM</b>	Veterinary Medicine
<b>Ms. Susan McAlpine</b>	Humane Advocacy
<b>Commissioner Tammy Pearson</b>	Public Interest (Equine Behavior)
<b>Dr. Barry Perryman, PhD</b>	Public Interest (NRM Special Knowledge)

## BLM Designated Federal Official Remarks

*Mr. Kuechle thanked the board and then introduced the BLM Assistant Director for Resources and Planning, Mr. Sharif Branham, as the designated Federal Official for the BLM and U.S. Forest Service meeting.*

**Mr. Sharif Branham, Assistant Director for Resources and Planning, BLM**

Mr. Branham: Thank you. Good morning, everyone, and welcome to those in the room listening remotely. Let me start by introducing myself. My name is Sharif Branham, and I am the BLM Assistant Director for Resources and Planning, as well as the designated federal official for the board. I apologize for not being able to be there in person today, but I look forward to meeting you all soon.

The Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board provides advice and recommendations to the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service as the agencies work to fulfill their responsibilities under the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act. The act mandates the protection and management of free-roaming horses and burros in a manner that promotes a thriving natural ecological balance on public lands. Your keen attention, advice, and recommendations to help us fulfill our mission has never been more critical. I am sure you all will discuss over the next few days the Wild Horse and Burro Program is at a crossroads. Though progress was made to reduce the overpopulation in recent years, herds remain at a heightened risk of starvation and thirst, especially when drought conditions return because populations are three times the size that is healthy and sustainable for the animals and the land.

With more than 82,000 wild horses and burros on BLM-managed lands, we also remain perilously close to a tipping point beyond which it becomes increasingly difficult or impossible for the BLM to prevent runaway population growth. According to our estimates, if the total herd size exceeds 100,000 animals, our current capacity for gathering and

removing animals will not be sufficient to control growth. In other words, births will outnumber the maximum number of removals we could perform in a year. This would lead to runaway population growth, potentially resulting in a population crash—an outcome I believe everyone here would like to avoid.

I encourage everyone here to come to the table in the spirit of collaboration. I truly believe that teamwork and partnership will be the cornerstones of our success. Look around you; each person here is a vital piece of the puzzle. Their strengths and expertise complement one another, creating a synergy that can propel us forward with new ideas and renewed vigor.

Let us venture beyond boundaries and embrace your creativity. Those ideas that have seemed impossible might just be the key to our next breakthrough. Innovations thrive on daring to explore the unexplored, on stepping outside conventional paths. We look forward to exploring what is possible.

Please be mindful and respectful of each other's viewpoints. Remember, we are all here for the benefit of the animals and the land. We share the desire to succeed. In conclusion, I look forward to working with the board over the next couple of days on pressing issues facing the Wild Horse and Burros on public lands and hearing your recommendations. With that, I will turn it over to you, Celeste.

*Ms. Carlisle thanked the Assistant Director and turned the conversation back to Mr. Kuechle to facilitate administrative updates and further introductions.*

***Patti Klein, Acting Division Chief for the National Training Center, BLM***

Ms. Klein: Morning, everyone. Welcome to the National Training Center and the Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board meeting. My name is Patti Klein. I am the acting division chief for the National Training Center. And I am happy to host all of you at our training center facility this week in sunny Arizona. I would also like to acknowledge Udom Hong, who is our acting branch chief for all the Wild Horse and Burro training for the Bureau. We are here to serve you this week. Please let us know if there is anything we can do to assist you or make you more comfortable. I hope you have a fantastic week, and I will turn the time back over to you.

Mr. Kuechle: Thank you very much. All right, I am going to now turn it over to Holle' Waddell, the Division Chief for the Wild Horse and Burro Program to introduce yourself and your team.

***Holle' Waddell, Division Chief of the Wild Horse and Burro Program, BLM***

Ms. Waddell: Thank you, Bryant. And again, good morning, everyone. My name is Holle' Waddell and I am the division chief for the Wild Horse and Burro Program. And I just wanted to thank the board again, thank you, Celeste, for your introductions of the board. Thank you, board, for being here and thank you everyone else in the room and online. I will just start off with introducing the deputy assistant director, Brian St George. He is here in the room. We also have our deputy division Chiefs, Paul McGuire for off-range, and Scott Fluer for on-range. Dorothea Boothe, who is our coordinator. Thank you, Dorothea, for all your work. I am always going to thank you.

Zachary Seeger, he is new to our team and a NEPA specialist. Serena Camacho, thank you for your coordination and work. She is our admin assistant. Jason Lutterman who is our public affairs and outreach specialist. John Hall, who is the Arizona wild horse and burro state lead, and you probably saw him yesterday on the tour. Great job. Dr. Paul Griffin, who is our research specialist.

And again, we have the Arizona Deputy State Director, Jerry Davis in the room. Thank you. And online, I'm not sure if she's online yet, but we do have Jerri Bertola who is our comprehensive animal welfare program specialist. And if she's not online now, she will be joining us later. Thank you.

Mr. Kuechle: Thank you, Holle'. I want to turn over to Charles Oliver with U.S. Forest Service to introduce himself and his team.

Mr. Oliver: All right, thank you very much. Charles Oliver. I am the deputy director for the forest management, range management and vegetation ecology program area with the U.S. Forest Service in Washington DC. And we have the Wild Horse and Burro Program under our purview. I have here with me today from the Washington office, also assistant director, Eric Davis, and our national Wild Horse and Burro Program manager, Dr. Teresa Drotar. Thank you.

### **Meeting Public Participation Protocol**

*Mr. Kuechle reviewed the procedural elements for public participation, stating that the BLM recognizes the value of public input and appreciates public interest in expressing themselves regarding matters of concern. He explained the process for registering to provide public comment, noting that there would be two designated opportunities to do so. Mr. Kuechle reviewed the day's agenda.*

### **Welcome Remarks from BLM Arizona**

***Jerry Davis, Arizona Deputy State Director, and John Hall, Wild Horse and Burro Program State Lead***

Mr. Davis: Thank you and good morning. Thank you to the board, to Holle' and all the headquarters Wild Horses and Burro program staff for inviting us to come and welcome you to Phoenix. As Sharif mentioned, the program faces many challenges, but there are many opportunities. And it's definitely going to take all of us to do what is right and what needs to be done for the management of the species as well as the habitat as a whole.

As John will cover here in a little bit, Arizona is a couple of years into the execution of a strategic plan that we developed with the support of the Headquarters BLM staff and program. And we're starting to make really important strides towards getting the species to where it needs to be for the management of all the resources on the public lands. And we have enjoyed great success and support with the public as well as all of our stakeholders on public lands.

Thank you. Welcome to Phoenix and look forward to engaging with the committee, the advisory board today, and hearing all the important work that you have in front of you. Thank you.

Ms. Carlisle: Sorry about that. Thank you very much. Appreciate that. John, I think we're moving to you next for further introduction about the program. Go right ahead, introduce yourself.

Mr. Hall: Good morning. My name is John Hall. I am the Wild Horse and Burro lead for Arizona. I am also the facility manager at the Florence Prison Wild Horse and Burro Training and Holding facility. I'll be talking to you today about Arizona and just some updates of currently what's going on. The Arizona Wild Horse and Burro team is made up of two horse and burro specialist, one dual hat, which is my position, the lead and also the Florence facility manager. And we also have one staff assistant. In Arizona we have two facilities. One is an off-range crowd, which is located in Florence. We also have our facility in Kingman, which is a staging facility that we use during gathers to house animals for short term. We also have a satellite adoption team in Arizona, which is made up of Horse and Burro employees. And then also we have some other volunteers in BLM that help us out at those events.

I'm going to talk a little bit about wild horses and burros in Arizona and where they exist and how we manage them. The majority of our burros really are along the Colorado River corridor. We do have some other animals that are here in Lake Pleasant as you saw yesterday during our tour. We have six HMAs in Arizona and 11 HAs. Most of those HAs are just immediately surrounding the HMAs. The current estimate as of March 1st in 2023 was 5,492 animals. There's 5,027 wild burros and 465 wild horses. In FY22 we removed about 1,297. In FY23 we removed so far about 756 animals. Our current AML in Arizona is 1,676 animals total.

We spoke yesterday about drought and the current condition that we have here in the general area of Phoenix. And this map is from October of 2023. But the current map, I pulled it up last night, looks fairly similar. In Arizona we're not in too bad of a dry condition right now, but that changes throughout time and it's a management problem that we have to deal with almost on a yearly basis.

As Jerry mentioned, we worked on a strategic plan for basically the next 10 years to set up, reestablish if need be AML ranges for all the areas that we manage, and also to plan how we're going to move forward with getting those areas to AML. We started with the Black Mountains, we'll be then moving over to the Three Rivers and then Cibola-Trigo, Lake Pleasant, so on and so on.

What we did with this plan is we will start with large scale gathers in the beginning in order to get to or near AML, and then we will use periodic small in-house gathers once we do get to AML. This strategy also pointed out that we needed some additional help. We were able to get some positions that we are still currently trying to fill one of them. And we also were able to get some help from outside when it comes to the GS-11 position that we filled in Florence basically, in Phoenix.

I'm going to talk about the HMAs first. The Black Mountain HMA is our largest HMA. It's about 1.1 million acres. It's a very rugged terrain and the AML is approximately 478. It's located near Kingman, Arizona along the Colorado River.

As I mentioned before, we were starting with the Black Mountain for the actual strategy. And we gathered approximately 1,100 head of burros in 2022. We had nine females that we captured during that gather that were part of the HSUS project that we treated with PZP and released back to the areas where we gathered them. During this gather, we had no deaths. There was no significant events that occurred, so we felt that it was a very successful gather. And it was the largest burro gather in Arizona history.

We came back in October and April 2023 and bait trapped. We were planning on bait trapping approximately 700 wild burros. We ended up only catching 539 just due to environmental conditions at the time. We had a very wet winter last year. And so, the animals were difficult to locate and trap. During that gather, we caught nine females that were part of the HSUS project. They were treated and re-released just like they were during the helicopter gather.

We have an upcoming gather for Black Mountain. It's going to start January 9th. We are planning on gathering 1,000 burros, removing up to about 900. This is going to be a difficult gather just because we have been in the Blacks for the last three years, basically gathering animals. And if we do catch any of the females that are part of the HSUS project, we will treat them. So, we could catch up to 100 females. We will be completing a population survey after that gather so that we can really figure out if we're nearing AML like we hope.

Cibola-Trigo is located in southwest Arizona. It's near Yuma, Arizona. The HMA is approximately 179,000 acres, and the AML is approximately 165. The interesting thing about the Cibola-Trigo HMA is that it is bordered by Fish and Wildlife Service land; and in order for us to remove animals on large portions of the HMA, we actually have to remove them by boat, and so that is the picture of burros on a boat.

Lake Pleasant is the HMA that I gave you all a tour of yesterday. It's located 25 miles northwest of Phoenix. It's approximately 103,000 acres. It's very rugged as you can see when we were actually in the field yesterday; and the vegetation is typical of the Sonoran Desert, Palo Verde, there's lots of Catclaw Acacia as we saw in the wash last night or yesterday.

Currently we have the Horse and Burro specialist at the state office. That was Eric Duarte, you met him yesterday as well. He's in the process of revising the AML and working on a new herd management area plan so that we can move forward with a tenure plan for that HMA as well.

Three Rivers, that's the Big Sandy, the Havasu and Alamo HMAs. Combined, they are approximately a million acres. We just put together and put out to the public a tenure management plan for those three HMAs. We've received public

comments. We're in the process of addressing those comments. We're hoping to have a finalized decision out somewhere around the beginning of the year. The combined AML for Three Rivers is 372 to 465 animals.

Just to go back, this is again our map that shows the HMAs in Arizona. We typically adopt or sell about 700 animals a year. This is due to a combination of satellite events, what was formerly the Trainer Incentive Program, direct sales to individuals and organizations, and then also just straight from Florence itself. We typically do about five to 10 events at Florence every year. We also will do satellite events. We'll typically do two to five depending on the year where we go across the state.

One of the unique things about our facility in Florence, and you'll see this tomorrow, is that we have the ability to utilize the University of Arizona for our veterinary care and medicine. The prison itself has an agreement with the university, so it allows us to have students assist with ordinary procedures as well as boosters and vaccines. And every year, in around April to June timeframe, we'll have 12 students at the facility three days a week for basically the whole day. Any type of procedures that need to be done can be done under the care of a veterinarian with the students, they're on hand to help. It gives a really unique experience for them because most veterinary students would never be able to spend that much time working large equine in this type of environment.

We also, up until recently, the Trainer Incentive program was a huge part of our placements in Arizona. There's some pictures here I'm going to show you from a TIP challenge, which was youth. They picked these burros up from us in Florence and had them, I think it was about 60 days for this one. And these kids really did an awesome job. And you can see that the yearling burro that this young girl had was very well trained. Just some more pictures of that great program.

We also allowed them to pick up some yearling horses as well. Some of the other trainers were able to do pretty good with those yearling horses. As I mentioned, we have our Florence facility. As part of that facility, we have an inmate training program. We typically place about 50 to 75 animals a year, through that training program. They will have the animals typically about four to six months while during that timeframe, they're training them to do all of your basic gentling, plus they'll also have them under saddle. A typical wild horse that comes from our training program has somewhere between 25 and 50 rides on it by the time we're ready to actually allow the public to adopt or purchase them.

Another unique partnership that we have is with Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue. We've been approved to sell 3,000 wild burros to them over the next five years. Over the last three years, we've sold them about 1,500 burros. They've been very successful in placing those animals. And according to their website, they have placed approximately 9,200 burros into homes over the last 20 years. We look forward to continuing that partnership.

Some of our big management challenges in Arizona are overpopulation across the state. Basically, every HMA is over AML. We're about three and a half times over our statewide AML. I showed you that map of the drought. I know that currently we're not in too bad of a shape, but across all of our HMAs water is an issue. Access to water and just availability of water.

We also have program-wide budget limitations. I think we all know about those. It limits our ability to achieve our priorities of actually achieving AML. We also have a large increase of private property that is occurring around the greater Phoenix area especially. I know I spoke to all of you yesterday quite a bit about the human interactions that we're having with those burros and new neighborhoods that are popping up. Vehicle collisions are a major problem for us. And it's something that we have to deal with on a daily basis at this point. I know yesterday we saw some burros right along the side of the road as we were coming in. And this is to show you what tends to happen with burros. If you stop on the side of the road in Lake Pleasant and they approach you and you roll down your window, they will stick their head in your vehicle. The problem is that this burro has now been habituated to being fed from a truck window. That's where we have these major problems with collisions is once they get into this habit, it's pretty much unstoppable that they're going to stand in the road. Does anyone have any questions?

## **Discussion**

Ms. Carlisle: Thank you, John. I think the entire board appreciates that burros are oftentimes an afterthought. I think for all of us. I'm not pointing towards anyone. We think of wild horses and burros. And it has been really fantastic to dig into the burro issues, which are different than the horse issues.

I'm going to start, and then for those of you that are newer on the board, I will try to have my head on a swivel and make sure folks are called. But you're welcome to poke your neighbor to poke at me if I'm not noticing you. But to start with, I'm really interested in the 12 students a day that you have coming to the Florence facility. I know other universities and other extension organizations are interested in how to partner with BLM and set up similar types of situations. So, if you could talk a little bit about how that agreement was put into place, that would be great.

Mr. Hall: So, the university does not have an agreement directly with the BLM. The university has an agreement with the prison. Through the prison contract. They're required to provide veterinary care. They chose to utilize the university as their sole veterinarian. They do have the ability to change vets if they'd like. But really as a whole, we really wanted to bring the university in. Their vet school has only been accredited, I think, for about two and a half years now. So, we actually had started working with their vet school before they were an accredited school and we're having students out that were not in their vet school yet. So, we've been a part of the vet school getting accreditation from the beginning and it's been an integral part of their program to allow students to come out there for three days a week. Like I said, 12 to 15 depending on the day. But basically, they're doing their rounds for about three months every year.

Ms. Carlisle: Dr. Lenz?

Dr. Lenz: So, I just returned a week or so ago, I was at the American Association of Equine Practitioners meeting and in the Welfare Committee there was some discussion on a subject that I've never heard of before involving donkeys, and I don't know if you have or not, called the Ejiao gelatin high trade. Have you heard anything about that? You aware of that?

Mr. Hall: I'm familiar with the trade itself.

Dr. Lenz: Yeah, I'm just curious or mainly I want to make sure you all are aware of it because what they told us, is there's about 4.8 million donkeys that have been euthanized around the world and their hides used to produce cosmetic products and Chinese medicine. So, I was mainly concerned that maybe y'all weren't aware of it. It hasn't been an issue in the United States yet that we're aware of, but it potentially could be.

Mr. Hall: Right. I know that it's common practice right now in Australia and also in Africa for those animals, the hides to be utilized for that. To our knowledge here or to my knowledge anyways, it's not an issue in the US as of now. It's definitely something that we're tracking though.

Ms. Carlisle: Ms. McAlpine.

Ms. McAlpine: John, yesterday you took us on a trip that showed us how complex the issue of wild burrow management is here in Arizona. We have federal land, we have state land, we have county land, we have city land, we have private land that the BLM burros tend to travel over. Three o'clock in the morning, my light bulb seems to want to go off all the time, and one of the things that I thought of is that hopefully somewhere along the line partnerships can be made.

There's a lot of interest and angst being spoken by city county leaders. Our state and Arizona State representatives are getting information and voicing concerns about it and so is at least one of our US congressmen, so hopefully, and the public, some of the strings will start to be tied together by the right people in BLM so that these entities stop saying, "What is BLM going to do about the issue?", and start thinking more about Celeste's favorite word: "collaboration" and working together to fund and to help coordinate the efforts that you make as a staff.

Ms. Carlisle: That is my favorite word. All right. I have another question. One of the things that really struck me yesterday was the challenges in particular at Lake Pleasant, which are different than probably most every other place that I'm



thinking of herd management areas exist and territories, though actually some territories are experiencing this as well, that the human interaction with the burros in this case is high. And it's not necessarily folks that are coming just... I mean we have interaction of humans and wild horses and burros in many HMAs. People love to go and see the animals, but this is a different level of interaction with traffic and campgrounds, at county park, inside that area.

And I know that your staff and you were talking yesterday about the extensive outreach that you all are just sort of always engaged with on a day-to-day basis in your interactions with folks. But the ability to have the additional manpower that's needed too, I mean that's in and of itself several positions that I can see. And so, as you all are thinking through your herd management plans, are you adding on any educational components to be able to enhance what you all are able to do? And I'm looking at the list of things that you all are tasked with doing and the number of staff and you all need to do a lot! So just sort of seeing how you all are thinking about that very particular issue.

Mr. Hall: So, we're in contact with communications constantly. I work with, I think Dolores might be here today, but we work with Dolores a lot and we work with our comm staff a lot trying to get the message out there to not feed the animals, to lessen the amount of human interactions with the animals themselves so that we stop having all of these issues at Lake Pleasant in particular. Lake Pleasant isn't unique with human interactions though. I mean we have Oatman in Black Mountain; we have Fisher's Landing in Yuma. Almost all of our HMA's have that same problem. Lake Alamo, same thing. Lake Havasu, same thing. It's kind of across the board. We have burros that become tamed very easily. As soon as you start feeding them, like in that picture before, they will tame down and that's when we start having so many issues.

As part of our strategic plan, we did point out that communication with our partners is going to be something that's very important to help us move forward and to also allow us to share that messaging, "Please stop feeding them." That's what it comes down to, we really have to reach out to some of the people that we maybe have currently not been reaching out to try to achieve that. And so, it's unfortunate, like I said yesterday, that we no longer partner with Mustang Heritage Foundation because the tip trainers did really help us a lot. There was a lot of communication that was put out there through their social media and it's going to be something moving forward that we're just going to have to continue working on.

Mr. Davis: And I'd like to just add on to a little bit what John said towards your comment and Ms. McAlpine's. Collaboration is really going to be key. I mean the BLM Wild Horse and Burro program will likely never have the amount of staff that we need to do everything that we need to do. That's just a reality I think, of government and staffing and funding levels and all of that; but that's okay because we have a lot of really interested, really vested partners, particularly in this program, some more than others, but there are also other programs within the BLM that go towards this mission. So, you mentioned the county park that's out there we also have BLM developed recreation sites adjacent to that area as well. That's an area that we're trying to staff up because we have obviously issued with recreation and what's appropriate on public lands and the management of that.

But by having those park rangers out there interacting with the public, the burros are obviously in the same area. There's additional opportunities for us to engage outside of just the Wild Horse and Burro staff. And so, there's an internal education component being able to provide those individuals with the information so that they can appropriately share it with the public, as well as the efforts that the Wild Horse and Burro program are doing externally and with partners. We do have interface with the city of Peoria. As you could see, the city continues to expand out towards the HMA and further kind of develop up with the new chip plant that's going up out there that's going to be surrounded in residential development eventually. And the district and the field office have a lot of engagement with local partners as well, particularly county and state DOT due to the highways in that area as well. So it's something that's been happening, but it's definitely something that we need to continue doing more of and always be looking for new opportunities. Thank you.

Ms. Carlisle: Commissioner French and then Dr. Perryman and then Dr. Lenz and then Dr. Iacona.

Mr. French: I just want to personally thank you for the time you took to educate us. I've been six years on this board. I spent 30 years plus in North Central Nevada ground zero for the Wild Horse program with regard to the impacts to the Wild Horse program on public lands and wildlife. And I personally, there was quite a few statistics that I wrote down

yesterday on our trip that surprised me to be honest with you. And I just want to back up a little bit. I think the Wild Horse program has, in my view, has always been about horses on public lands and the redheaded stepchild in the whole program was the burro component of that.

And I know Mrs. McAlpine often reminds us that burros are in the act and I felt that a couple of things came up that I was surprised by. I know you folks spoke quite a bit about the upcoming planning program that you're putting together with regard to HMA management and actually updating your work program with regard to trying to get a handle on your population expansions, at least on the HMA that we were involved in yesterday. The one statistic that I was really surprised by was the 100% adoption rate over time. And that's completely unheard of with the wild horse side of it, that's a resource for you.

The other thing that surprised me... and I came to the conclusion on my own after listening most of the day, was that a lot of the management that we have initiated, for instance on the horse program, with regard to assessing impacts has to do with vegetative component, has to do with whether it's a shift in vegetation in its entirety or whether it's over-utilization of certain types of vegetation similar to what we do with allotment management planning and whatnot for livestock use. What I saw yesterday though was a management protocol that is going to be less about whether or not we're seeing vegetation impacts, but more about the impacts of the animals themselves on the surrounding populations of people and environment, whether it be what you pointed out yesterday having to do with the impacts of the burros on recreation areas, impacts of the burros on interstate highways and vehicle collisions with burros.

It appeared to me, that is going to be your indicator is going to be the out migration and pioneering of these critters as they leave the HMA probably from a density perspective. And one of the things that I wondered about, and we talked about it at dinner last night a little bit has to do with the fertility program. And I know you mentioned in your presentation that fertility treatments, I think you said, was going to be a hundred animals, that you were actually going to-

Mr. Hall: Up to a hundred for that.

Mr. French: Up to a hundred that you're thinking about doing. I am wondering about scaling that, depending on whether identifying the fertility control is possible, a real anchor in your program to try to, once you achieve AML or thereabouts, to try to maintain AML in those HMA's.

And I'm just wondering from a long-term perspective what your thoughts are with regard to fertility control. I know there's a lot of questions as to the use of the fertility drugs that are out there right now on burros as opposed to wild horses and I'm sure there's going to be a lot of research work that'll center around that. But it seemed to me that that might be a real tool for you to get to AML and maintaining it, not just because of the fertility, the drugs themselves, but because you seem to have access to the animals, they concentrate in certain areas routinely, they don't avoid people much and they seem to make themselves available with regard to being able to dart or being able to treat with fertility. And I just was wondering what your thoughts were along that line.

Mr. Hall: So currently our population is about half inside the HMA and half outside the HMA. So yes, the animals that are near the lake we actually would have a lot of access to, but we have the wilderness area that's there as well that would be very difficult to access those animals. They're spread out a lot more than you would think. There are other water sources that they have in those mountains. The biggest thing with fertility control is delivery, right? That's going to be the hardest thing for us to do and maybe the animals that are close to the lake, we could have that component and I think that we will have fertility control, I know that we will as part of our management plan, but until we get to AML, until we get to that number where we're comfortable really with our population, it's hard to say exactly what that's going to be when it comes to how we deliver it.

I mean, animals get trap shy very quick. Once you catch them a couple of times, it's really difficult to catch them again, so a remote darting program could be a possibility. We could figure out working with partners to actually have some sort of darting program. But I think there's quite a bit more research that needs to be done with fertility control, with burros in particular. I know we've got the two projects in Arizona. The one project really that we've completed with the Black

Mountains, and then we had our coloring project Lake Pleasant to track animals to see how their movement throughout Lake Pleasant actually occurred throughout the year. So just more research is going to help us a lot and the only way we can do the research is to actually start a program.

So, it is something that is in all of our management plans, it's in all of our EAs, so we're definitely looking forward to using it. There will always be a removal portion though. I don't foresee us having the ability to 100% control population with fertility control because you have breakthroughs, you have animals that still will have babies. So, I think there's always going to be that removal component.

Mr. Davis: And if I could just add to that. So, John mentioned our 10-year strategic plan for burros and horses and burros in Arizona and that we're kind of a two to three years into that plan. So, the plan really, when we constructed that, is broken into two phases.

So, the first phase that we're kind of in the middle of, so the first five years or so is really what we're calling the AML phase and that's where we're working to get all of the HMAs down to that AML. And then the second phase is what we kind of refer to as the maintenance phase. And so, a key component of that maintenance phase and being able to try and manage the wild horse and burro populations within the HMAs within that AML band that's established for each of them is going to be fertility controls, absolutely.

At this point where we're still just so far above AML, it doesn't really make sense resource wise as well as just the time intensity that it takes to actually deliver the boosters and the initial treatments and things like that. To do that is a large part of the program. It's still an important part like you saw in John's presentation, so about maybe 10% of the animals or so. And then of course we're maintaining those as we have the opportunity to, but that'll become a much larger and probably more key component of that maintenance phase once we're able to get there. And that'll be on an HMA by HMA, case by case basis. So Black obviously will be the first HMA to kind of get to that second phase and then we'll as we move on to the others, we'll continue to figure out what tools work best to manage the burros in that area.

Mr. French: Thanks.

Dr. Perryman: Yes, thanks for your presentation. It was a great field trip yesterday. I enjoyed it quite immensely. Just a couple of questions regarding public contact with these animals. One of the things that I think personally has been so good with respect to the Onaqui herd in Utah is their informational kiosks that they have. And it seems to me, and we didn't see any yesterday, maybe you have some of them up, I don't know, but there's so much checkerboard in this particular area and so much contact with humans, it would seem that some kind of an education program just in a sort of kiosk signage approach would get the word at least moving through those, I don't know what to call them, semi-residential areas; and other campers on both state and county lands that, you know, you need to minimize your contact. You don't need to be feeding these animals Cheetos.

And maybe that's something you might want to consider if you haven't already, is a really good strong informational campaign through kiosks, I don't know what else to call those things, little informational areas. I think you know what I'm speaking of; that's one way to do it. Of course, you're not going to eliminate all of that contact. I mean almost everybody in the world knows you don't go scratch a bison on the head, but people continue every year to do it and so you're never going to eliminate all of it. But I think maybe one way to at least enter into that educational format arena to initiate that.

Another way it occurred to me yesterday as well, since you have so many state lands and I think some county lands around there too that we were in and out of, and I know you can't go into a state office or a county office and start dictating things, but is there a movement, and it's sort of an educational movement and awareness that would disincentivize this human contact; if someone knows that if they get caught and it's going to cost them \$2,000 ticket, fine, that might be a disincentive. It may be a reason for a parent to tell a child, "Oh yeah, don't feed the burros out there, eat your own Cheetos and Doritos." So, I don't know, is that something that you guys have explored? Either one of those, both education and then a disincentive? I know there was some attempts to do that in the Virginia range with the state of Nevada a few years ago where the sheriff's office was actually going out and writing citations for people that were

supplementary feeding animals in their front yards and backyards and things like that. So, have you considered either one of those efforts in this education and non-contact incentive process?

Mr. Hall: Thank you for your comment about the kiosk. Currently, we do have kiosks that are at our established rec areas. They do have some information about burros, but it's definitely something we can consider moving forward is providing more material for those actual kiosks or have an educational type of kiosk at those rec areas. And maybe even on some of the areas where you can see burros more often, like the concrete bridge we drove over yesterday, there's pretty much always burros there. So, it's definitely something that we could consider. As for the-

Dr. Perryman: But it wouldn't hurt to ask the state if it would be possible to locate something in a strategic state land area as well. So not just-

Mr. Hall: It's definitely something that we can bring up during our next stakeholders meeting. We have increased our stakeholders' meetings to monthly just because of the amount of collisions that have occurred this year. As Jerry mentioned, that chip plant, there's a lot more people driving in that area than there used to be. So, we can definitely look into some sort of educational kiosk and provide some more information to the public.

We do have a flyer that we hand out on a normal basis that basically tells people to not feed the burros, but you can't reach everyone. Even with the kiosk, we will never reach every single person. And so, bringing up the feeding rule, we currently do not have anything other than basically harassment that we can go after people with if they're feeding the animals. There are state laws that don't allow you to feed wildlife, but enforcement is really difficult. You have to physically catch someone in the act. In the time that I've been with the BLM, I've really only seen a handful of people actually cited for harassment of wild horses and burros because of the feeding, and it's because law enforcement directly saw them do it. So, it's really difficult to enforce. There's not a special feeding rule on the books. It's definitely something that we've talked a lot about, and I will continue to try to move that forward. I have been for the last couple of years and hopefully we can get something eventually there.

Dr. Perryman: And your monthly meeting advisory board or whatever you're calling it-

Mr. Hall: Stakeholders, yeah.

Dr. Perryman: A stakeholder's board, do you have some of the OHV leadership groups in that group?

Mr. Hall: Not currently, but that's definitely something we can look into. That's a great idea.

Dr. Perryman: An invitation to those groups would certainly, I think, go a long way. A significant amount of your traffic judging from the number of fence cuts I saw yesterday.

Mr. Hall: Yes.

Dr. Perryman: Which is illegal as well. Yeah, I would certainly think about including OHV, sportsman's groups, and recreational group leadership in those discussions as well. And all it takes all it is one or two incidents of someone being caught with a hefty fine associated with it. That word gets around. And again, you're not going to stop everybody from wanting to, you know, you're going to see burros with Cheeto dust on their lips occasionally. It's just that's all there is to it. But anything we can do, and it sounds like you guys are on the right track to minimize those encounters, we're going to be better off. So, I appreciate it. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. Kuechle: To sort of jump in with the quick time check. We have an hour before our next break and in that time, we have a presentation from the U.S. Forest Service with a local welcome and the board recommendations conversations so we can have a few more comments if we can do them quick or we can let the U.S. Forest Service present and then come back to questions.







































































animals in that situation that were originally domesticated and meant for people to take care of, they often are not that healthy on the range.

So, I think the number one... Well, I don't know, I'm not a wildlife biologist or a horse biologist, but I think lameness, for example, plagues wild horses and is a really crummy way to suffer. But so, it kind of combines stewardship and human care with free, roaming beautiful horses. And because they have controlled the breeding for a long time, and I think that's not something that's undesirable for the public and that people would like to see the Spanish type emphasized and so on. But this horse is highly valued. And so generally the excess horses can be sold to people who will also care for them and value them. So, I don't know. I've been thinking of that, it would be worthwhile to look at other models around the world because maybe that's just a little too domesticated for us. But the one thing we could come up with is contraception in the United States, but it would be interesting to look at other models.

Also, the horses are in areas where they actually do have a positive ecological function, and that's been another reason why those systems have survived for so long.

Ms. Carlisle: Ms. McAlpine.

Ms. McAlpine: Dr. Huntsinger, thank you very much for saying a word I get in trouble with often as a domestic horse owner with a lot of knowledge about our domestic horse population, the majority of our male horses who can impregnate more than one mare at a time, gelded. And I've been a proponent of at least verbalizing the fact that we as a country really need to look at that resource that's part of our national heritage and saying, "Okay, if we're going to allow them to procreate, then we really need to start to look at what are the best confirmation genetic and health criteria for those horses to allow them to continue to procreate." So, thank you for saying that word.

Then I wanted to jump back because it relates back to a public comment that was made earlier and also our concern about increasing collaborations all the way across the board. California uses goats for forage, I don't want to say dissemination, elimination, and my thought based on that public comment earlier, if you are leasing goats through a contract, is there a possibility to collaborate with BLM and perhaps use BLM burros? Mostly younger ones that are not quite so large and aggressive as the older ones for that same purpose.

Dr. Huntsinger: I don't know who that was directed at, and I'll leave the final answer to that to the BLM. But in terms of vegetation management, yes, we use goats, they're good in small areas where brush is a problem, but our biggest vegetation management program, which we don't acknowledge very well, is actually cattle. They graze 20 million acres, and they remove about 12 billion pounds of dry invasive annual grasses from our rangelands every year. And given our situation, I don't know what we'd do without them. We even have a national park that pays a livestock, a cattle producer to graze, do targeted grazing. And targeted grazing means you, not necessarily that it's a particular animal, but that the specifications are very clearly aimed at a target. In this case, it was a particular invasive species. So, I think goats are great, cattle and sheep have a lot to offer in that area also. Burros, I don't know. It's an interesting thought. So, I'll leave that to the BLM to answer that.

Ms. McAlpine: Thank you.

Ms. Draper: I definitely do not have an answer. I definitely do not have a specific answer for you. I can tell you what I can say about what we can authorize under our grazing regulations in terms of domestic, what qualifies as domestic livestock that we can permit or lease. I defer to the Wild Horse and Burro experts that are here with us such as Scott, because I am not a subject matter expert under the Wild Horse and Burro free roaming act. So, I do not know what authority we have to actually use, or permit, or lease burros that are wild and free roaming on our public rangelands other than the purpose of them to be wild and free roaming.

Dr. Griffin: I have nothing to add. I don't know if Scott Fluer might.

Ms. Carlisle: Scott. Just checking to see if you have anything to add before we jump on.

Mr. Fluer: No, I don't have anything to add. They are wild and free roaming under the act on public land within those herd management areas. And we do have animals in herd areas that are not designated by Congress that are animals that we are trying to zero out because they don't meet certain criteria like food forage, water availability in those areas. So hopefully Marlo, I touched on what you were thinking there.

Dr. Griffin: I am aware that Dr. Rubin has led some studies into effects of burros on habitat. I don't know if I want to put you on the spot. Any comments about burro effects relative to fire?

Dr. Rubin: Yeah, we do. We have done some work and we have a paper that's actually in review right now, so I can probably not speak about that, but I was going to comment on that idea of using burros to do brush management. And my word of caution or something to really think about carefully is first of all, these different ecosystems that are very different and would be able to accommodate different types of grazing. And then also thinking about equids and the way that they feed, the way that their tooth structure and their ability to feed, for example, on tree bark, to reach things, to strip trees, the requirements that they have to actually consume more food per day, they're going to have a different impact. So, I think it's not just an easy swap, an equid, for an ungulate. And different habitats, different rangelands could probably accommodate or not accommodate that kind of thing. So that's kind of my thoughts of caution there.

Ms. Carlisle: Commissioner French.

Mr. French: I had a quick follow up from the BLM perspective and it's something I went back to my old career in the past, but we wondered what is the BLM's protocol, or the Forest Service protocol when one congressional mandate conflicts with another? Endangered Species Act, many, many places in the area where I'm from, as Dr. Perryman talked about, we've got allotments in Northern Nevada that haven't had a cow on them in 40 years.

And we've got significant riparian damage and aquatic habitat damage on riparian areas, that has led to reduction in viable populations of Lahontan cutthroat trout, in my lifetime went from 47 viable populations in an area I was responsible for down to seven before I retired. Those populations were lost as a function of the loss of habitat, riparian habitat in particular by wild horses and burros. And we often wondered who sets that protocol? I mean, obviously when you're looking at an AML that's 4, 5, 6 times the population, 6 times AML, we're leading to a takings issue on an endangered species. How do we reconcile that? I mean, that's a question I got a lot, I still get, and I just often wondered where you guys sit with that.

Ms. Draper: We work at the local level and at the state level, we work very closely with our counterparts at US Fish and Wildlife Service. We engage in informal and formal consultation on listed, threatened, and endangered species. When we are making management decisions, whether it's at the land plan level or the local level, we are going through a process that's guided by internal agency policy for both agencies.

Normally when we're doing an environmental document or an environmental analysis to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act, oftentimes we are doing a biological assessment or a biological opinion for listed, threatened, and endangered species. And oftentimes Fish and Wildlife Service will issue a biological opinion and then we have to follow the terms and conditions outlined in that biological opinion.

The agency usually submits a biological assessment to Fish and Wildlife Service. The agency is making recommendations on what we're proposing for whether it's AML livestock numbers or other activities that the agency's authorizing. So I hope that's somewhat getting to your question in terms of protocol, but it's usually internal policy that guides both agencies on how we comply with the section seven of the Endangered Species Act.

Mr. French: Yeah, just a little bit of a follow-up, we followed that process many times, especially when you had active AUMs and active allotments, grazing allotments involved in those conversations. In those areas though, in Northern Nevada where we no longer have a viable grazing option there, there's nothing to cut from a standpoint of the livestock operators out there. Yet we're still seeing dramatic declines coming in and out of droughts, dramatic declines in habitats for a threatened species. And I'm just wondering if you're talking about the service's biological opinions, have you ever

seen one that actually the service asks for a reduction in horses down to AML, for instance, to protect a threatened species?

Ms. Draper: I would need to defer to our specialists here in the Wild Horse and Burro program.

Mr. French: Okay.

Dr. Griffin: Yeah, commissioner French. I'm aware that the Fish and Wildlife Service has identified overpopulated wild horses as being a contributor to the reduction in sage-grouse populations in some areas. Back to your larger question about how you balance competing mandates, I think that Brian had a comment.

Mr. St George: Thanks. This dialogue is great, Marlo, thanks for your remarks. Commissioner French. Sorry, board member French. I get that a little mixed up. Mr. French. I think your question is great, and it hearkens back to some other discussions the board has had at its last board meeting around land health. I don't think these mandates are in conflict, but they certainly are intentional and it's why we in the agency say on a daily basis, multiple use sustained yield is not for the faint of heart. This is a tension that happens all the way down to every BLM field office. Indeed, probably every ranger district on every project. When we have interdisciplinary teams coming to the table to weigh that tension between one program objective, one mandate, and against another program mandate. So, in this case in particular, we need to also think about land health and the goal we're trying to achieve of healthy herds on healthy lands.

And as the bureau is assessing the condition of the lands with our land health standards, one of those standards would be how are T&E species doing? How are threatened and endangered species doing on a particular landscape? And that data, that information might indicate there is a problem, there's a signal on the landscape that endangered species are suffering from a particular loss of habitat. We would go further to assess what's the modality of that loss, what's the cause, the causal factor of that loss, and begin to assess what discretion the agency has. So, if the goal is healthy herds on healthy lands and one indicator is failing habitats to meet endangered species' needs, we have a clear path for action then, at that point. We understand that we perhaps need to manage that herd to ensure we have healthy lands delivering goals and objectives that meet the multiple use mandates that we face. Right?

Mr. French: That's what I was hoping you were going to say.

Ms. Carlisle: I want to just give everybody a quick time check. I think we have 18 minutes or something. So just to let you know, and I'm going to ask a question. I'm going to start with Dr. Rubin, but then for all the panelists, I think we're doing a better job identifying a broader swath of stakeholders in this issue in general. I think the sort of stereotypical historical past was ranching communities and the wild horse advocacy communities, and they sort of hammered it out and everyone else stayed way out of it. But there's a big shift and there are a lot more stakeholders involved and coming forward with concerns and with solutions and with collaborations as well. In the work that you all do, which is a little bit removed from this, but certainly a part of it, which stakeholders do you think we are continuing to leave out? Or how are you inserting yourselves into being part of this a little bit more, and what has made it seem like you're able to do that now versus maybe 10 years ago? Because it has changed.

Dr. Rubin: Well, thanks for that question. And we appreciate being invited to be a part of this. I think as far as how we would like to be involved, more is our mandate, like I said, is to manage for all these wildlife species. And a big part of that is keeping our common species common. We don't want to wait until we're dealing with an endangered species. Some of the comments now I really appreciated, but I did want to point out that endangered species, listed species are rare by definition, and if you wait until you're having to use them as a metric that's waiting really long and they're rare by definition, so it's really hard to monitor them and it's hard to know when you're doing something to benefit them or when it's time to make a change or time to pull cattle or horses off.

But we really, our department and other wildlife agencies also are really interested in the health of the habitat. And we really need to monitor that habitat for all the species and not wait until we start seeing things crumbling. That was one of

my reasons for bringing up the Sonora desert habitat issue. You all went on a field trip yesterday, I think, to Lake Pleasant. That's where some of those pictures of those very degraded trees were taken.

By the time we start seeing those changes, and I assume BLM is monitoring that land, but we are still seeing effects and we've got burros out there and I am not familiar, and maybe we'd be interested to hear more about that, how is that vegetation being monitored? What are the protocols and what pieces are being monitored? Because what we're seeing signs of is changes that it's kind of like the foundation of your house is starting to crumble, and when that starts to fall apart, when we lose those long, long-lived perennial species, it is not an easy situation to remedy. It's not a system that's in a thriving ecological balance. It's not a situation where you can just revegetate and start over again. The desert, which is very widespread, is very slow to recover, or in many cases it is impossible to recover. So, when we start seeing impacts, that's when we need to start paying attention to those and pull those impacts off. So, I would say that engaging with state agencies to talk about wildlife habitat and quality habitat for all species is I think very important.

Mr. Kuechle: Celeste, Commissioner Pearson also has a question.

Ms. Carlisle: Commissioner Pearson.

Commissioner Pearson: Let me get unmuted here. Yeah, you guys are lucked out. I haven't spoken yet, so here you go. Of course. This is my favorite presentation and I appreciate more than you'll ever know the commonsense language and the commonsense management stuff that you guys have talked about. I know we get into the high-level science and different things like that, but I'm a plain old farm girl, cowgirl. I know a whole lot about on the ground kind of stuff. I've lived in the middle of the wild horse herds in Utah for over 40 years now, and I see those impacts like what you're talking about. And like Dr. Perryman was talking about the kind of impacts that are going to take centuries if ever to come back.

It's very easy for livestock to be managed. From the first one's off, we care about what's there. We do the targeted grazing, so we're only in a specific pasture for a couple of months, maybe at the most, and then you move and then that pastures rested; and so we know that if we overgraze and we have worn out our welcome, not only are we going to have a black eye with the BLM and our conservation officers, but we've ruined the actual resource that we need to sustain our livelihood and the wildlife and everything else.

And so, Dr. Huntsinger, I really appreciated the things that you were saying and as well as the panel, it's really hard to look at this on an unbiased perspective when you know where some of these issues are coming from. And so, I love the fact that you said that the horse problem, and we all know this, we all know it's complicated and it's layered, but our hands are tied in so many different ways on how we can, even if we suggest it, whether it goes on up the chain with BLM, whether Congress funds it, whether that funding trickles on down to where it's needed. It's really a hard complicated thing. But in the meantime, the impacts on the ground are the same.

I am hoping that we've made some good progress the last few years with funding specifically and ramping up with the adoptions wrapping up again, with the gathers, but we have got to keep the pedal down when it comes to that kind of stuff. It is going to be impossible. I've said this for probably the last 10, 12 years that I've been in the political world, that this is going to be a manmade ecological disaster if we don't get on top of this somehow. And the story's still the same. It's an impending crisis and some places are possibly never going to recover. But I appreciate all of you and what's been said today. Thank you.

Celeste, your question earlier was about which stakeholders are being left out, and you addressed it to all members of the panel. I don't know if Dr. Bradford and Dr. Huntsinger wanted to comment as well.

Dr. Bradford: I don't know if it's exactly about stakeholders, but it's more about opportunities maybe, is the comment I might make. Dr. Perryman did a great job of describing the challenges, for example, of sagebrush establishment, which is related to the challenge of restoring and rehabilitating these dryland ecosystems. On one hand, the fact that it's rare that you get the conditions that the perennial plants will establish in these systems is a big challenge. It's a problem we're all living. On the other hand, maybe it's an opportunity. If we can learn about what those specific conditions are, as Dr.

Perryman said, sort of the combination of precipitation and soils and the moisture at the right times in the right places, we can potentially anticipate those occurrences, and help land managers invest their restoration dollars and resources in the right places, in the right times.

This is something that the USGS is trying to build. We're working with the BLM right now to build a tool that helps them integrate the weather forecast, the long-term multi-month forecast from the National Weather Service, and ask the question, is it a wise investment in any given location to be seeding sagebrush this year, or should we wait till next year? Because there's no point in doing it if the odds are extremely likely that it's going to fail.

I talk about climate change, and I'm often sort of the grump, maybe this time of year I'm the Grinch, in every meeting, and so I feel compelled to at least suggest that it's looking for these kinds of innovative opportunities, these creative solutions that I think is going to help us deal with this area of dynamic change that we're going to experience in more and more in coming decades. So, I don't know, that's not about stakeholders, it's about opportunities maybe.

Ms. Carlisle: And Dr. Huntsinger, did you have an addition to that at all?

Dr. Lynn Huntsinger: That assumes a lot of knowledge that I don't have, so I don't think I can answer that. But generally, I'd like to see more people who agreed with me.

Ms. Carlisle: Amen, sister. I would be shocked if this board wasn't able to fill the next seven minutes. Oh, good, Dr. Becker.

Dr. Bechert: Happy to oblige. Can you hear me? It's really great. Thank you for this panel discussion, it was really helpful. And it's encouraging to see all of you working together. But I wanted to ask you, how are you working together? Because you've mentioned BLM, U.S. Forest Service, USGS, Arizona Fish and Wildlife, so do you work together on a project-by-project basis? Is it just a couple of people who know each other across agencies? Or is there some kind of collaborative organizational structure that you work within?

Dr. Bradford: Well, I'll start just from the USGS sort of research side. USGS has different branches, Ecosystems Mission Area is one of them, and our ostensible mission is to provide the science support for the Department of Interior agencies, like BLM, Fish and Wildlife Service, Park Service. And we as a result of that do have some formal structures for maintaining relationships and maintaining communication about what the science and information needs from the agencies, and then where can the USGS to help fill those holes? There are folks dedicated to bridging that gap, being liaisons between the agencies that help, for example, coordinate and maximize the efficiency of work in sagebrush and sage-grouse related issues is just one example.

That all being said, there's also a huge component, I think, of personal relationships. A lot of it is someone that you know and you've worked with, and we talk a lot about decision support tools, but I think in some senses what we're trying to cultivate, and having some success, is sort of decision support relationships, long-term engagement between the resource managers and the researchers to try to help actually implement that adaptive management, that elusive adaptive management kind of paradigm that's difficult to actually make happen, but I think is increasingly necessary as we move into these rapid changes. So that's one perspective from one small part of the USGS.

Dr. Rubin: Yeah, so the Arizona Game and Fish Department, we do have agreements, such as MOUs with BLM, and with the Forest Service, an in very general terms agreement on wanting to work towards shared goals, and we try to focus on those. But as was mentioned, also sometimes it's a lot of the interpersonal relationships, folks who are working in particular parts of the state, working together on projects and communicating. We've had staff help the BLM on surveys when they've needed folks, or we've invited them to join us on surveys specifically for borroughs, horses when we've incorporated those into some of our research. So, a lot of that is maintaining those relationships as well.

Ms. Draper: I would like to provide an example of one of our most successful partnerships that we have in BLM. And before I go there, I want to highlight that our sister agencies and DOI have different authorities than one particular agency



may have. So, we have tools available to us that enable us to work with our sister agencies, whether they're interagency agreements or MOUs.

Interagency agreements are awesome, because this is how we can use each other's money to take advantage of opportunities. We have two joint ventures in the Bureau of Land Management, where in the Intermountain West Joint venture, this partnership, is actually enabled through an authority that the Fish and Wildlife Service has that the BLM does not. But because of being able to use an IAA to partner with Fish and Wildlife Service and their authority, we have this organization under this joint venture, and it enables us to bring a variety of other agencies to the table to further our ability to leverage resources, such as their ability to hire positions, and these positions grow our capacity to do work out on the ground.

Also, these partnerships, we are able to tap into opportunities for research, we're able to fund things that we couldn't otherwise fund on our own, and then we're able to take that new science and transfer that and use it within the agencies to inform the policies that we develop, that inform the decisions that we make.

Also, the partnerships can reach down to state and local level, that we may not otherwise be able to do, and leverage those resources. Our ability to partner with agencies at the federal level and the state and local level enable us to ensure that we aren't excluding any stakeholder that should be at the table, to your point that was brought up earlier.

Mr. Davis: And I'd say for the Forest Service, very similar to what we've heard, there are formal and informal. There are formal MOUs, or good neighbor authority, that we have with states, tribes, sometimes counties. We keep abreast of the latest science, working with Forest Service Research and Development, USGS, Universities, Society for Range Management. We keep up with stakeholders, with national level groups, like Public Lands Council and Association of Fish and Wildlife agencies.

At the local level, that's probably where you're seeing more field expertise shared. At the national office, I'm not talking to each state's representative on something, but I certainly can set up a mechanism that our field folks know that they can do that and are encouraged to do so.

**Mr. Kuechle announced a 15-minute break**

## **BLM and U.S. Forest Service Program Updates**

*Holle' Waddell, Division Chief of the Wild Horse and Burro Program, BLM*

Ms. Carlisle: Welcome back everybody, I think we are moving right into a few presentations from BLM and Forest Service program updates.

Ms. Waddell: Okay, perfect. Thank you. Okay, well good afternoon, everyone. Thank you again, advisory board members, the public, the room, and those joining virtually, as well as the Bureau of Land Management staff that we have here in the room, the Forest Service staff for being here, and for everyone being engaged in this very important issue. I do have with me the deputy division chiefs for both on and off range, Paul McGuire and Scott Fluer, they're going to be here to answer any specific questions, and just kind of add on where I may leave things off. Again, my name is Holle' Waddell, and I am the Division Chief for the Bureau of Land Management's Wild Horse and Burro program.

So, what you see on the slide now is just a brief outline of what I plan to cover today in this presentation, and we'll start off with a few background slides about our legal authorities and program objectives. I'll remind you of our latest population estimates, and then cover a few updates from our on and off range branches, talk about our new partners. We had several notice of funding opportunities that went out last year, and so we made some awards. And then update you on any new policies, go over our comprehensive animal welfare program, and then end with a few slides about the program's budget. So, the BLM is guided by numerous laws that are passed by Congress and signed into law. However, for our

purposes today, the two most important pieces of legislation that we will be talking about and referring to, and you heard it from Eric as well as Marlo, and that was the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, and both of which were signed into law in the 70s, and they provide the BLM with the legal authority to manage wild horses and burros on public lands. I'm ready, Tracy. All right, so talking a little bit more about it, the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act is the primary law that tasks the BLM with the management and protection of wild horses and burros. And there is a lot in the act, and so I hope that you've all had a chance to familiarize yourselves with it. The board, you do have it in your notebook, those may be joining virtually. It is a part of the notebook, so if you want to grab it handy, feel free to.

Also, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act is the second major piece of legislation that I mentioned, and it covers all horses and burros and directs our management. So, there are other laws that have made minor changes, as well as the PRIA, which is the Public Rangelands Improvement Act, and the various omnibus budget bills that are passed by Congress.

So, together these laws have provided the BLM with our overall mission, which is to manage wild horses and burros as integral parts of the natural system of public lands, and balance with other uses of those lands in accordance with BLM's multiple use and mission. You heard Eric and Marlo both talk about that.

So, with that said, our goal is quite simple. Yes, I said simple. According to this program, we want to manage and protect healthy wild horse and burro herds on healthy public lands. Now, that phrase is extremely simple. How we get there is what is a little more challenging. So, our most recent estimate shows more than 82,000 wild horses and burros that were roaming on public lands. That's of March 2023. And this includes herd management areas and herd areas. And so that means that the population did tick up about 500 animals compared to last year's population estimate, but we're still more than three times the sustainable population level, or what we like to call appropriate management level. I know you've heard many of these terms today, or at least the acronyms, and I know the acronym sometimes can be a lot. So, this year, we had nearly stagnant growth that follows two years of population decline from a peak of more than 95,000 animals in 2020. So, it is important to note that our population estimates don't line up perfectly with the fiscal year, which is how we track removal numbers. So even though we removed more than 20,000 animals in fiscal year 2022, only 11,400 of those removals came after March 2022, which is the date from which we calculate annual population estimates.

So, I also want to take a second look about our effort to keep populations below 100,000. Let's talk about that. As you all know, I mentioned this in June, that with a larger population comes more foals that are born each year. So, if the population reaches 100,000 animals, then we would be producing an estimate of 20,000 foals in one year, and the BLM's current removal capacity is around 20,000 animals per year with our current resources. So that means that we would not be able to affect population size after that population threshold is passed.

So, following a record year for removals and treatments, we removed fewer animals in fiscal year 2023, and that was due to complications and timing of our budget. When continuing resolutions and a budget is delayed, it does delay our operations. So, of the total number of animals gathered, we almost gathered 6,000 animals, and removed 5,300 of them.

So, we did have fertility control treatments that we conducted during the gather. We talked a little bit about that earlier. We conducted them together, either with our partners, or administered through darting, or during gather operations. And I want to note that this was the first year that we started using a new contract mechanism that focused on catching, treating, holding for about 30 days, and then releasing mares back to their herds. So, I'm hopeful as we move forward, we can rely on more catch, treat, hold, release gathers to help us maintain populations through slowing growth and reduce the need for removals.

I think we heard earlier that contraception was key in order to address the growth of a population, but it is important to also note that what is key to effectively address overpopulation is to immediately remove animals. That is the operation that immediately addresses overpopulation, that is conducting gathers and removing animals. Once that happens, contraception can be a part of those gathers, but contraception slows population growth, it does not address population.

So, we also began two new research projects in fiscal year 2023, which we shared with the board at our last meeting in June. And so, one was looking at how we can improve PZP effectiveness, and the other was looking into developing a one-dose vaccine. You can find more information about each of these studies in your notebooks. I did walk through the notebooks with the board this morning, so it is in the notebooks, a further breakdown of some of the research. We also completed surveys in 56 herd management areas and 10 herd areas and including using the infrared to survey 10 herd management areas. Now, that's great. We use those in the Idaho, Nevada, and Wyoming states. I believe that's correct. Scott will definitely correct me if that is not right.

So, I'm also very extremely pleased to also present to you some major accomplishments in our off-range branch as well. Note, this photo was taken by our very own Deputy Division Chief, Paul McGuire. Round of applause. Paul and Jason do a great job at capturing many parts of our program. You'll see their work throughout this particular presentation as well as online.

But we had another very strong year for adoptions in sales, having placed a combined total of 8045 animals into private care or with another government agency. And that's important, because that private care placement does not only account for adoptions in sales, but also transfers, and that's what that another government agency reference is talking about. So, that's the second highest number of animals placed into new homes in more than 25 years. Yes, more than 25 years.

So, following fiscal year 2021, when we placed more than 8600 animals into new homes. Now, about half of those adoptions were through our adoption incentive program, and we're very thankful for our partners who help train and find homes for other animals. So, we continue to provide care for animals in off-range corrals and pastures for those animals that were not adopted, sold, or transferred. And as you can see, the vast majority of our animals are in off-range holding systems at our pastures. Now, pastures are more cost-effective, and provide a better quality of life long-term for these animals.

So, before we move on, I do want to highlight a few more updates from our off-range branch, and we continue to be amazed with how successful the Online Corral is at placing animals into private care. And I think I've mentioned to you before, we'd really like for Online Corral to become the Amazon of adopting and purchasing animals.

As you can see, over 1400 animals have found homes through the Online Corral in fiscal year 2023. We're also nearing the finish line with being able to release new solicitations for off-range corrals and pasture space this year. And finally, I'm really happy to announce that we filled three critical positions in the off-range branch, so we can continue our progress with private care placement.

So, we remain focused, and that's supported by our agency leadership, in building effective and engaging partnerships to help us accomplish our mission. And we're excited to work with 10 new renewed partners. So then, they're a mix between being new partners and renewed partners this year, on a range of projects, and this is as a result of our notice of funding opportunities. And they're from fertility control darting and management, to research, private care placement, and that includes adoptions... I'm sorry, I totally lost my place. That includes adoption, sales, and then public education. So, you can see an example of the work, and one of our partners in the picture that's on the right. Mustang Champions has built a beautiful exhibit that they've taken to equine events all across the country. And this is to raise awareness and promote adoption. So, it's more of an outreach education tool. As you can see, this exhibit includes a virtual reality experience that takes participants to western public rangelands to see horses, wild horses, in their element.

In an effort to continue expanding our partnerships, we've released three new funding opportunities over the last few months aimed at soliciting more on-range, off-range, and research projects. Also, more information is in your notebooks.

The Wild Horse and Burro program has issued two new policies or instruction memoranda in fiscal year 2023. Together, these policies strengthen and affirm the BLM's commitment to providing high quality care for excess wild horses and burros off-range.

The first is an update to our animal health vaccination, gilding, and microchipping policy. And as you know, this policy requires that every wild horse and burro is microchipped in addition to receiving a freeze mark when prepared after being gathered and removed from the range.

The second IM establishes standards for humane treatment, handling, and care of wild horses and burros in off-range pastures, and public off-range pastures as well. So, this IM continues building the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program, and I'm proud that these are now published and formally established as policy.

So, speaking of the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program, this slide provides a visual of what our overall goal for assessments are, and what the overall averages are for gathering off-range corral and adoption assessments. So, our first goal is to have assessment ratings of 70% or higher, and as you can see, we are accomplishing that. Our second goal is to have the majority of our assessment rate at 86% or higher. Again, we're accomplishing that. When we look at the averages of all the gathers, we are achieving 95%, and for off-range corral an 88%, and for adoption events 91%.

So, within the year, or since the beginning of the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program, we've completed over 43 assessments in total, 22 of them were focused in off-range corrals, 14 of them were focused on gathers, and seven on private care placement events. So, we continue to refine processes as we continue to develop more parts of the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program.

So, this shows the individual assessments were completed to date and their ratings. And as you can see, the vast majority are rating above 80%. I know it's a lot of blue on the screen. But this shows the total of 43 assessments in the breakdown that I mentioned. So that said, we'd love to see perfect scores on all of our assessments, and that is what we are working towards. You can see right there.

So, this slide shows how the BLM spent the available funding within the Wild Horse and Burrow program in fiscal year 2023. So, this is really an update just from June to September 30th. So, as you can see, as of October 1st, we spent a total of about \$158 million. The vast majority of our expenditures continue to be for caring for unadopted and unsold animals in our off range holding facilities. Expenditures in this category will continue to remain high in the coming years, as we provide lifetime care for unadopted animals.

And what we've been focused on for several years now is moving more animals from higher cost corrals to lower cost pastures when it's being determined that they don't have an adoption demand or sell demand. And so, this helps keep holding costs low, and provides better outcomes for the animals as well.

So just a reminder, our fiscal year 2023 budget was \$154 million, and so we spent about \$158 million. I just want to note that some of that has been benefitting sub-activities and par year funds as well. So, so far in fiscal year 2024, reminder, we are under a continuing resolution, which carries over the budget levels from fiscal year '23. Sorry, note, wrong number. In '23, our budget was 147.8. Our president's budget is 154.

So, as you can see, we're seeing a familiar picture, with off-range holding by far the largest of our cost, even still. The president's budget for fiscal year '24 has called for that increase to 154 million, which would help continue our efforts to reduce overpopulation on the range. So, on that note, I want to thank the board for your attention to this presentation, and for the entire day as well as yesterday, and I'm happy to take some questions.

## **Discussion**

Dr. Perryman: Quick question, Holle', what's your feed budget for fiscal year 2024 for off-range? Off the top of your head, just give me close.

Ms. Waddell: The feed budget?

Dr. Perryman: Feed budget, yeah.

Ms. Waddell: I don't know if I... Tell me that again. What do you mean?

Dr. Perryman: How much are you going to spend on hay?

Ms. Waddell: So, the issue there is that, so our contracts are a little bit different. We don't necessarily, not in every contract does BLM purchase the hay.

Dr. Perryman: Right.

Ms. Waddell: There are some contracts that the hay is included in those contracts along with everything else. And then there are some contracts where BLM does purchase hay. So, what I'd ask Tracy, will you pull up the slide for 2024? So, you'll see the gray pie. That is the one that identifies all of the off range holding.

Dr. Perryman: Right.

Ms. Waddell: So that's how much we're going to spend. But that is, I could totally get the breakdown. I'd have to look at a larger spreadsheet to get the breakdown. But that's going to include all costs. That's going to be labor as well as operations. Operations are going to include any actual contracts, vet care fee, transportation, all of that is going to be in that same pie.

Dr. Perryman: Right. I was just wondering, just some kind of a close number of about how much of that is actually feed cost altogether, separating out the holding cost and everything. I realize some of it's easier to calculate than others, but-

Ms. Waddell: It does depend.

Dr. Perryman: Do you have a best guess? Does anybody have a best guess on it?

Ms. Waddell: I mean, again, the corral costs, and Paul, you may be able to explain this a little bit better, but the corral cost itself... Each one of the contracts, we have the list, if you look in your folder.

Dr. Perryman: Right.

Ms. Waddell: So, we have the list of the corrals and pastures that are broke down by each individual one. Each of them is its own contract, and some of those contracts are different. At our correctional facilities, some of them grow the hay, so it's included in that contract, there's no feed bill. And then there's some contracts that there's a feeding contract, which includes the contractor purchasing the hay. And then there are other contracts where BLM purchases the hay. Paul, do you have a better response? Okay.

Dr. Perryman: Just some kind of ballpark numbers. Just curious.

Mr. St George: Hi, it's Brian St George again, for those that may not be able to see me. So, Paul and I were just collaborating, because I think we did some rough estimates for some of our BLM senior leaders recently. This isn't a good figure for you, Dr. Perryman, but it comes close. We calculated something like 14 million feed days. Meaning, we're providing that food and care for animals on an estimate of 14 million feed days, roughly \$22 million perhaps. No.

Dr. Griffin: That's feed days.

Mr. St George: Oh, 22 million feed days.

Dr. Griffin: So that's corrals and pastures. Yeah, so just to elaborate on what Brian is saying, so this is very rough, but if you figure we've got 60,000 horses in holding corrals and pastures, 365 days, that's about 22 million feed days. So, to get to the number, you're asking about how many dollars have we spent on hay under contract, we'd have to drill down pretty deep to get that, because we have different contracts for how hay is required. And of course, many of these animals are on pastures, so they're not consuming hay most of the year. So, we could certainly get that number if you're interested in it, but it'd be kind of an audit to get there.

Dr. Perryman: Get, I can take 14 million feed days and I can go from there, or 22 million feed days. I can take that and go and get to it. Okay, good. Thank you.

Dr. Griffin: Thank you, Brian.

Ms. Waddell: Sorry, Dr. Perryman, the thing is that it is extremely complex when you're talking about the budget. We try to simplify it, and there's a very nice pie chart.

Dr. Perryman: It's really quick. It's very quick from there. I mean, if it's 22 million feed days and it's a buck a day, you can do the math pretty quick. I don't think it's quite that much, but it may be. But nevertheless, that's great. That's exactly what I was curious about.

Ms. Waddell: Yes. And Dr. Perryman, I'll tell you, so the feed days do include the animals sitting in the pen, right? But our cost, they assume all of the things dealing with that animal. So, it's not just the hay that it's going to be eating, it's going to be the person that put the hay there, it's going to be the person that scooped the poop out of that pen, all of those costs are associated in that feed day cost. Yes. Any other questions?

Commissioner Pearson: I've got a hand up. I'll ask a question if nobody else does.

Dr. Rubin: Go for it.

Commissioner Pearson: So just out of curiosity, what are the price comparisons between a rail holding space per day and the long-range pasture? And I know the prices vary, but what's your range right there?

Ms. Waddell: That's a great question. Our average corral cost and our average pasture cost.

Dr. Griffin: Yeah. So, without giving a lot of details in terms of dollars, I think your question was how do they compare? So, the cost of keeping an animal in a corral is about three times, maybe a little more than three times what it costs to keep that animal on a pasture. And so, that clearly is why we prefer pastures as a long-term option for holding those animals. If that gets to what you were asking, Ms. Pearson.

Commissioner Pearson: Yes. I know a few years back, when we were trying to expand greatly the long-term holding facilities, the bids, at least in Utah, the bid for a corral per day was about \$5. And we really don't have very many long-term pastures in Utah. You need to have a little higher annual precept than what we do. But I was just curious what those pastures would be.

Dr. Griffin: can tell you again without getting too specific on the dollar numbers, because obviously with solicitations coming out, we want those to be competitive, but you mentioned \$5 a day for pastures several years ago, or in corrals. It's more than that now. Considerably more.

Dr. Lenz: So, what is it a day, today? Corral versus pasture, per horse, roughly?

Dr. Griffin: Okay. I'll go ahead and give you the averages because they're not a state secret, but I'll put it out there. We generally, when we're calculating costs and projecting, we're looking at somewhere in the neighborhood of \$7 a day for corral. Could be more, could less, and typically maybe around \$250 a day for pasture care. Again, could be more, could be less depending on where that pasture is.

Mr. Kuechle: Branham has his hand up as well.

Ms. Carlisle: I'm sorry, I didn't hear that. Oh-

Ms. Waddell: It's Sharif.

Ms. Carlisle: Oh, okay.

Mr. Branham: Yes, so I just wanted to ask back a clarifying question about how much it costs to feed the horses, how much are we spending? I think in a year is what you were looking for. If you could give us some more information about what you were trying to figure out. What were you hoping to get from us and then what were you wanting to do with the information? And I ask that only because that would help us whether later conversations later today or tomorrow, but also going forward.

I also wanted to highlight and underline the fact that the information that we're giving you is based on best understanding of what your question is, and we don't want to go too far with it. Given that it's not a direct answer to your question. It's not a direct, you know, these are the costs. So, I just want to be cautious, depending on what you're going to do with the information, to not go too far with it. But if you can clarify for us, what did you want to figure out based on your question to us about the feed amounts and cost associated with that? That would be helpful.

Dr. Perryman: I got this number, 22 million feed days. I'm good. That's what I needed. I can take it from there. So, I'm good.

Ms. Waddell: Thank you Sharif. Because I guess Dr. Perryman, and I'm happy to send you a further breakdown. I don't think any of you were a member of the board when our budget people would take a further breakdown besides this pie chart. When you're talking about average cost, which is what Paul was getting to, our average pasture cost is about \$3 and 54 cents. That's also on our website. We give, at the end of the year, information and that's something that we share on our website. Our average corral cost is about \$7 per head, per day, which is what Paul was getting to.

When you're talking about feed days, again, labor and operations are in each one of those. So no, if you divide 22 million feed days against the total number of monies that we spent on corrals and pastures in a year, you're not going to get how much hay we purchased. So, to be clear, and that was your exact question-

Dr. Perryman: No, I can take 22 million feed days and figure out. I mean I do this, so that'll get me an idea of how much hay is being fed and et cetera. So, I can do that.

I do have another question though, and that is on the pastures. If you hit a drought sequence or something in the pasture and you just don't get the forage growth that year, how do you design a contract that allows the animals to be fed properly if they have to have auxiliary feeding, because of some kind of drought situation or production situation maybe come up?

Dr. Griffin: You're probably aware that the standard term of most of all of our pasture contracts is the contractor is required to be prepared to feed four months out of the year. That's for the dormant period. But you have a situation like you're describing, you've got a drought situation, if there's an actual drought declaration, and that would be a state declaration. If the governor declares an emergency situation where we have one of our pastures, then there are clauses in the contracts that allow those contractors to appeal to BLM to purchase supplemental hay. So, if we need to feed for two or three more months that year, the contractor can appeal for that and that can be provided.

Ms. Waddell: And I think we gave an example at the June board meeting and also last year at the board meeting about that. I think that question was asked how many times we provided additional supplemental hay and we did talk about the counties that declared drought declarations and that we did provide additional supplemental funding to support those contractors.

Dr. Perryman: And that's typically based on the drought monitor and declarations of

Dr. Griffin: The trigger for the contract would be a drought declaration by the governor.

Dr. Perryman: By the governor of that particular. Okay, cool. Thank you.

Dr. Lenz: When I hear that price, I think that's really good. I'd like to feed a horse for \$7.50 a day, right? I think sometimes it sounds like we're pounding on you all, but I'll have to compliment you that that's really good.

Dr. Griffin: And just to highlight something that Holle pointed out, that cost figure that's for corrals is inclusive of everything. So, feed labor, which is a big chunk of that, contractors labor. Other operational costs.

Dr. Lenz: Well, that's everything, which again, it's extremely inexpensive, right?

Dr. Griffin: Well, we're dealing in volume, so-

Dr. Lenz: Take care of my horses.

Ms. Waddell: Yeah, I mean it's 16,000 animals, 365 days. I don't know.

Ms. Carlisle: Dr. Iacona gets to go next.

Dr. Iacona: Great, thank you. While we're asking about various costs of things, I'm interested in the relative cost. So yesterday when we were out in the field, we were talking a little bit about the costs of actually doing the roundups. I know you're not doing very much of this at the moment, but for future planning, what is the cost of the contraception actions? Like, if you didn't round them up, but you did a roundup to provide contraception or I guess the other way is darting, right? But what is the relative cost of that particular activity versus rounding them up to bring them into holding?

Ms. Waddell: So, gathering to remove versus gathering to treat.

Dr. Iacona: Yes.

Ms. Waddell: Yes? Okay. So there still is the cost to gather; that cost doesn't change. It still costs the same to hire a helicopter to gather the animals, and there's not necessarily a cough saving. I'll bat it to you, Scott, in just a second. What I was going to say was the gathering to remove is one element. Gather to treat, we would be bringing in a certain number of animals to try and only gather a mare to treat. So, we may be bringing in two animals to then treat one. Versus gathering to remove, we're just gathering and removing all the animals that come in.

Mr. Fluer: Yeah, no, great question. The cost of gather and remove is actually cheaper than the cost to gather and contracept. And the reason that is, is in some cases we're holding those animals to booster those animals. So, we may be holding them for 30 to 60 days onsite, in a temporary holding facility to booster them with a vaccine. And so, you've got to pay that daily rate for feeding during that 30 to 60 days. So that cost goes up substantially.

Dr. Iacona: I see. So, it's essentially the same as gathering, but then you put them back out.



Mr. Fluer: I mean the gather cost is still the gather cost, yeah.

Dr. Iacona: The gather cost is still the gather cost. You still have to hold them for a little while and then you put them back out, so it's not-

Mr. Fluer: Right, if you're booster-ing.

Dr. Iacona: Yeah. So, a related question, are there any efficiencies of scale? So, if you go to a HMA that's way overpopulated, is the gather costs per animal lower than one where they're much more dispersed?

Mr. Fluer: Well, it just depends. When we go out with a statement of work and go out for bid, it really depends on the herd management area, the topography out there, the access, all the costs associated for that gather operation that the contractor bids on. And so, it just depends.

Granted, larger numbers of animals are typically cheaper. And so, what we've done under the catch, treat, hold and release contract, the new contract that Holle described, is we've bundled some of these smaller herd management areas. So, we have maintenance activities going on, like small numbers in an HMA. So, we might bundle two or three HMAs together under one contract to try and build numbers to save dollars, if you will.

Dr. Iacona: So, what are-

Ms. Waddell: I'm sorry, Dr. Iacona, before you go on, I just want to say that when you're talking about gathering and removing, even though gathering and removing large animals of animals may be less expensive on the gather contract, but once we remove those animals and bring them into holding, we've committed to funding. It is not cheaper, just to be clear.

Dr. Iacona: Right, yeah. No, I was just wondering about the gather costs itself. Whether there was-

Ms. Waddell: We can't talk about the gather cost without talking about the holding cost.

Dr. Iacona: Yeah, I got it. I think I had one more follow up, but I've lost it now. Oh well. Oh wait, I remember it. It was based on what you were just saying about what does influence the contract costs. And so, is it things like how rough the topography is that you're going out and searching for the horses in, that sort of influence the cost most? Or area you're going over?

Mr. Fluer: Well, it depends. Some of our herd management areas are very large landscapes, millions of acres. Versus, like we were in yesterday, I think John said was 80,000 acres, but there he's going to have to bait trap. Could you imagine doing a helicopter drive trap in that menagerie of people? And so that's going to take some time, and so you've got daily costs waiting for those animals to come in and capture. So, it really just depends on each of the gathers.

Dr. Iacona: Great. Thank you.

Ms. Carlisle: Dr. Bechert.

Dr. Bechert: Thanks. My question has to do with the budget, too. I know the goal is to get to AML and then maintain AML, which makes sense, but I remember in the past too that you have these plans to gather. Every state has its strategic plan, but then life happens, right? There's an emergency drought or something else happens and then the money is taken from that state to deal with the emergency, understandably.

And one of the board recommendations had been to establish some kind of emergency fund so that each state could carry on with its strategic plan. And I don't know if it's buried in one of those line items up there, or if any progress has been made in that respect.

Ms. Waddell: That's a great question. So, Dr. Bechert, we did. We've identified, and every year we do a certain number of emergency or nuisance animals, not knowing exactly what state they may be in, but in our budget, we set aside in our minds and on our table, our spend plan does identify funding for a certain number of animals to address emergencies or nuisance.

Mr. Fluer: Yeah, no, great question. If you look at the '24 gather schedule, which is posted on blm.gov, you'll see a placeholder for 1500 emergency and nuisance gathers. There's nothing assigned, right? Well, actually Arizona just submitted the request that we looked at yesterday. So, 400 are going to come off of that 1500. That's additional money that they've got to find and come up with. It's additional holding money, gather money. It's kind of like all of a sudden here it comes out of the blue and now we've got to deal with it. So, makes it a challenge.

And we have to analyze holding space availability. Where are these animals going to go? Do we have room? It's a real balancing act before we even authorize such an action.

Ms. Carlisle: I was trying to get my calculator because my mind is whirling right now. I did want to point out that I think sometimes we have these desires to try to figure out, "Oh, well we want this and such to happen more for the agencies. We want them to be able to do more holding or more fertility or more this or more that. So, they just need X more money." But that is never how it actually translates on the ground. It is too interleaved with one another. You can't pick things out that carefully. I'm just appreciating that more and more every time we have these conversations.

Ms. Waddell:

You know, Celeste, we had talked in June and maybe it was one-on-one, and I think I mentioned to you that money is not the primary solution. It's that there are a lot of other pieces. You can send \$200 million to this program, but if we haven't had the time to acquire additional space, corrals and pastures... And not just anywhere, but in the right places. It doesn't help us to acquire 10 new corral spaces in Kentucky when, where we need to be addressing overpopulation is out west.

So, it's important. It's a logistical challenge, for sure, when you're talking about this program.

Ms. Carlisle: You blew everyone's mind so much that we have no further questions.

Ms. Waddell: Or I was so thorough.

Ms. Celeste Carlisle: That's right.

Ms. Waddell: Thank you deputies. Appreciate it.

Ms. Carlisle: Did you have one, or do you want to hold off? I think we're ready.

Mr. Kuechle: Okay, so we're going to shift to the update from the Forest Service from Dr. Theresa Drotar.

***Dr. Teresa Drotar, USFS Forest Service Program Update***

Dr. Drotar: There you go. Good job. All right, we got it going. So yes, as you said, I'm Theresa Drotar and I am the National Wild Horse and Burro program lead for the Forest Service. And we do have a contingent of people here and we'll get into that as we go along. Next slide please. Oh, closer? Okay, next slide please.

Right now, within the Forest Service, I'm going to give you a range instead of exact numbers of how many horses are out there and the reasons are because some areas actually pay attention and have their census up-to-date, and some are unable to do so. So, we have somewhere between nine and 12,000 horses out there on the range and we have somewhere between 1,000 and 1,400 burros. We should have around 2,000 horses and around 300 burros. So, we are way over AML in all areas out there on Forest Service lands.

The latest developments going into, I'm not giving you anything going over the basic stuff that we talked about in June, but obviously we continue to be underfunded. We keep saying we need money, and we do. Our budgeting system and the way that we're appropriated is entirely different than BLM. Again, we do have uneven management from one forest to another, from one wild horse or burro territory to another depending on where they are and what's going on with that forest supervisor or that regional forester.

The good thing is placement rates out of Forest Service facilities is close to 100%. Even the older horses, they're moved into private care. When I say "placement", not going into other things out of Forest Service corrals. And that doesn't mean that all of the Forest Service horses go to private placement because we do have a lot of animals also in conjunction with BLM.

We are talking with BLM currently. We had a successful transfer of horses that were designated as Forest Service horses from the joint management areas that were gathered last spring. And we were able to move 35 horses back over to our Forest Service facilities and get them into private placement, taking the pressure off of BLM to do that for us, and it was very successful. So, we're in talks to try and do that again because we do have space again. And hopefully in the future we'll have more.

One of the things that we did that were recommendations from you guys in June, we did hold an internal Forest Service Wild Horse and Burro training for our personnel across the agency in the various regions. It was held in Durango and then we did a field trip down to our corrals in Bloomfield. I think it was quite successful. Obviously, it was our first go at our standalone training. They've done trainings way back in the past in conjunction with BLM, and we'll continue to do that and try to get consistency.

And also, even within the agency, certainly in the public, there's a lot of people that don't even realize that Forest Service has a Wild Horse and Burro Program because of a lot of different things in the past. And we only have 20% versus 80%. So, we are definitely, you know, we have a lower number and a lower percentage, but we've been working really hard. And so that internal training was our first go to get started and that was something you guys suggested, a very good suggestion. So, we did institute that successfully and we'll continue to do that.

The other thing that we're looking at, and we spent some time, I had a detailer that helped me with this, but we were looking at the Comprehensive Animal Welfare program that, you know, Forest Service was there when BLM developed it and we follow the same principles, but there's some language in there that doesn't suit Forest Service as well just because of the differences in the agencies. And so, we're trying to modify that and make that so that it fits Forest Service better, so that we can post that on our website. So that's in process. We kind of know what we want to do, but I got to get that written.

What I'm going to do is we have some low lights, but we have some highlights. I'm primarily going to go over the highlights with what we're doing and we're going to start with the Modoc National Forest near Alturas, and the Devil's Garden Plateau Wild Horse and Burro Territory. And we're lucky enough to have really good people out there. I mean really, really good people. As Celeste said, if you haven't been out there, it's not the easiest place to get to because if you have to fly, it's like a three-hour drive to a major airport, but it's worth it. And one of these days if the board's up to an adventure, maybe we can go out there. But we do have some of those people, I'm going to introduce them as we go.

The forest supervisor is Chris Christofferson, who is a very, very good person to work with. He's really mellow, but very sensible and talks well with the management up above his head. But here present at Region Five's range manager and Wild Horse and Burro coordinator basically is Lee Seedy, in the back. So, Lee deals with more than just Modoc. She deals

with all of the territories plus the range issues up and down Region Five, which is California. So, it's big because California is huge compared to many other states.

But then also present we have Charlie Johnston, she is the corral manager, and I can't imagine where we found her, but partly because she's from that area. But Charlie is, I mean both of these women put in so much effort and are so enthusiastic. I don't know how we got so lucky. The other one right there is Madeline Levy, and Madeline is the on-range manager. First, she started in lower positions, and she even did a little bit with BLM, but she's been with us now in that position and doing a bang-up job. And these two are just marvelous, and so that's part of the success there that we have at those corrals. Next slide.

So, we do have some census data from the Devil's Garden, not way far back. Oh, and one of the things I wanted to mention too, it's never really talked about, but essentially at Devil's Garden is 97% Forest Service, 3% BLM. But we manage it all as Forest Service because 3% is immaterial, but BLM does have 3% of the land mass. And there was a number of the acres, it was 232,000 plus acres. So, it is a pretty good-sized area; so that area there are allotments, grazing allotments, intermixed in there. So, it's a bit different. It's pretty rough country though. It's beautiful. We got to go into some of these places and you don't just drive in there with a minivan, but it is quite large and it's beautiful.

But in 2016 there were 2,246 was the estimate for the horses on the range. And as you can see, those numbers have come down steadily, though there was a little bit of a bump up in 2023. One of the things that the harsh winter last year did have some effect, though, in cutting down some of those things. But there have been removals and management of those horses bringing that down so that hopefully we'll get down to AML by... What is your goal now? It was 2025, has it changed? 2025, they are planning to be at AML. Next slide please. So totally removed since 2016 would be from that forest are 3361. So, on that one forest, there's quite a few removals in that period of time. In 2023, there were 240 horses removed. In 2022 there were 389, and the year before that there were more than that. I'd like 492, or something of that nature. One of the problems that we're seeing or one of the issues that we're seeing with these particular animals, horses are smart, burros are smart too. They're becoming habituated and some of them are ignoring the helicopter.

Helicopters are given a bad rap, but if they're used properly, they're actually a very humane way to move animals. Can be very low stress and some of the animals, they're learning that "That's not going to hurt us." So, they're going to a little bit more, going to try some different things, including just trapping, which costs just as much per horse as a helicopter and it's lower numbers at a time, but there are other ways to get around it when animals are getting habituated to it.

So, the good thing about this group, they placed 300 now, because it's more since we've been here. 300 horses in private homes since December 4th, 2023. So that's a lot from when they took in 240 horses this year. So, everything that came in last fall is gone. They are no longer in the corrals. Our corrals are not set up to hold horses for a year and a half, two years. They move in and out pretty quick. Most of the time the holding is, average is maybe three months that horses are in the corrals. So, they're moved out quite quickly, which is great.

And so yeah, that's 99 to 100% placement rates. I mean, that's exactly what we want. Now there are reasons that that is true and that we do have some cooperators that are taking some of the older horses that are just pasture ornaments and you're never going to get close to, which isn't always true with the numbers BLM is dealing with. But the 99% rate is very good.

And they did foal out a hundred mares this year. Some of those mares stayed in a little longer because they were too far along in their pregnancy to ship them when people wanted to adopt them. They'll foal the mares out and then ship pairs when it's safe to do so.

They have pickup sites they have cooperators back east. I know there's a person in Maine that helps coordinate with different adopters and we have pickup sites in a lot of different places. So, they go back east to Florida and all kinds of places. All these horses can't stay in the west. There are too many of them, but there's a real need for horses all over the country.













Ms. Carlisle: I just want to point out that Return to Freedom, we have 12 Devil's Garden horses, and we're big fans. Other questions? What, is this group tired or so? I want to know what happened to that 1%. Is that just one horse, couldn't find a home? Charlie took it and it doesn't really count.

Ms. Johnston: No, I'm cut off. My husband cut me off. No, so the longest that we've held one single animal in our facility is 17 months, and that's typically an older Plain Bay mare that gets looked over. And so that's where the 1% typically goes.

Ms. Carlisle: I'm a big fan of Plain Bay mares. So, you guys know. Is this group tired? Is that what I'm reading here?

Ms. Carlisle: That's true. We might be there. Thank you for the presentation. Impressive as always. You all have much different challenges. Some are similar but a whole different ballgame, so appreciate it. I'm going to pass it over to Bryant to sort of take us out with some housekeeping and I think we might be shutting down a bit early today.

### **Advisory Board Discussion and Wrap Up**

Mr. Kuechle: Sounds good. Yeah, we have some time held for the board, but it sounds like we don't need to utilize that time now. Is that accurate?

Ms. Carlisle: No, we're going to do some logistics planning for tomorrow.

Mr. Kuechle: Sounds good. Okay, so that'll conclude today's meeting. So, just some housekeeping before we close out. For the public and those viewing at home, this meeting will begin tomorrow. It's scheduled for 2:15 Mountain and Arizona time. The board is going to be on a tour in the morning, so we're going to try to hit that 2:15 mark as close as we can. But bear with us if you tune in at 2:15 and we're not quite settled in. So that's the plan for the viewers and for the public. And there'll be a public comment period time tomorrow afternoon as well. And that concludes this. And then after we conclude the video streaming, we'll do just some housekeeping logistics for the board before we depart. So, thank you very much.