

Advisory Board Recommendations to BLM and USFS  
December 2023 Advisory Board Meeting

1. The board recommends that the BLM prioritize and complete the rulemaking/regulations updates and involve board members in the draft review process so that meaningful policy adjustments can be made.
  - a. **BLM Response:** The BLM has drafted updates to the regulations and is awaiting further direction. The BLM will alert the Board when the regulation update effort resumes.
  
2. In an effort to determine the effectiveness of BLM's sales and adoption programs and indicate changes in placement programs where needed, the Board recommends that the BLM follow up on a statistically significant percentage of wild horses and burros that have been placed or sold into private care over the last five years. The follow up should identify: year the horse(s)/burro(s) adopted/purchased; if the original adopter/owner still possess the animal(s); if the animal(s) were returned to BLM, transferred, sold, died; and the current use of the animal: pasture only, companion animal, riding, driving, pack animal, or in state/federal service.
  - a. **BLM Response:** The BLM supports the Board's objective with this recommendation, which is to ensure animals are placed into good long-term care with private individuals. In terms of the effectiveness of the adoption and sales programs, the BLM relies on certain defined metrics (i.e. number of animals placed and titled) as well as adoption compliance reports and title applications. In terms of systematically tracking the subsequent disposition of titled and sold animals, the BLM is mindful of the WFRHBA which places these animals outside the agency's purview. While the agency does engage with past adopters/purchasers in various endeavors (e.g. invitational shows and outreach initiatives), the agency does not (and may not) maintain an official system of records relating to the disposition of titled or sold animals (apart from their status as titled or sold in the official Wild Horse and Burro Program System). That being so, the BLM encourages private individuals and organizations with an interest in tracking the disposition of titled/sold animals to utilize publicly available records/information to craft such surveys or other methods as may inform them of animals' current and future status.
  
3. The board recommends that the BLM and the USFS present at the next board meeting plans that determine ecosystem health and population stabilization by choosing two HMAs/Territories each and demonstrating how the PopEquus model can be utilized to attain desired management outcomes, as well as what those outcomes would be.
  - a. **BLM Response:** In February 2024, BLM headquarters circulated an internal memorandum to the field, clarifying that PopEquus may be used in NEPA analyses to inform population projections. PopEquus is being used to compare and contrast how effective and expensive it would be to achieve stable populations within AML, using different management scenarios. In this way, PopEquus is taking the place of the outdated version of 'WinEquus' from the

1990s. BLM is already using PopEquus to inform decision-making in several HMAs, where NEPA analyses in the form of environmental assessments [EAs] are in various stages: preliminary EAs, public comment periods, or final EAs and associated decision records. Those NEPA analyses have explicit considerations of ecosystem health, such as in terms of land health standards or rangeland utilization measures. After decision records are final for two of those HMAs, they will serve as the type of demonstration projects that the board is recommending. Whereas most herd sizes are estimated every 2-3 years, for these HMAs, the BLM will aim to conduct of annual herd size monitoring. In HMAs where ground counts and individual horse monitoring is possible, that method will be used to assess foaling and population growth rates, to the extent practicable. In HMAs where aerial surveys are the method of choice, those will be used annually to assess foal to adult ratios and population growth rates, to the extent practicable. The BLM will report back to the board annually on the population status of these two HMAs, and the extent to which the population trends are or are not consistent with projections from PopEquus.

4. To take advantage of opportunities currently available to the Forest Service, the board recommends that the Chief of the Forest Service must advocate for a funded, multi-year budget line item to support the USFS Wild Horse and Burro Program. This should also include funds currently owed to the BLM for management/holding of USFS horses.
  - a. USFS Response:
  
5. So that resources can be freed up for on-range management options, the Board recommends that the BLM request, as appropriate, that the BLM Foundation serve as a funding source/mechanism for off-range holding costs:
  - a. **BLM Response:** With its new CEO in place as of October 2023, the Foundation for America's Public Lands released its [Strategic Framework](#), which outlines its inaugural program priorities that will guide partnership development and charitable fundraising opportunities. The Wild Horse and Burro program is a priority program, and the Foundation is now working with BLM staff to identify opportunities for partnerships and fundraising to achieve the Bureau's annual ambitious goal of more than 10,000 horses put in private placement off-range, as well as engage external stakeholders in being part of the solution through awareness, data and education.