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**Cash incentives help agency adopt more wild horses and burros**

*First year of program sees 91% increase in placement numbers*

**WASHINGTON**— The Bureau of Land Management announced today that the Wild Horse and Burro Adoption Incentive Program launched in March 2019 contributed to a significant increase of animals placed into private care. In the first 12 months of the AIP, the agency adopted 6,026 animals, compared with 3,158 during the previous full fiscal year. That increase of 91% revives and accelerates an upward trend of adoptions that began in 2015.

The AIP, which began mid-way through Fiscal Year 2019, helped the agency to achieve a 15-year record for total placements that year of 7,104 animals. Total placements include animals adopted, sold or transferred to another public agency. Each animal successfully placed into private care is estimated to save taxpayers approximately $24,000 in lifetime off-range holding costs. That amounts to over $170 million in lifetime savings generated during Fiscal Year 2019 alone, in large measure due to the AIP.

“We’re excited that the public has responded so strongly to this innovative program. The successful use of incentives to increase adoption rates is a win for all involved – saving taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars, reducing the overpopulation of wild horses and burros on the range, and helping these animals find homes with families who will care for and enjoy them for years to come,” **said Acting Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Land and Minerals Management Casey Hammond.**

The AIP seeks to increase placements of wild horses or burros by paying individuals $1,000 for each untrained animal they adopt. Payments are made in two installments: $500 within 60 days of adoption, and $500 within 60 days of receiving title (approximately one year later). By contrast, it costs an average of $1,850 per year for the BLM to care for a wild horse or burro in an off-range corral facility.

“Placing animals into private care is a vital component of our mission to restore and maintain balance to America’s public lands where extensive wild horse and burro overpopulation threatens ecosystems, economies and even the health of the herds themselves,” **said BLM’s Deputy Director for Policy and Programs William Pendley**. “The response we’ve seen to this incentive reveals how much the American people value wild horses and burros and understand the importance of BLM’s mission to properly manage them.”

Besides an increase in overall adoption numbers, the first year of the AIP also saw a sharp rise in the number of first-time and repeat adopters, as well as the number of individuals who adopted multiple animals. In all, there were 2,923 first-time adopters, 932 repeat adopters and 1,280 multiple-animal adoptions – all of which represent substantial increases over previous years.

Brad Smoot and his family, who live in Arco, Idaho, learned of the Adoption Incentive Program and ultimately adopted eight wild horses. They started their herd by adopting two weanlings and two 2-year-olds from the Boise Wild Horse Off-Range Corrals. The initial experience with BLM Wrangler Ruby Kyle was so positive they made a trip to Boise and adopted three more mares. The Smoots then adopted a pregnant mare during the wild horse adoption held in Challis the winter of 2020. Having grown up with Quarter horses and Tennessee Walkers, Brad Smoot knew he wanted his family to enjoy experiencing life with horses.

“Together my wife and I have eight children and we enjoy getting into the back country and trail riding,” **said Brad.** “These horses have been relatively easy to start. I really do prefer working with horses that do not have any developed or spoiled habits. My 15-year-old daughter has already started riding one of them.”

During the same time the agency ramped up other efforts to find good homes for more animals, including holding more events and offering more animals. Nationwide, there were a total of 223 adoption events held at BLM facilities, remote venues and online, at which 9,228 animals were offered. This also represents a substantial increase over previous years.

Under a 1971 law, the [Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act](https://www.blm.gov/or/regulations/files/whbact_1971.pdf), BLM is responsible for preserving and protecting these animals as part of a thriving natural ecological system on public lands. The agency achieves this objective primarily by gathering and removing excess animals from the range and offering them for adoption or purchase at facilities and events around the country.

As of March 1, 2019, the wild horse and burro population on public lands was estimated at more than 88,000, which is more than triple the number of animals the land can sustainably support in conjunction with other legally mandated uses, making every successful adoption or sale vitally important in helping the agency regain proper balance.

Given the extensive overpopulation, wild horses and burros routinely face starvation and death from lack of water. The high number of excess wild horses and burros causes habitat damage that forces animals to leave public lands and travel onto private property or even highways in search of food and water.

“The current overpopulation of wild horses and burros represents an existential threat to the health of landscapes across the West. In many places, the range will take decades to recover – and in some cases, it’s unlikely that it ever will,” **said Pendley.** “For this reason, the Wild Horse and Burro Adoption Program is critical to the health of native wildlife populations and the economic health of countless communities.”

When the number of animals removed from the range exceeds the number the agency can place through adoption or sale, the remaining animals are held in off-range corrals or contracted pastures at taxpayer expense. Currently there are approximately 50,000 wild horses and burros in off-range corrals and pastures. The cost of providing quality, humane care for these animals runs about $50 million annually.

To learn more about the wild horse or burro program, visit <https://blm.gov/whb>

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*The BLM manages more than 245 million acres of public land located primarily in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. In fiscal year 2018, the diverse activities authorized on BLM-managed lands generated $105 billion in economic output across the country. This economic activity supported 471,000 jobs and contributed substantial revenue to the U.S. Treasury and state governments, mostly through royalties on minerals.*