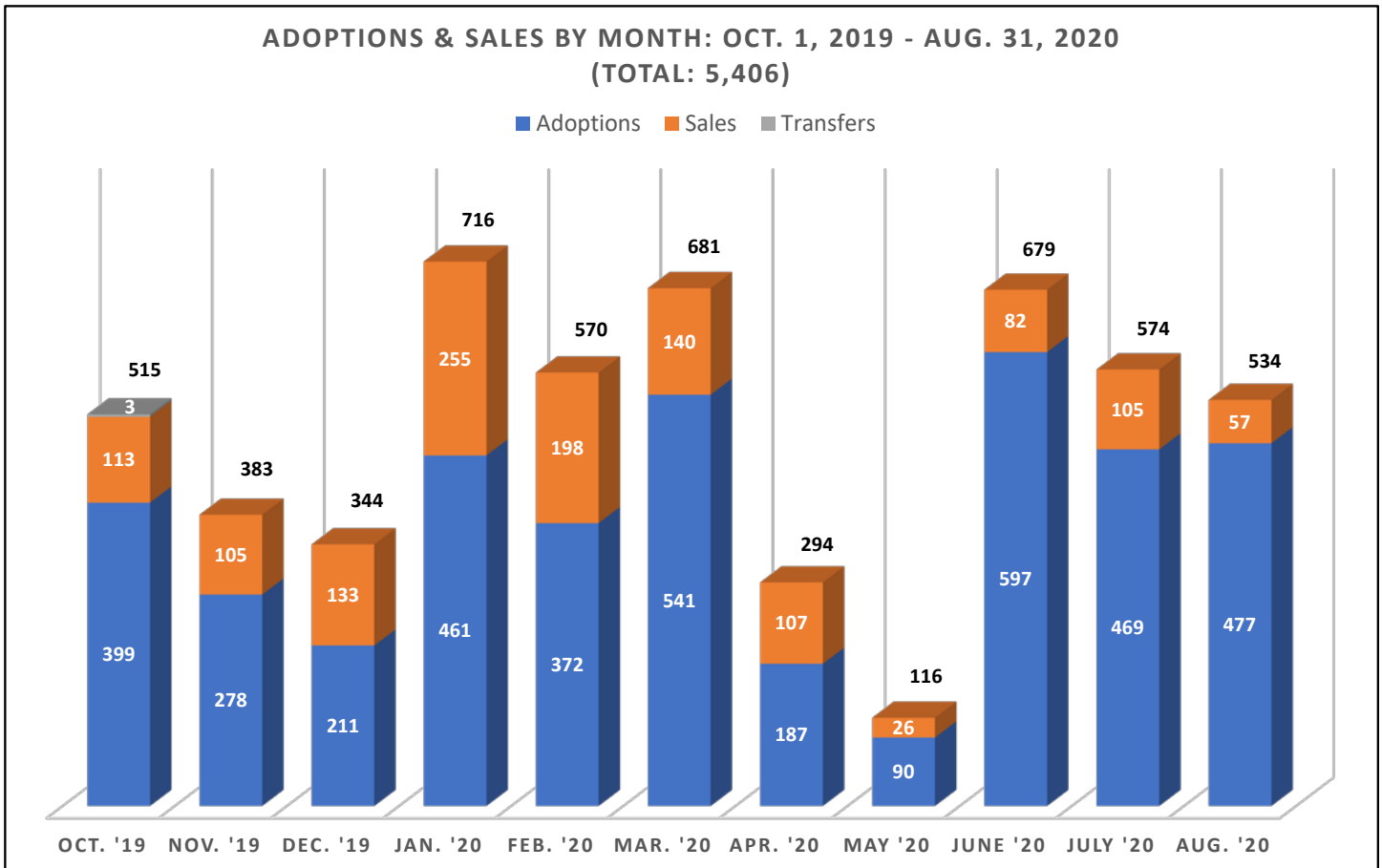




## Off-Range Highlights for Wild Horse and Burro (WHB) Advisory Board Meeting, September 23-24, 2020

**FY 2020 Private Placement Results** – The WHB Program has placed 5,406 animals into private care so far this fiscal year (through August 31, 2020). That is an especially impressive figure in light of the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had nationwide. Starting in mid- to late-March, numerous facilities were closed and events cancelled in accordance with state and local health guidelines aimed at limiting the spread of the virus. Even so, through a combination of efforts – including continued use of the Online Corral and reliance on our partnership with the Mustang Heritage Foundation – the Program remained on pace to have a very good year. The Adoption Incentive Program continued to prove effective at invigorating interest in the Program and placing animals into private care.



**Adoption Incentive Program First-Year Evaluation** – Following the remarkable reception of the Adoption Incentive Program (AIP) which was launched on March 12, 2019, the WHB Program conducted a thorough first-year analysis of the AIP to gauge its effectiveness at increasing adoptions. That analysis was captured in an evaluation report for agency and Program leadership to inform future decisions about any adjustments or modifications that might improve the effectiveness of the AIP going forward. Data presented in the report suggest that the AIP contributed to increased interest and participation in the program.



**Off-Range Pasture Tour, Davis, OK, September 21, 2020** -- The WHB Program conducted a virtual tour of a wild horse off-range pasture via Facebook Live September 21, 2020. The purpose of the tour was to allow the public to see and learn more about BLM’s WHB management mission, including the agency’s responsibility for providing humane care for thousands of animals held in off-range facilities. The off-range pasture featured during this virtual tour near Davis, Oklahoma is a private ranch under contract with the government to feed and care for up to 200 federally protected wild horses in a natural free-roaming environment. The virtual format was chosen as concerns about mitigating the spread of COVID-19 remain high. BLM staff specialists along with the ranch owner walked the public through the pasture on camera to see the horses and discuss details about how and why the agency manages this resource. Virtual attendees were able to ask questions via the live chat.

**WHB Activity Book** – The WHB Program is working with a professional educator and external marketing firm to develop a youth activity booklet to offer students an engaging overview of the history of wild horses and burros in America, their needs, impact on the environment and the necessity and challenges of properly managing them. The booklet is expected to be available to the field for public distribution by January 2021 and remain a key educational tool for the Program for many years to come.

**WHB Care and Feed Guide** – The Program created an easy-to-read care and feed guide as a resource for adopters and purchasers who have taken home a wild horse and/or burro. The guide consolidates helpful information from a variety of sources addressing adopter responsibilities and titling requirements; loading and unloading the animals; getting to know your animal(s) and the importance of exercising and gentling them; horse and burro nutrition, body condition and preventative care; equine diseases; and pregnancy. The guide is available in hardcopy at private placement events and also electronically on the [WHB website](#).

**50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemoration of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act** – The year 2021 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act. The WHB Program is planning a year-long commemoration of the Act starting in January. The goals of the commemoration will be to: Take the lead in establishing a positive narrative associated with the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary; Highlight the value of WHB as enduring symbols of our national heritage; Educate the public about the history of WHB on public lands and their management; Promote awareness of the beauty, versatility and desirability of WHB; Spotlight opportunities for Americans to adopt or purchase WHB at specially branded “50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary” events around the country. The Program has chosen a special logo and tag line to support the marketing and educational goals of the commemoration: “A Milestone for America’s Living Legends: Bred Wild ~ Built to Survive ~ Incredibly Versatile.”



**Virtual Compliance Program** – BLM Handbook H-4760-1, last updated in 2004, provides guidance for field staff conducting compliance checks on adopted wild horses and burros. The WHB Program is currently developing an Instruction Manual that elaborates on this guidance by providing for the use of modern technologies for conducting remote or “virtual” compliance inspections. These may include any of various video teleconferencing platforms such as Zoom, Skype, Facetime etc. The draft guidance for virtual compliance checks applies the same comprehensive standards for ensuring animal welfare as outlined in the original Handbook while specifying documentation requirements appropriate to the new media. Virtual compliance checks could be conducted for any routine purpose under this Program, but not when an inspection is initiated



in response to a complaint of inadequate care; A physical on-site inspection ~~is~~ would be required in that case. Expanded use of virtual compliance is expected to maximize efficiencies – both in terms of time and operational costs – and promote greater safety. Physical on-site inspections often require extensive travel with attendant costs for lodging, per diem, overtime and fleet operations. In addition, time (labor cost) spent traveling from one location to another is time not spent inspecting animals. More travel also increases employees’ exposure to the inherent risks of highway driving. Greater reliance on virtual compliance would moves all of these metrics in a positive direction without sacrificing quality of work.

**Off-Range Corral Request for Information – Eastern States** – The WHB Program posted a Request for Information (RFI) seeking potential sources in the Eastern United States with the interest and ability to provide corral space for excess animals. Depending on the level of interest shown, the agency plans to follow-up with a formal solicitation seeking bids for multiple Off-Range Corrals which can hold between 200-500 wild horses and burros. These Off-Range Corrals will serve as holding facilities for wild horses and burros removed from public rangelands and, importantly, support the WHB adoption and sales program by serving as regional shipping and receiving points. Since wild horses and burros can only be humanely transported a certain distance in a single day (typically no more than 10 hours), it is necessary to have a network of off-range corrals strategically located to allow for safe and humane shipment. Facilities will be considered in the 30 states bordering and east of the Mississippi River.

**Off-Range Corral Environmental Analysis Complete** – In support of the agency’s mission to sustainably manage wild horses and burros on public rangelands, the WHB Program announced that is has completed the necessary environmental analyses to award contracts for three new and one expanded off-range corral facilities in the states of Colorado, Utah and Wyoming. The four corrals, which will collectively hold 8,500 animals, will serve as short-term holding and preparation facilities for animals to be transferred to off-range pastures or adoption and sale locations throughout the country. The three new facilities are located in Cañon City, Colorado; Sutherland, Utah; and Wheatland, WY. The fourth expanded facility is in Axtel, Utah. All facilities will be staffed by contractor personnel and overseen by BLM staff with the knowledge, skills and ability to safely and humanely handle wild horses and burros and provide appropriate veterinary care.

**Off-Range Pasture Contract Awards** – As part of an ambitious, multi-pronged strategy to reduce overpopulation of wild horses and burros on public lands, the WHB Program announced that it will be awarding seven contracts for new wild horse off-range pastures in Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Washington. These pastures will help free up capacity in the BLM’s network of off-range corrals, which directly support management operations on public lands and the agency’s adoption and sale programs for placing animals into private care. Altogether, the seven new facilities will increase the agency’s off-range holding capacity by approximately 5,000 head.

**Online Corral** – The WHB Program continues to expand its use of the Online Corral platform to present more animals for placement and to reach a broader market. FY20-to-date, a total of five\* OLC events have been held with 919 animals being offered. Of these, 637 were adopted or sold, representing nearly a 70 percent placement rate. The average online bid for animals online was approximately \$285, yielding just over \$174,000 in all.

\*Results for a *sixth* event held this year in early September are still be tabulated and will add to the overall placement figures for this fiscal year.



**Combined Adoption and Sale Form** – The WHB Program developed and launched a new combined adoption and sale form (4710-10) for use by the field to simplify processing and improve record keeping. The new form is available [online](#) in a fillable PDF format to reduce input errors due to illegible handwriting. Based on constructive feedback from the field, the WHB Program expects to make further improvements to the form in the near future.

**Mustang Heritage Foundation** - The Mustang Heritage Foundation (MHF) partnership continues to support the Program through its many successful efforts to place animals into private care. In August the Program was pleased to announce an additional \$425,000 in funding for Fiscal Year 2020 to support the MHF and allow it to remain on track to exceed its private placement goals for the year. By the end of August, MHF had placed 2,164 animals, representing 40% of BLM's overall placements. MHF also continues to assist the Program with public outreach and education through the America's Mustang Virtual Reality Experience (AMVRE) trailer which is a valuable tool to reach diverse audiences about the challenges of WHB management and opportunities to support through adoption or purchase. The Program is currently in the process of developing a Statement of Work that will allow the agency to fund further deployment and expand the reach of the AMVRE via a contract instrument.