

Bureau of Land Management
Northeast California Resource Advisory Council

Business Meeting
Wednesday, Feb. 8, 2012
Redding, California

Summary Minutes

The meeting came to order at 1 p.m. in the Conference Center of the Oxford Suites. Nancy Huffman presided as chair.

Attendance

Category One: Jack Razzeto, Todd Swickard, Ken McGarva, Skip Willmore. Absent: John Erquiaga.

Category Two: Judy Oliver, Alan Cain, Frank Bayham, Gale Dupree. Absent: Louise Jensen.

Category Three: Sean Curtis, Jim Chapman, Brad Hansen, Carol Montgomery, Nancy Huffman.

There is a quorum.

BLM Staff: District Manager Nancy Haug, Alturas Field Manager Tim Burke, Eagle Lake Field Manager Ken Collum Surprise Field Manager Allen Bollschweiler, State Office Natural Resources Specialist Karl Stein, Arcata Field Manager Lynda Roush, Acting Headwaters Manager Katie Wood, District Public Affairs Officer Jeff Fontana.

Guests: Chuck Schoendienst, Red Bluff; Susan Courmanche, Las Vegas, Nev.; Jennifer Gillespie, Redding; Bonnie Kohleriter, Alamo; Shirley Laos, Trinidad; Stan Leach, French Gulch; Carla Bowers, Volcano, Calif.; Sherry Oster, Cottonwood, Calif.; Louis Wistos, Bella Vista, Calif.; Joyce Wickerd, Redding; Marta Williams, Middletown, Calif.; Jessica Johnston, Sacramento; Lisa LeBlanc, Rancho Cordova, Calif.

Opening business

Today's agenda and the minutes from the last meeting were approved as presented.

Election of Officers: The RAC unanimously elected Nancy Huffman to continue as chair and Skip Willmore to continue as vice chair.

Project Updates (information)

Horse Lake Wind: Eagle Lake Field Manager Ken Collum updated the council on status of the proposed wind energy project east of Eagle Lake. It is a proposed 50 megawatt wind farm on public land. A plan of development has been presented and accepted by the agency as adequate. The BLM must file a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register to begin development of an environmental impact statement that will include analysis of the potential environmental impacts of the project, and whether to amend the Eagle Lake Resource Management Plan which currently does not allow for this type of development in the area proposed. The NOI has not yet been published. The proposal is in an area designated as visual resource management class 2, which calls for retaining the primitive environment. There are three alternatives being presented by Invenenergy. Alternatives to be addressed in the environmental analysis will be developed after public scoping period in the EIS process. An environmental impact report (EIR) required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) will be prepared concurrently.

Preliminary project issues include possible impacts to golden eagles, bald eagles, Native American tribal concerns, visual impacts and possible impacts to sage-grouse habitat. The latter is significant because about 60 percent of the project area is in core sage grouse habitat. The field office is part of a BLM west-wide effort that will amend resource management plans by adding sage grouse conservation measures. These could have a bearing on development of a wind farm.

There was discussion about market factors affecting development of alternative energy.

High Rock Complex Wild Horse Roundup: Surprise Field Office Manager Allen Bollschweiler updated the group on the completion of the gather last November. In the roundup, 1,334 wild horses were gathered as part of the effort to return populations to sustainable levels. Appropriate management levels are 258 to 451 wild horses in the Bitner, Nut Mountain, Fox Hog, High Rock and Wall Canyon herd management areas. Gather details are online at www.blm.gov/ca/surprise.

Additionally, District Manager Nancy Haug updated the RAC on efforts of the BLM and Fish and Wildlife Service to coordinate on horse and burro management in northwest Nevada and southeast Oregon. The Tri-State wild horse and burro management effort is focused on improving knowledge about herd movement and improving management effectiveness and efficiency.

Bly Tunnel at Eagle Lake: Collum updated the council on action to close the valve on a bypass pipe on a plug in the Bly Tunnel, a failed, historic irrigation project at Eagle Lake. He said the decision was based on reversal of a California Department of Water Resources opinion that a downstream water right existed to ground water accumulating in the tunnel. Additionally the California Department of Fish and Game reversed an earlier opinion that water flowing through the bypass was needed for downstream fish and wildlife. The failed irrigation tunnel was permanently plugged in 1986 to prevent

flooding during high lake levels. The bypass was installed to accommodate a water right thought to be in place at the time.

Todd Swickard noted that the issue has been a political football as Eagle Lake levels have declined for various reasons. He does not agree with the BLM decision, saying the validity of the DWR water rights opinion is questionable. The courts will be the best venue to decide the water rights question. Jim Chapman noted the issue has been moved out of the Lassen County Board of Supervisors chambers where it did not belong. He views the BLM decision as correct. He said the expectation that the lake will begin to rise immediately will prove to be incorrect. He suggested a website, Susanville Stuff .com, as a good source for a historical view of the tunnel project and Eagle Lake itself.

Sage-Grouse: Nancy Haug updated the council on the process to amend BLM land use plans across the west to incorporate sage-grouse conservation measures. The Eagle Lake, Alturas and Surprise RMPs will be subject to amendment in this process. This comes after the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined that sage-grouse are “warranted but precluded” for listing as threatened or endangered under the Federal Endangered Species Act. The FWS will determine by 2015 whether or not to list the species. Among the factors to be considered in that determination is whether the BLM has sufficient regulatory mechanisms in place to protect habitat for the species. The current planning process aims to put those mechanisms into place. Arlene Kosic, a wildlife biologist in the Alturas Field Office, will be the northeast California project lead on the sage grouse project. Collum noted that interim management guidance will apply for the next two years affecting any on-the-ground actions in sage grouse habitat until the EISs are developed. He added that local conservation work has been underway for years, and strong local sage grouse populations put the northeast part of California in good position.

Aquatic Condition Assessments (action)

Karl Stein, natural resources specialist from the California State Office, presented information on a pilot program to provide managers with broad scale analysis of biological, aquatic, and upland habitat conditions. Data collected through this process can tell managers where to focus maximum efforts on species conservation, showing where opportunities for success are highest. In northeast California the project could be used in grazing permit renewal decisions, enabling managers to make defensible decisions. The pilot project now underway will validate use of a sample design in assessing conditions. Trout Unlimited is a partner. There is detailed information at <http://www.tu.org/science/conservation-success-index>.

Action: The advisory council unanimously endorsed the pilot project and asked for continuing updates.

Wild Horse and Burro Comments (action)

The RAC reviewed recommendations provided by its wild horse and burro subcommittee (Todd Swickard, Sean Curtis, Alan Cain and Chair Nancy Huffman) regarding an

independent, technical evaluation of the Wild Horse and Burro Program being conducted by the National Academy of Sciences. Several members of the public were present to offer their viewpoints. At the request of these guests, Chair Nancy Huffman allowed public comments prior to the RAC discussion of the recommendations.

Public Comments on subcommittee recommendations:

Carla Bowers: Asked the members to "open their minds" to more information about wild horses and burros. She said that BLM management needs to be fairer to horses and burros in the west. Ms. Bowers noted that the wild horse interests are working to keep horses on the land. She said the BLM program is managing wild horses to extinction. She asked the group to postpone a recommendation today. Ms. Bowers added that the numbers on the range are not sufficient to maintain genetic diversity.

Bonnie Kohleriter: Referenced handouts she provided showing wild horse and burro population in the western states. She provided information on PZP use that she gathered from meetings of the NAS task group, adding that work is underway on a three year effective immuno-contraceptive drug. She noted that studies are underway on use of SpayVAC. Results will not be known for five years.

Marta Williams: The BLM needs a state of the art census process for counting horses on the range. The RAC should assure that actions are taken to be sure the NAS study is accurate. Issues to be considered should be genetic diversity, the danger of extinction, best management for humane treatment, recognition that horses are native to the North American continent and should be managed as a native species. There should also be a determination as to whether the gather stress is causing compensatory reproduction, examination of the 20 million acres question (lands no longer available to wild horse and burro herds, and consideration of repatriating animals to these areas. Conditions in BLM holding facilities holding are substandard.

Elyse Gardner: submitted this comment via email:

February 6, 2012

Re: Summary Meeting Notes to the
RAC Subcommittee Meeting on January 11, 2012
Alturas, CA

To: Jeff Fontana, BLM California Northern District Public Affairs Officer

First, I once again extend my sincere thanks to RAC Chair Nancy Huffman for requesting this meeting.

Jeff, thank you very much for facilitating the telephone access of this Northeast California RAC subcommittee meeting of January 11, 2012. I hope the public can

continue to attend in this way. I was going to submit my comments in writing after the meeting and apologize that I did not do so in a timely manner.

I submit them now and ask that you please add them as an addendum or amendment to the SUMMARY MEETING NOTES because the summary of my comments as it exists in that document generalizes to the point of losing my main points, which follow:

1) The 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act defines wild horse and a wild burro as follows:

(b) Wild free-roaming horses and burros means all unbranded and unclaimed horses and burros on public lands of the United States.

I was addressing someone's comments (I believe it was Chairperson Nancy Huffman) about wanting/needing to determine which horses were truly wild, which she defined as having Spanish blood, and which horses were "feral," i.e., domestic horses and their progeny running loose.

I respectfully submit that this misconception or perhaps bias favoring Spanish-blooded horses (and actually defining "wild horses" in this way) needs to be set aside by this committee, by the National Academy of Sciences – in fact, by all having to do with our American wild horses -- since the law itself makes no reference to "Spanish blood." A sanctuary or private organization can gear toward Spanish blood or a particular type of wild horse (e.g., Kigers, Paints, Curlies), but the government must abide by the legal definition of wild horses and burros as set forth above.

2) The other area of concern I had about the Subcommittee's lack of information was regarding their dismissing compensatory reproduction as a non-issue even after they acknowledged they didn't know what it was. Compensatory Reproduction may be described as a species' built-in increase in reproductive rate to "compensate" for a perceived threat to its survival.

When subcommittee member Sean Curtis stated, "There is no evidence of compensatory reproduction. The BLM needs to focus on herd management on the ground," this statement is contrary to the actual facts, and I was disappointed that Amy Dumas didn't speak up about this erroneous remark. Perhaps I am mistaken, but I thought Amy had knowledge of this issue. Candidly, Mr. Curtis' bold, inaccurate assertion, made as though it were fact, has given me pause in trusting other assertions he makes.

Dr. Jay F. Kirkpatrick's study is known and available to review and concludes that compensatory reproduction is a real issue. Dr. Kirkpatrick has worked for years on PZP studies. Here in pertinent part is a portion of his article from the Journal of Wildlife Management, Vol. 55, No. 4 (October 1991) pp. 649-652, published by Allen Press, Compensatory Reproduction in Feral Horses (the link doesn't appear to be working, but one can Google "compensatory reproduction horses," and this article comes up at the top):

The Maryland herd consists of approximately 150 horses living on Assateague Island National Seashore, and, in keeping with National Park Service policies of nonintervention, management is minimal. The Virginia herd consists of approximately 200 horses inhabiting Chincoteague NWR; these horses are intensively managed through the annual removal of approximately 80% of the foals, a practice dating back >30 years. In an 8-year study of reproduction among the Assateague Island horses conducted between 1975 and 1983, Keiper and Houpt (1984) reported an annual foaling rate of 74.4% among sexually mature mares on the Chincoteague NWR. In contrast, the foaling rate for the unmanaged Assateague Island NS horses was only 57.2%, with an age-specific range of 40-70%. Since 1986, the Assateague Island NS foaling rate has dropped below 50% (J.F. Kirpatrick, unpubl. data).

Below please find a “screen grab” of the same article.

3) I also stated the NAS study, to be accurate, must necessarily include livestock grazing ratios.

4) Finally, per the 1971 Act, minimum feasible management is the legal mandate; slowing the herd’s growth is not the only issue. BLM presently makes this program all about numbers and controlling population, but substantially impacting the nature of wild horse society with the way Catch/Treat/Release roundups are currently conducted fails to meet the minimum feasible management mandate by acting like a giant wrecking ball, destroying literally every single family band in an HMA with its plan to round up all known horses in an area, which currently means separating all studs from their mares; permanently removing most horses, including older horses with herd and range knowledge; PZP treating mares selected for return, and then returning all studs selected for return at once; waiting perhaps minutes/hours/days (it varies) and then releasing mares selected for return. This decimates the lifelong work of the stallions in one day and necessitates his fighting to attempt to rebuild his family.

Added to this decimation of all family bands is the other unstudied practice of gender skewing or sex skewing the gender ratios so that BLM releases 60 percent stallions, 40 percent mares, thereby creating a more fierce competition than exists naturally in the wild. BLM does this on the heels of having destroyed all family units. No one is out there studying the impacts of these invasive, disruptive practices on these highly social animals. I believe this demonstrates how BLM is failing to meet its legal mandate of minimum feasible management

NO SCIENCE EXISTS: This current practice of C/T/R roundups, as radically as it impacts the entire herd as described, has never been studied; its effects on the individual horses, the bands, and the entire herd dynamic and structure, short-term and long-term, have never been studied, yet the BLM is applying this practice across the board in virtually all large remaining (and many small) HMAs. I believe any reasonable, prudent person would consider this highly irresponsible since no studies exist, and it may well be impossible to undo the potential damage being done.

In the 2009 Pryor Mountain Catch/Treat/Release roundup, BLM demonstrated it knows how to conduct a roundup with minimum feasible management and impact by keeping family bands intact throughout the helicopter chase, the temporary holding pens, and the “processing” time, virtually eliminating injuries during their captivity and reducing stress. They then released all animals selected for release still within their bands, leaving about five minutes between releases.

“Manage and protect” means the individuals and their way of life. While fertility/infertility practices are within BLM’s discretion, the minimum feasible management mandate standard remains intact and BLM must consider not only the numbers, but the social structure of these animals, as well.

Thank you for your consideration.

Elyse Gardner

A telephone conference line was made available for anyone interested. No comments were telephoned in.

Subcommittee Recommendations: The RAC reviewed and commented on the following recommendations, developed by the RAC wild horse and burro subcommittee when it met in Alturas.

RAC member comments from today’s RAC meeting are inserted in bold after each numbered subject area in the following subcommittee meeting minutes, which are indented and shown in the arial typeface:

**Bureau of Land Management
Northeast California Resource Advisory Council
Subcommittee on Wild Horse and Burro Management**

**Summary Meeting Notes
Wednesday, January 11, 2012, 9 a.m.
Alturas, California**

RAC chair Nancy Huffman requested this meeting following her attendance at a public meeting hosted by the National Academy of Sciences in November 2011. The NAS is conducting an independent, technical evaluation of the BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program, and invited public comments during the November meeting. Chairwoman Huffman wanted the Northeast California RAC to have an opportunity to review the issues under analysis by the NAS and have the opportunity to provide comments to the BLM.

These subcommittee comments will be provided to the full Northeast California RAC when they meet Feb. 8, 2012, in Redding, Calif.

Attending

RAC Chair Nancy Huffman, RAC subcommittee members Sean Curtis, Alan Cain, and Todd Swickard.

BLM Staff: Northern California District Manager Nancy Haug, Alturas Field Manager Tim Burke, Surprise Field Manager Allen Bollschweiler, District Public Affairs Officer Jeff Fontana.

Members of the public: Bill Phillips, Susanville; Ed Ward, Alturas.

By audio conference line: BLM California Wild Horse and Burro Program Manager Amy Dumas; members of the public: Jessica Johnston, Debbie Coffee, Elyse Gardner, Laura Leigh, Carol Abel, Deniz Bolbol, Sherry Oster, Billy Turner, Barbara Warner.

Nancy Haug explained the role and structure of the subcommittee. Information will be provided to the full RAC and then to the BLM for forwarding to the NAS as part of their study.

Nancy Huffman summarized her attendance at the NAS meeting in Reno. She suggested that the subcommittee work through the list of topic areas, indicate agreement or disagreement and any suggestions about additional areas to proceed.

Following is a summary of comments (not a verbatim record) by the subcommittee and members of the public. They are arranged by topic areas assigned to the NAS.

Topics and Comments:

1. ***Estimates of the WH&B populations:*** *Given available information and methods, how accurately can WH&B populations in the West be estimated? What are the best methods to estimate WH&B herd numbers and what is the margin of error in those methods? Are there better techniques than the BLM currently uses to estimate population numbers? For example, could genetics or remote sensing using unmanned aircraft be used to estimate WH&B population size and distribution?*

Comments:

Alan: Questioned the science behind using remote sensing for population surveys and how genetics factor in to population numbers. Remote sensing will not alleviate problems counting horses in difficult areas such as places with heavy tree cover.

Sean: Reasonableness and cost have to be factored in. What would we gain with remote sensing? We know we will never count every individual horse.

Todd: the population number is always changing and counts must consider annual die offs.

Full RAC Comments:

Frank Bayham: No disagreement with the subcommittee. He hopes that the most current procedures can be evaluated.

2. *Population Modeling:* Evaluate the strengths and limitations of the WinEquus population model for predicting impacts on wild horse populations given various stochastic factors and management alternatives. What types of decisions are most appropriately supported using the WinEquus model? Is there a better model (i.e. the HSUS model) the BLM should consider for future uses?

Comments:

Nancy Huffman: This is where the genetics question applies. Each herd management area has its own distinct lifestyle.

Amy explained the WinEquus population model is used to predict population responses to various pressures. The BLM uses the model for wild horse population modeling.

It is a useful planning tool to predict population responses. It is one of many tools used. It can be used to project when a herd may need to be considered for regathering after completion of a roundup. Amy noted it is a statistical model of population dynamics.

Sean: Before switching to a new model, the BLM should determine whether the WinEquus model is meeting needs. He does not have the capacity to fully analyze the effectiveness of WinEquus.

Full RAC Comments:

Nancy Huffman: Overall, management has to be affordable and implementable on the ground.

Frank Bayham: This topic should be divorced from any decision making.

Alan Cain: We need to support another look at WinEquus to be sure it is still useable and appropriate.

Nancy Huffman: Is not sure that switching to a new model from WinEquus would be practical.

3. Genetic diversity in WH&B herds: *What does information available on WH&B herds' genetic diversity indicate about long-term herd health, from a biological and genetic perspective? Is there an optimal level of genetic diversity within a herd to manage for? What management actions can be undertaken to achieve an optimal level of genetic diversity if it is too low?*

Comments:

Nancy Huffman: Information will be important to determine whether the BLM is dealing with truly wild horses, or horses that have been turned loose for various economic reasons.

Sean: Consider whether genetic information is more important for bands with Spanish blood versus those with lines to other origins.

Nancy Huffman: The best use would be to determine whether there is herd inbreeding.

Full RAC Comments

Frank Bayham: The NAS should ask what effect horses turned onto the range have on the genetic makeup of the wild herds.

Alan Cain: is puzzled by the attention given to genetic diversity, when the question is not addressed in the WHB Act.

Frank noted that genetic diversity in any population is a good barometer of the health of the entire population. Lack of diversity can make animals vulnerable to disease and other negative effects. It is good science to look into that.

4. Annual rates of WH&B population growth: *Evaluate estimates of the annual rates of increase in WH&B herds, including factors affecting the accuracy of and uncertainty related to the estimates. Is there compensatory reproduction as a result of gathers to remove excess WH&B or application of PZP-22 over a 4-year gather cycle, and if so, what is the level of compensatory reproduction occurring? Would WH&B populations self-limit if they were not controlled, and if so, what indicators (rangeland condition, animal condition, health, etc.) would be present at the point of self-limitation?*

Comments:

Sean: No large scale experiments are needed to try and prove the population will self-regulate. We know they will but there will be catastrophic rangeland havoc to habitat. We know that populations can self-limit, but it would be through starvation or dehydration.

Todd: Range health always has to be the BLM's primary concern.

In discussion, the committee members agreed that any attempts to allow wild herds to self-limit their populations would have negative impacts to animals and the range.

Sean: There is no evidence of compensatory reproduction. The BLM needs to focus on herd management on the ground.

Full RAC Comments:

Frank Bayham: The question is reasonable. The study should directly address the possible impacts of wild horse population self-regulation on the land and other species. Consider this under topic 11 -- additional research needs.

Gale Dupree: Wild horse surveys could be done at the same time as wildlife agencies doing wildlife population counts. Wild horse and burro advocate groups should consider helping to fund.

Skip Willmore: Some members of the public express concerns about wild horse population impacts on other species.

5. *Predator impact on WH&B population growth: Evaluate information relative to the abundance of predators and their impact on WH&B populations. Although predator management is the responsibility of the USFWS or State wildlife agencies and given the constraints in existing federal law, is there evidence that predators alone could effectively control WH&B population size in the West?*

Comments:

Nancy Huffman: Has the California ban on mountain lion hunting has had an impact on wild horse populations in the state?

Sean: The question is an academic exercise only. Pursuing this question might not be the best use of funds.

Full RAC comments:

Gale Dupree: Pursuing the question might reveal a trend, by comparing California numbers with states where mountain lion populations are controlled by hunting.

6. *Population control:* *What scientific factors should be considered when making population control decisions (roundups, fertility control, sterilization of either males or females, sex ratio adjustments to favor males and other population control measures) relative to the effectiveness of control approach, herd health, genetic diversity, social behavior, and animal well-being?*

Comments:

Sean: The BLM may be off the mark is relying on a two-year effective fertility control measure for a long term tool at population management. Effective fertility control would need a long-lasting treatment. The RAC could suggest that NAS investigate longer-lasting methods of fertility control but he remains skeptical that such a long term drug will be developed.

Todd: Decisions need to be made based on existing technology.

Members discussed market considerations in drug development and whether BLM will contribute financially toward development.

Sean: Part of this discussion should include the effects of permanent sterilization, the effects of sex ratio structuring.

The group agreed the topic is an area that can have significant impacts on how herds are managed on the range.

Full RAC comments:

Judy Oliver suggested looking at horse management approaches in other areas of the world to see what's working.

7. *Immunocontraception of wild horse mares (porcine zona pellucida):* *Evaluate information related to the effectiveness of immunocontraception in preventing pregnancies and reducing herd populations. Are there other fertility control agents or population control methods the BLM should consider (for either mares or stallions)?*

Comments:

Nancy Huffman: A question must be addressed about how to fund an improved method or drug.

Sean: For the current drug to be effective, aggressive population control program would be needed.

Full RAC comments:

General agreement: The NAS should look at the cost comparisons among various options of population control measures. Look at the economic considerations of various approaches.

8. *Managing a portion of a population as non-reproducing:* *What factors should the BLM consider when managing for WH&B herds with a reproducing and non-reproducing population of animals (i.e., a portion of the population is a breeding population and the remainder is non-reproducing males or females)? When implementing non-reproducing populations, which tools should be considered (geldings (castration), sterilized (spayed) mares or vasectomized stallions or other chemical sterilants)? Is there credible evidence to indicate vasectomized stallions in a herd would be effective in decreasing annual population growth rates, or are there other methods the BLM should consider for managing stallions in a herd that would be effective in tangibly suppressing population growth?*

Comments:

Committee agreement: The RAC needs to specifically request a look at whether there is a place on the range for non-reproducing herds. If there is, what are the parameters that would lead the BLM to taking that action? BLM should look into the cost effectiveness of that action.

Full RAC comments:

None

9. *AML Establishment or Adjustment:* *Evaluate the BLM's approach to establishing or adjusting AML as described in the 4700-1 Wild Horses and Burros Management Handbook. Are there other approaches to establishing or adjusting AML the BLM should consider? How might BLM improve its ability to validate AML?*

Comments:

Committee agreement: Revisiting the topic might be important, but if the BLM agrees to this it should be sure it can be accomplished with existing

workloads and staffing. AML adjustments can have longer term and broader consequences in terms of numbers of horses to be removed. Economic considerations need to be part of decision making on AML adjustment discussions. Consideration should also be given to impacts to range users.

Full RAC comments:

Frank Bayham: Jesica's comments should be considered under this question. Is the balance between cattle and horses appropriate? Should it be changed?

10. Societal Considerations: *What options are available to BLM to address the widely divergent and conflicting perspectives about WH&B management and consider stakeholder concerns while using the best available science to protect land and animal health?*

Comments:

Todd: The BLM needs to recognize that using the best available science to protect land and animal health is the most important aspect of the program.

Sean: The question must be asked about dedication of resources to public access and transparency versus the need for resources to get the job done on the ground.

The amount of transparency that the BLM can provide can be limited by staff and financial resources, and locations of gathers. BLM needs to develop public access programs that fit locations.

Full RAC comments:

None

11. Additional Research Needs: *Identify research needs and opportunities related to the topics listed above. What research should be the highest priority for the BLM to fill information and data gaps, reduce uncertainty, and improve decision-making and management?*

Comments:

Committee agreement: More knowledge is needed about a longer term contraceptive and an available stallion contraceptive. There is no alternative to helicopters (for gathering) at this point. We recognize there is more to learn but the BLM shouldn't put program on hold while we wait for additional information that may or may not be there. The program has

to be aggressively moving forward. If the BLM learns something new or different, we can make a change.

Sean: If helicopter use is evaluated, BLM can't stop using them in the meantime.

Nancy Haug: Better information on movement of horses among HMA jurisdiction and inter-relationships among HMAs would be valuable.

Sean: The capacity of electronic monitoring should be more fully explored as a way of gaining more on the ground information on herd movement and other dynamics.

Full RAC Comments:

Frank Bayham: Look into impacts of population self-regulation on health of the land and the other species depending on it.

Skip Willmore: Overall, the wild horse and burro program has more issues to consider than just the 11 points in the NAS study.

General agreement: Two additional topic areas should be an economic evaluation of the cost and benefits associated with different approaches; and the impacts of self-regulating populations. None of the questions directly impact these two topics.

RAC asked the BLM staff to check on whether other RACS have commented on the NAS study.

Public Comments:

Barbara Warner: There should be a strategic and independent count of wild horse and burro populations.

Bill Phillips: BLM is doing better at estimating populations than in earlier years. We have good ideas on numbers left on the range Population modeling important component in structured herd management. Genetic diversity factors in to herd management by allowing the BLM to remove from herds undesirable traits. The number of foals taken by mountain lions has been underestimated and should be recognized. When herds achieve appropriate management levels, rangeland effects should be studied for five years (at that population level) before changes are made.

Ed Ward: The wild horse population increased after passage of the Act and the lack of ability for citizens to control numbers. He appreciates seeing horses in the wild. Mountain lions are taking a toll and wolves

might be a factor as well. Wild horses and burros are the best friends you can ever have.

Debbie Coffee: Was shocked at some of the lack of knowledge from the subcommittee about wild horse management.

Deniz Bobbol: The law requires the BLM to complete census, and this work has been lacking by the BLM. Lack of knowledge leads to genetic problems and can lead to herds being zeroed out because they are not healthy. BLM needs to do a better job of census and needs more knowledge on herd makeup. WinEquus is 20 years old. She was shocked by the committee chair voicing concern over cost of fertility control, when the NAS discussed the financial long term advantage of fertility control. Non reproducing herds would be a violation of the Act. Releasing sterile horses also violates the Act. The subcommittee did not address the foundation of the BLM program. The NAS does not address this foundation either. The allocation of AUMS needs to be part of the discussion. Subcommittee members need to know how the public resources are allocated and need more complete information on herd areas.

Laura Leigh: Thanked the group for acknowledging the need for more information on herd dynamics and movement. She encouraged the subcommittee to understand that the recommendations apply program wide, not just to the field offices here. There is an extraordinary lack of data in many BLM field offices. She said Kiger management should not be used as a model for other herds. The Kiger horses have been intensively managed and is almost a range breeding program. There is population modeling software that can be modified and might be a good replacement for WinEquus. There is good information available to the NAS about compensatory reproduction. There is no NAS protocol for incorporating this type of dialogue (being provided at today's meeting). Public access is not part of the NAS study. The committee members do not seem to recognize that the BLM has responsibility for the animals and the land. Wild horses are unique in the structure of the BLM.

Elyse Gardner: Was troubled by the lack of information that the subcommittee has, but thanked them for service. She said everyone needs to make an effort to remember the law and not address the issue on personal preferences. She referenced section 2 of the WHB Act as the definition of wild horses and burros. There is good scientific information to support compensatory reproduction. She encouraged the subcommittee members to admit then they don't know something and be willing to learn more. The NAS study needs to include livestock grazing ratios. The Wild Horse and Burro Program needs to address minimal feasible management and resource allocations. The law was meant to protect the animals

because they were fast disappearing from the land. The BLM needs to protect family units, as it has in the Pryor Mountains -- gather and release by bands.

Jesica Johnston: Expressed concern with subcommittee making recommendations without being fully informed on the science regarding wild horse and burro management. Burros were not mentioned in this discussion and have equal protection. The direct count census technique is outdated. There are better and more cost effective methods and NAS should investigate. Line transect is one. Viewing predators as a problem stems from the livestock industry bias for predator control. The BLM should remove livestock from public lands where wild horses live to return to a more ecosystem restoration approach. There is research available that is not being used in the program. For example, there are papers written on the misclassification of wild horses as a non-native species. Take a step back and take another look at the land allocated to wild horses and burros.

Carol Abel: Is disappointed in knowledge base of the subcommittee members.

Sherry Oster: Karen Susman of the American Society for the Protection of Mustangs and Burros has done research on PZP and intact wild herds. ASPMB. She is concerned with management impact on wild herds family structure.

Elyse Gardner: Was troubled by the lack of information that the subcommittee has, but thanked them for service. She said everyone needs to make an effort to remember the law and not address the issue on personal preferences. She referenced section 2 of the WHB Act as the definition of wild horses and burros. There is good scientific information to support compensatory reproduction. She encouraged the subcommittee members to admit then they don't know something and be willing to learn more. The NAS study needs to include livestock grazing ratios The Wild Horse and Burro Program needs to address minimal feasible management and resource allocations. The law was meant to protect the animals because they were fast disappearing from the land. The BLM needs to protect family units, as it has in the Pryor Mountains -- gather and release by bands.

Continuing discussion:

There is a question about data system compatibility. Can BLM access information developed by others?

Sean: The NAS should investigate whether there are better ways to spend allocated dollars. We are currently keeping the long term pastures full and the range full. A long term model would address the effects of aggressively getting to low AML and staying there. The BLM will not see a cost decrease with the current model because we continue to fill up long term holding. Getting the on the range population down and keeping it down reduces gather and holding needs and therefore program costs, after an initial increase in holding costs. This is an important part of the socio economic question to be addressed. Ensure socio economic and research projected long term to determine the long term effect of reaching AML.

Todd: Long term contraceptive is a key to management into the future and should be encouraged by the BLM.

The Northeast California Resource Advisory Council will receive these meeting notes and consider whether to forward them as a RAC recommendation to the BLM.

Summary notes compiled by:
Jeff Fontana
Public Affairs Officer
BLM Northern California District

Action: The Northeast California Resource Advisory Council (RAC) endorsed the comments of the subcommittee with the additions provided by the full council today, and asked that they be forwarded to the BLM wild horse and burro program for consideration in the NAS study.

Public Comment Period

Nancy Huffman opened the comment period and invited anyone to comment on any item of interest.

Susan Courmaneh, Las Vegas: Counting horses by helicopters causes them to scatter. Better to do it from horseback like the Cloud Foundation does. Keep family bands together safely. Bring them to safe and nurturing place for them to be such as Nebraska or North Carolina.

Jesica Johnston: The NAS study needs to look at impacts of livestock grazing on wild horse and burro population management. Studies need to be broader.

Kimberly Rodemeyer, Reno: There needs to be better public access to all roundups. She is concerned with distances from gather sites for public. The NAS should address forage consumption by cattle. There should be new independent study on cattle forage consumption. She is concerned cattle are favored over horses.

Gale Dupree: Provided information on the differences between ravens and crows and how to tell the difference. Ravens are the number one predator on sage grouse.

The public comment period and telephone conference line were closed at 4:15 p.m.

Field Managers' Reports

Field Managers Collum, Burke and Bollschweiler presented written reports.

Additional comments:

Alturas: The sage steppe ecosystem project technical review team has been convened by the North Cal Neva Resource Conservation and Development Council. Creation of this group is mandated in the management plan. It is not a BLM advisory council.

Surprise: The field office has been receiving positive public comments on improvements at Massacre Ranch.

Eagle Lake: The staff is developing a plan for repairing new routes into wilderness study areas.

Closing Business

Next Meeting: Wednesday and Thursday, June 13-14. Cedarville. Field trip on the first day.

Agenda topics: Updates on Bly Tunnel, public land access (responding to public questions from Burney area) travel management provisions in current resource management plans, BLM policy on deed restrictions on acquired lands, Medicine Lake Highlands geothermal development proposals, acquisition strategy for Infernal Caverns site.