

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management**

**Finding of No Significant Impact  
DOI-BLM-CA-N050-2010-05-EA**

**TWIN PEAKS HERD MANAGEMENT AREA  
WILD HORSE and BURRO GATHER PLAN**

**July 2010**



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## BACKGROUND

The purpose of the Proposed Action evaluated under EA # DOI-BLM-CA-N050-2010-05 is to remove excess wild horses and burros from the Twin Peaks Herd Management Area (HMA) in order to manage population levels consistent with the established appropriate management levels (AMLs), and to slow the current growth rate of horses. The current population inventories and estimates indicate that in 2010 there are approximately 2,303 horses in the HMA and approximately 282 burros. Wild horse numbers have increased an average of 20% per year since the HMA was last gathered in 2006. The current population is about five times over the AML lower range.

## FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based upon the review of EA # DOI-BLM-CA-N050-2010-05, and its associated administrative record, it is my determination that the implementation of the Proposed Action will not have significant environmental impacts beyond those already addressed in EA #DOI-BLM-CA-N050-2010-05 and that the Proposed Action is in conformance with the Eagle Lake Resource Management Plan, 2008. I have determined that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action, and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. For these reasons an environmental impact statement or a supplement to the existing environmental assessment does not need to be prepared.

## CONTEXT AND INTENSITY

This finding is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and to the intensity of the impacts described in the EA or as articulated in the letters of comment.

**Context:** The project is a site-specific action which by itself does not have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance.

**Intensity:** The following discussion is based on the relevant factors that should be considered in evaluating intensity as described in 40 CFR 1508.27:

***1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.***

I have determined that none of the direct, indirect or cumulative impacts associated with Alternative A are significant, individually or combined. The Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluated both beneficial and adverse impacts of the gather and removal of wild horses and burros. Potential impacts include injuries to wild horses and burros from capture, processing, transfer and holding; and effects to the populations through changes in herd population dynamics, age structure or sex ratio, and subsequently to the growth rates and population size over time. Other short term impacts include disturbance to soils and vegetation within gather sites and temporary holding facilities, and short term visual and noise impacts to recreational use of wilderness study areas (EA Sections 4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.1.3, 4.1.4, 4.7.1, 4.9.1, 4.11.1).

Removing excess wild horses and burros would reduce the level of use of rangeland and riparian vegetation, and help alleviate competition for resources between wildlife and wild horses.

Removal of excess wild horses and burros will allow for the recovery of natural resources, such as soils, vegetation, watersheds, wildlife, and wild horse habitat. However, none of these impacts would be significant at the local scale or cumulatively.

**2. *The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.***

The Proposed Action is located within a very remote setting with little human habitation. The Wild Horse and Burro Standard Operating Procedures (EA, Appendix A) would be used to conduct the gather and are designed to protect human health and safety, as well as the health and safety of wild horses. The Proposed Action would have minimal affect to public health or safety.

**3. *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.***

The Twin Peaks HMA contains many unique and important biological, geological, scenic, and cultural resources. These include several important archaeological sites, four areas of critical environmental concern, seven wilderness study areas, four historic trails, and one eligible wild and scenic river segment. The EA analyzed the impacts associated with implementation of the Proposed Action to these unique areas. Wild horse and burro gather activities are designed to be minimally intrusive and would have no permanent surface disturbance or impacts to these sites or to their associated values. A cultural resources inventory would be completed prior to constructing temporary trap sites and holding facilities. If cultural resources are found in an area, a new location would be determined to set up temporary trap sites.

**4. *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.***

Effects of the gather are well known and understood. No unresolved issues were raised following public notification of the proposed gather. This is demonstrated through the effects analysis in the EA.

**5. *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.***

Gathers for wild horses or burros similar to the Proposed Action in Alternative A have been occurring throughout northeastern California BLM Field Offices and elsewhere within California and Nevada for the past several years. The effects of these treatments have resulted in a fairly consistent (beneficial) outcome to wild horses and burros and to biological and cultural resources. The analysis provided in the attached EA does not indicate that this action would involve any unique or unknown risks.

**6. *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.***

Future projects occurring within the Twin Peaks HMA would be evaluated through the appropriate NEPA process and analyzed under a site-specific NEPA document. The Proposed Action does not set a precedent for future actions.

**7. *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts – which include connected actions regardless of land ownership.***

Cumulative effects expected would include continued improvement of upland and riparian vegetation conditions, which would in turn benefit permitted livestock, native wildlife, and wild horses and burros as forage (habitat) quantity and quality is improved over the current level (EA Section 4.1.9). There are no related or connected actions associated with the Proposed Action.

**8. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.***

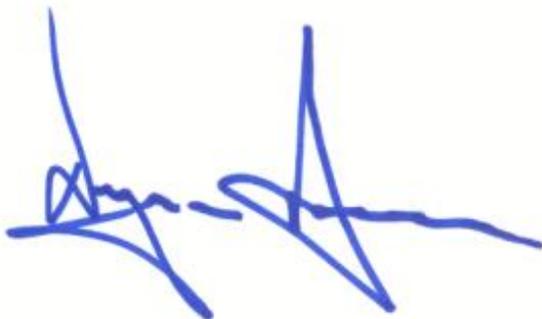
The Twin Peaks HMA contains several important archaeological sites, some of which are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Prior to implementation of the Proposed Action outlined in Alternative A, a complete cultural resources survey of the treatment areas will occur. This survey will identify cultural sites, and these will be flagged and avoided during treatment (EA Sections 3.3, 4.3.1).

**9. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.***

There are no threatened or endangered plants or animals known to occur within the project or the surrounding area. Sage-grouse, a federal candidate species, and a BLM sensitive species, are known to occur within the HMA. Sage-grouse habitat was an issue discussed and analyzed within the EA in Section 3.10 *Wildlife Habitat*, and Section 4.10.1 *Effects on Native Wildlife and Sage-grouse Habitat*. The Proposed Action will improve sage-grouse habitat within the project area, as it will reduce heavy utilization and trampling of riparian/wetland areas, and will improve the condition of native perennial vegetative communities.

**10. *Whether the action threatens a violation of a federal, state, or local law, regulation or policy imposed for the protection of the environment, where nonfederal requirements are consistent with federal requirements.***

The Proposed Action does not violate any known federal, state, or local law, or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.



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Dayne Barron  
Field Manager

*July 8, 2010*

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Date