



**Wild Horse  
Management**



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This action will balance population levels with the forage available for horses by herd area. The population of a herd area will be held at a level that provides opportunity for improvement of range condition, herd health and viability, wildlife habitat, and watershed condition, or maintains these in good condition.

### **Resource Objectives and Planned Actions**

The resource objectives in this action will be to maintain a viable breeding herd which could perpetuate the characteristics of the Pryor Mountain wild horses; maintain 2,775 acres that are currently in good range condition; prevent further deterioration of range sites in less than satisfactory condition and to achieve an upward trend in range condition on those range sites. The primary benefit will be a healthier, more viable horse herd.

Under this action, the initial stocking level will be 121 adult wild horses; 46 on Tillett Ridge, 44 on Sykes Ridge and 31 on the Dryhead herd area. These numbers are based on current estimates of grazing capacity for each herd area. These numbers are also dependent on the continuation of current agreements which allow wild horses to graze areas outside the designated wild horse range boundary.

The initial target allocation for wild horses will be 121 head (it is estimated that 80 percent of this number would be 2 years old or older). Actual numbers may vary from year to year due to variations in foal crops, natural death loss, forage productivity and other factors including budgetary constraints.

During the short-term period (8 years), monitoring studies will be conducted to confirm or modify the initial estimates of grazing capacities and trends in habitat conditions. Data from these studies will be used to modify the initial target allocation, either upward or downward.

During the long-term (25 years), the number of wild horses in a herd area will be permitted to increase if monitoring shows that additional forage is available. Ultimately, the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range (PMWHR) has the potential to support up to 179 wild horses yearlong. This assumes all areas now grazed by the wild horses will continue to be available. However, the projected long-term population increase in this action is considerably less than the potential level of 179 head since no rotational grazing systems will be in effect.

Improved wild horse grazing habits and distribution will be attempted by controlling their access to water sources. When the average utilization on important grasses within the area serviced by a water source reaches 45 percent by weight, access to that water source will be denied. This would stimulate the horses to move to another watered area.

To assure that non-public lands remain available for grazing by wild horses, the United States will attempt to acquire 1,467 acres from the State of Montana, and 632 acres of private land.

The emphasis in herd management will be to limit the reproduction rate and perpetuate the characteristics of the Pryor Mountain wild horses. This will necessitate beginning a selection program to retain only those wild horses with conformation, color and breeding (genetic) characteristics typical of the Pryor Mountain wild horses.

This action will require altering the current sex ratio so that it is heavier to studs than the current population. This will reduce the foal crop and minimize the need for excessing wild horses.

When it becomes necessary to reduce the number of horses within a herd area, the excess horses will, if possible, be relocated to one of the other herd areas. If this option is not available, the excess horses will be disposed of through the adoption program or other legal processes.

A Wild Horse Herd Management Area Plan (WHHMAP) is being developed jointly between the National Park Service, Forest Service and BLM, with the BLM as the lead agency, and will incorporate the management direction provided by this plan. This WHHMAP will be released in September 1984.

### **Proposed Range Improvements**

This action requires minimal additional man-made improvements or facilities. Five water catchments will be required to improve grazing distribution by bands of horses. About 2 miles of fence will be needed for improving the efficiency of capturing horses. The estimated cost to implement this action is \$50,500. In the short-term, the annual excessing of horses will continue, requiring an estimated \$18,000 to \$21,000 annually to gather and excess an average of 30 horses. In the long-term,

altering the sex ratio will reduce the foal crop, but some level of annual excessing may still be required. Costs in the long-term cannot be estimated because the timing of the sex ratio reversal and its impacts to horse numbers has not been established.

### **Rationale**

The primary objective will be to maintain a healthy, viable herd that displays the characteristics typical of the Pryor Mountain wild horses. In order to accomplish this, the range must be kept at a condition that will provide both the quantity and quality of forage needed to sustain the herd. The Bureau has an obligation to other agencies as well as private individuals who own land within the horse use areas to ensure the basic soil and vegetative resources are not degraded.

The 1981 Ecological Site Inventory determined what stocking level the range could support in its current condition. This is a target allocation and monitoring studies will be established to determine what, if any, adjustments are needed.

The proposed water catchments are to improve wild horse distribution through the availability of water. The BLM is currently exploring new designs for catchments to improve their efficiency, aesthetics, and lower the initial cost and maintenance costs.

Two miles of fencing will be constructed to facilitate the capture of the horses and is designed to reduce the stress horses are subjected to.

### **Monitoring**

Management progress will be evaluated to assure the level applied and the decisions made are compatible with multiple use objectives for the PMWHR. Vegetation monitoring will focus on utilization levels, movement toward reaching the stated objective of the Herd Management Area Plan (HMAP) and long-term trend (change in condition).

Studies on the wild horses will include population size, animal distribution, foraging habits and population characteristics. The studies on population characteristics will include sex ratio, age structure, social structure, animal condition and special characteristics identified in the HMAP such as selection of color. A more detailed discussion on monitoring techniques can be found in the HMAP.

### **Implementation Priorities**

1. Maintain wild horse populations within 5 percent of the suggested herd area levels.
2. Implement and carry out the PMWHR monitoring plan.
3. Seek acquisition of the Lost Water area (F.S.), State and private lands within the PMWHR.
4. Upgrade and maintain existing range improvements. Complete new range improvements.

### **Support**

Lewistown and Miles City District Office personnel will be needed 1 to 2 times per year for the capture and removal process. This will total approximately 4 to 5 WMs. Cultural clearances will be required on all range improvements. Support from the Forest Service and National Park Service will be required to implement the monitoring and maintenance programs.