



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Billings Field Office
5001 Southgate Drive
Billings, Montana 59101-4669
www.blm.gov/mt

In Reply Refer To:

4720 (MT010.JB)

April 13, 2015

SCOPING NOTICE

For Capturing and Removal of Excess Wild Horses in the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range

Dear Interested Party:

This scoping notice has been prepared to describe means by which governmental agencies, the general public, and other interested parties may participate in and contribute to the environmental analysis process. Public input is important to establish the scope of analysis for any National Environmental Policy Act document. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is inviting the public to participate in the development of a gather plan for the wild horses of the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range. The BLM is in the initial planning stages through scoping in order to develop a proposed action and alternatives, further identify issues, potential environmental consequences, mitigation opportunities, monitoring and development of an Environmental Assessment (EA).

Description of the Project

The BLM, Billings Field Office, is proposing to initiate a non-helicopter capture and removal operation of wild horses within the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range (PMWHR). The proposal could include, bait trapping, water trapping, herding or a combination of techniques to capture the majority of bands and remove approximately 30 excess wild horses ages 1, 2, and 3. The current population is exceeding the appropriate management level (AML) established between 90-120 wild horses, excluding current year foal crop. The action would be designed to help maintain the appropriate management level (AML) through limited capture and removal of wild horses, eliminating the need for helicopter gathers, protect the range from deterioration associated with overpopulation, while maintaining a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationships.

Relationship to Existing Plans and Documents

Gathering and removal of excess wild horses is in conformance with the Billings Resource Management Plan Final EIS (1984) Record of Decision (ROD) objectives to manage for a balance between a healthy population of wild horses and improvements in range condition, wildlife habitat, and watershed condition.

The 2009 Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range Herd Management Area Plan (HMAP) and Environmental Assessment (MT-O1 0-08-24) and Decision Record (May 2009) analyzed and

documented the need to manage the wild horse population between 90-120 wild horses. The HMAP states "manage the herd within AML either through removals, fertility control, natural means, or a combination of methods."

The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 (Public Law 92-195) as amended, Section 1333 (b) (1), states that the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture shall "determine appropriate management levels of wild free-roaming horses and burros on areas of public lands, and determine whether appropriate management levels should be achieved by the removal or destruction of excess animals, or other options (such as sterilization or natural controls on population levels)."

Background

Gathers and removal of wild horses from the Pryor Mountains has occurred on average every other year since 1971. Over 700 wild horses have been removed from the Pryor since 1971. The last gather was conducted in 2012 through bait/water trapping. In 2012, 148 wild horses were captured and 38 excess wild horse's ages 1-4 year olds and 6 foals were removed based primarily upon kinship (bloodlines), adoptability and maintaining herd structure identified in the HMAP. This operation was conducted by BLM and National Park Service personnel without harm or injury to wild horses, agency employees or the public.

Fertility control, in the form of Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP) or ZonaStat-H is also being applied to select mares, with approximately 70% of the mares under treatment. The PZP has been utilized on wild horse mares within the PMWHR through various treatments, prescriptions and intensities since 2001. One population-wide die off occurred in 1978. Six to 12 wild horses die annually. At least 25 outside wild horses were introduced to the PMWHR before 1990.

Participation

The public is encouraged to participate throughout the EA process. If any interested party would like to provide input that would help BLM in development of a proposed action and alternatives (including type of capture techniques, kinship, wild horse handling, etc.), further identify issues, potential environmental consequences, mitigation opportunities, monitoring, or provide information, data, or analysis to be used in development of an EA, please do so in **writing** submitted to:

Jim Sparks, Field Manager
BLM-Billings Field Office
5001 Southgate Drive
Billings, MT 59101

Office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Public Scoping will be open until close of business April 24, 2015.

Written comments in response to this scoping notice, including the names and addresses of each commenter will be available for public review. Before including your address, phone number,

email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. If you have any questions, please contact Jared Bybee, at (406) 896-5223.

Thank you for your interest in the PMWHR.

Sincerely,

/s/ James M. Sparks

James M. Sparks
Field Manager