

Attachment 4: Evaluation of Selective Removal Strategy - PMWHR Gather 1997

Available scientific data on ecology and population dynamics have led BLM management to determine that the appropriate philosophy for the Pryor herd involves retention of the natural working integrity of the population, allowing the majority of decisions to be driven by the horses themselves. Priority was given, therefore, to retaining dominant harem stallions, established lead and/or partner mares, and reproductively successful mares (and corresponding 1997 foals) within each established family group. This approach also recognizes the importance of maintaining reproductively fit horses to assist with long-term perpetuation of the population. Except for a few horses, which were recommended for retention due to humane reasons or rare genetic qualities, all other animals were considered equally excisable from the population. This would ultimately depend on individual susceptibility to the gather effort.

A total of 125 horses (41 from each of three subpopulations and two escaped domestic horses) were successfully gathered and brought into Britton Springs Administrative facility to facilitate the selective removal process. In terms of overall effectiveness, minimal stress and no injuries to the horses, the 1997 gather was considered very successful. A total of forty-six (46) horses were removed for the adoption program, of which forty were four years of age and under while six horses were between 6 and 9 years of age (see enclosed graphs). As such, removals were concentrated on young animals which had not, as yet, entered the breeding ranks of the population and have the greatest ability to adapt to adoption and domestication.

Removal of bachelor stallions was dependent on their susceptibility to the gather effort, until the recommended removal number of bachelors for each sub-population had been reached. A significant number of bachelors were removed in an effort to promote stability within the social structure and in an effort to bring numbers of bachelors in line with a percentage that is considered more average for a wild herd the size of the Pryor population. Of the six older animals removed, the majority were bachelor stallions which had not yet been successful in obtaining and maintaining mares. All had temperament types which should permit successful adaptability to domestication. Three of the initially gathered bachelors were turned back on the range due to either humane reasons or the presence of a previously identified rare color quality.

Two subordinate mares with foals were removed from the Burnt Timber subpopulation due to the fact that several bachelors and a few family groups were elusive to the gather effort. In one case the mare had foaled as a two-year old, had little milk and her foal was small and weak. The other mare and foal were in good condition but originally came from a harem group which had experienced instability during the summer and during the gather had come into the corrals with a completely different harem stud. In one case an unproductive older mare was removed from the Sykes Ridge subpopulation. During confinement in the corrals, one yearling filly (5202) aborted a 2 month old fetus. The mare and fetus were examined by a vet, and diagnosed as normal and healthy. Less than 10% of pregnant Pryor yearlings typically carry foals to term.

Goals for the selective removal program have largely been reached. The majority of identified harem groups have been left intact with removals focusing primarily on the younger or incidental animals (see enclosed identification data-base). The existing color balance within the population was preserved, and age-related removals tended to mimic proposed patterns of natural mortality (see enclosed graphs). Of the forty-six animals removed, 13 were mares while 33 were studs. The resulting impact on the population sex ratio is to balance horse numbers at approximately 77 females and 70 males. The gather effort did indicate that as many as 7 animals recently missing (summer 1997) on the range, especially within the Dryhead subpopulation, may in fact no longer exist on the range. Thus BLM's post-gather estimate of the horse population is between 140 and 147 animals (including 30 foals). None of the Pryor animals previously labelled as "uncertain status" (prior to the summer of 1997), were located during the gather effort, and as such are no longer presumed to exist on the range. Seventy percent of the population was subsequently sited during November aerial and ground surveys. Family groups appeared very stable and were located in pre-gather home range areas.

All animals (46) were available for adoption on Saturday, November 1, 1997 at the Britton Springs Administrative facility, near Lovell, Wyoming. All horses were successfully adopted to approved adopters using a silent bid competitive process. The average adoption price was \$228, with a high value of \$825 and a low adoption value of \$125. One injury was incurred as a young bachelor yearling (5218) escaped from the trailer as it was leaving Britton Springs facility. This animal was caught, examined by a vet, diagnosed as having minor abrasions and reloaded for transport.