

**ATTACHMENT 1A : SPECIFIC OPERATING PROCEDURES for the 2001 PMWHR
GATHER and REMOVAL**

A. GENERAL: The work will consist of the capture of wild horses from the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range (HMA) within southern Montana and northern Wyoming (Carbon and Bighorn counties respectively), care of those animals, and transportation to the Britton Springs Administrative Site at the base of the Pryor Mountains in Bighorn County, Wyoming. The Bureau of Land Management will contract with a private party (nationally awarded gather contract) for this operation, and unless otherwise stated, the Contractor shall furnish all labor, supplies and equipment necessary to accomplish the work. Agency personnel will also be directly involved in the completion of the project and the same procedures for gathering and handling wild horses apply to either contractor or agency personnel.

The methods employed during this capture operation will be herding horses with a helicopter to a temporary trap of portable panels, or ropers, or directly to the Britton Springs Administrative Site. Roping and/or bait trapping will be used as a last resort, if all other practical methods fail, and will only be used after consultation with the Field Office Manager, Billings Field Office. The work shall be accomplished in a safe and humane manner and be in accordance with the provisions of 43 CFR Part 4700 and the following specifications and provisions.

B. SUMMARY OF SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS OF GATHER CONTRACT: The specific work to be performed shall include the following parameters:

a. Capture Method:

- (1) Helicopter-Drive Trapping
- (2) Helicopter-Assisted Roping
- (3) Bait (water, food) Trapping

This contract will require the flexibility to potentially draw from all three forms of capture methods. The preferred method will be Helicopter-Drive Trapping, but as this method has only been tried once, albeit successfully, in the PMWHR, flexibility may be needed to revert to Roping from horseback or Baiting methods, if the former proves to be too high-risk for the contractor or horses or both.

Serious injury rates for wild horses subjected to helicopter gathers, using national livestock contractors, have been documented at a minimal (<5% of total animals gathered) level. Minor injuries, however, such as cuts and scraps, are generally unavoidable on horses gathered over rugged terrain. Major problems, such as broken limbs and/or fatalities, can be avoided if care is taken to allow the animals to pick both the path of direction and rate of speed of movement over the terrain. It is also critical that the helicopter pilot recognize when animals are being pushed too severely and immediately withdraw to allow the horses to stabilize. At the conclusion of each day of gather effort, injury rate and other aspects of the gather operation will be evaluated. If it is determined that the risk associated with injuries is significantly greater than

either expected (see above) or previously experienced with traditional wrangler efforts (maximum of 2 deaths per 150 horses gathered), other methods of capture will be considered. Any final decision to alter capture method will lie with the Field Office Manager, Billings Field Office.

b. Description of the work area, maps, and time frame of effort:

This contract will be restricted to the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range only (Appendix 1 and 2). Social groups of horses occupy 3 fairly distinct geographic areas of this range including Burnt Timber Ridge (BT), Sykes Ridge (SR), and the Dryhead (DH-National Park Service land), and as such, gather efforts will focus on one subpopulation of the range at a time (Attachment 3). If the majority of horses within the Burnt Timber and Sykes Ridge subpopulations are still intermingled within the subalpine meadows at the top of the range, then these groups will be handled together. It is estimated that use of the helicopter will facilitate the timeliness of the gather process, such that an average of 1-2 days will be necessary to work each geographic area. This effort, will of course, be weather dependent. Contractor availability and initiation of the gather effort is not expected prior to September 10, 2001. As such, culmination of the gather effort, with an organized adoption, is tentatively scheduled for September 29, 2001.

c. Responsibility and lines of communication:

The Contracting Officer's Representative, Ron Hall and Project Inspector, Linda Coates-Markle, or other individuals selected at the time of preparation of the task orders, have the direct responsibility to ensure the Contractor's compliance with the contract stipulations. However, the Billings Field Office Manager will take an active role to ensure that appropriate lines of communication are established between the Field Office and State Office. All employees involved in the gathering operations will keep the best interests of the animals at the forefront at all times.

All publicity, formal public contact and inquiries will be handled through External Affairs, State Office. The Field Office Manager will be the primary contacts to coordinate with the COR/PI to ensure animals are being captured, handled and removed in a safe and humane manner.

The contract specifications require humane treatment and care of animals during removal operations. These specifications are designed to minimize the risk of injury and death during and after capture of the animals. The specifications will be vigorously enforced.

Should the Contractor show negligence and not perform according to contract stipulations, he will be issued written instructions, stop work orders, or defaulted.

d. Presence or absence of wilderness areas:

Three BLM wilderness study areas, containing approximately 23,000 acres, exist within the boundaries of the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range including Pryor Mountain, Burnt

Timber Canyon and Bighorn Tack-On. In addition, sections of Lost Water Canyon (USFS) and Bighorn Canyon (NPS) are contained within horse range boundaries. Certain activities are restricted within these wilderness study areas including off-road vehicle use. Maps and information will be provided to the contractor which clearly demark wilderness boundaries and operative restrictions.

e. A description of specific gather area(s) and numbers of animals within general contract area(s) as animal concentration, terrain, physical barriers and weather conditions dictate:

The timing of the gather will be critical in terms of general position and migratory activity of the horses within the range. Generally, inclement weather conditions influence horse activity on the ridges such that animals are leaving the high altitudes of the range (~8000 feet) by late September. In addition, for the past two years, the majority of social groups have left the Dryhead by late summer and migrated to the Hidden Canyon area on Sykes Ridge for at least portions of the winter. Due to the above mentioned monitoring activity, reasonably accurate information on the location of individual social groups will be available just prior to the gather (see Attachment 3).

The contractor will be required to fly and evaluate the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range, in terms of terrain, topography, physical barriers, road conditions, current climatic conditions and potential hazards, just prior to initiation of the gather effort. They will also be supplied with maps depicting natural and manmade barriers which currently exist on the range. This pre-capture evaluation will also determine whether the level of activity is likely to cause undue stress to the animals, and whether such stress would be at an acceptable level or necessitate a delay in the planned capture activity. All gather activities may be subjected to disruption and/or rescheduling due to inclement weather conditions.

f. Estimated number of animals to be held for preparation activity, methodology and approximate duration of holding:

Horses will be gathered off the range and held within the Britton Springs Corral facility, with all efforts made to retain continuity of each family group. Preparation activity of animals will commence as soon as gather efforts are completed for each individual geographic area. It is anticipated that efforts within each area can be accomplished within a 1-2 day period, with the entire gather effort completed within a one week period. Horses designated to be released back onto the range, will be sorted out and released as soon as feasible (24-48 hours) after all capture activity has been completed for each subpopulation. All captured animals may be subjected to blood draws for both genetic and health studies. Horses designated to be removed from the range will be subjected to preparation activity involving freeze-branding, vaccinations, de-worming programs and blood draws for continuing genetic viability and health studies. These efforts may be handled by BLM personnel, APHIS veterinarians, gather contractors and/or a contracted local veterinarian. The government will provide a restraining (squeeze) chute, to be used by the contractor for the purpose of restraining animals. A contracted veterinarian will be present during any days in which horses are actually gathered off the range, brought into the corral facility, and

during any preparation activity.

g. Transportation destination point:

All gather efforts, involving horses from the Burnt Timber and Sykes Ridge subpopulations, should culminate within the Britton Springs Trap and Corral facility at the base of the Pryors. This is where the scheduled adoption will be held for these animals. Horses removed from the Dryhead may need to be transported (but this is unlikely) from temporary traps on the Dryhead to the Britton Springs facility. Permission will be obtained from the National Park Service in order to set up temporary traps or perform any gather-related activity within this area.

h. Public relations plan pertaining to gather activity:

In an effort to ensure the safety and welfare of all participants and observers for this gather, including the horses, management intends to apply a full, but rotating closure affecting two designated areas of the range. As such, for a 1-2 day period in which the helicopter is working either Sykes Ridge or Burnt Timber Ridge, these areas, including road access, will be individually closed. Only one area will be affected at a time. Gather efforts along the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area "Dryhead" will be co-ordinated through the National Park Service. This area will not be closed but some traffic control will be in effect during actual days of helicopter activity. It will also be necessary to co-ordinate with "livestock trailing" ranchers who may be using the Dryhead area during this same time period.

Efforts will be made to avoid time periods, such as weekends, of heavier anticipated public use of the range. However, the helicopter contractors are available to work on weekends, and this may be necessary as dictated by temporary weather shut-down or other unforeseen circumstances. Scheduling of the gather in September should mitigate, if not eliminate, most conflicts with mule deer and bighorn sheep hunters on the PMWHR. It should be stressed, however, that area and road closures will be of limited duration and only on days the helicopter is actually working a particular ridge.

Also, in an effort to facilitate anticipated media and public interest and attention towards the gather, management will establish specific viewing areas to the northeast of the Britton Springs Administrative Site. These sites will provide excellent viewing of helicopter gather activities as the horses are guided down either ridge. In addition, public affairs staff will be on hand at these sites to comment on the gather activity and current events. At the conclusion of each days activities, the Wild Horse and Burro Specialist will be available to comment and answer questions pertaining to specifics of the gather activity and selected removal program.