

Partnerships on the Pryors



The BLM Billings Field Office, Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area and The Cloud Foundation partner up to benefit the horses and the range.

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*Photos courtesy of
The Cloud Foundation*

The handsome young stallion, "Galaxy."

The Bureau of Land Management always makes a big deal of volunteer contributions and for good reason. Last year in the Montana/Dakotas BLM, 1,089 volunteers across our three-state area contributed 41,056 hours valued at nearly \$900,000. The costs incurred to the BLM for that significant effort was \$60,418. As the BLM works to find effective ways to continue fulfilling its role as steward of the National System of Public Lands and the resources they hold, that's a pretty darn good investment.

The spirit of public lands stewardship in 2013 remains strong in the Montana/Dakotas. We've established a tradition of successful volunteerism and partnerships on the popular Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range south of Billings, Mont. As a part of the BLM's National Wild Horse & Burro

Management Strategy, the BLM is working locally with the National Park Service (NPS) and the Cloud Foundation on the use of the fertility control vaccine Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP), or ZonaStat-H, which is administered to control the herd's size and reduce the number of pregnancies.

NPS employees Cass Bromley, Bill Pickett, and Ryan Felkins administered 37 of the 60 doses given this past spring to the Pryor mares and fillies, whose range includes a portion of the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area. In FY2012, NPS staff administered about one-half of that year's PZP applications. The Billings Field Office entered into a Service First agreement with the NPS in early July 2013 to acknowledge that agency's valuable assistance to the BLM in caring for the Pryor Mountain herd.

The BLM welcomed a new partner this spring. The adept volunteer efforts of the Cloud Foundation's Effie Orser, Lauryn Wachs, and Ginger Kathrens contributed to the successful completion of this year's fertility treatments in record time. The trio worked in concert with two BLM employees, Ryan Bradshaw and Jerad Werning, who were darting wild horses elsewhere on the Range.

In about one week's time, the Cloud Foundation volunteers applied 11 treatments which, according to State Wild Horse & Burro Specialist Jared Bybee, is an excellent treatment rate. Their volunteer efforts are a superb demonstration of combining the public's passion with the Bureau's mission to positively benefit the well-known Pryor wild horse herd.

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Ginger shared her recent darting experience on a beautiful Montana May day in the Pryors:

“That’s Limerick,” I told Effie as she, Lauryn, and I quietly climbed out of the UTV. “She’s a two year-old filly on our list.”

The flashy two year-old black eyed us innocently then went back to grazing with her mother and the rest of the band led by the dashing young stallion, Galaxy.

The “short list,” provided to the Cloud Foundation by the BLM, contained the names of a dozen or so females that had to date remained elusive to the darters.

Most were relatively easy to dart because the majority of Pryor mustangs are accustomed to frequent human visitors. We are of no particular interest to them, which is a perfect set-up to document their natural behaviors and, in this case, dart them with the vaccine.

Effie mixed up the booster shot of PZP and filled the small dart destined for Limerick’s hip. Load-



The Cloud Foundation volunteer Effie Orser moves toward a Pryor mare in order to dart her with the fertility control vaccine PZP. She successfully hit the horse in the hip, but the startled mare quickly resumed grazing as if nothing had happened.

ing the dart into the X-Caliber rifle, Effie walked away from the UTV in an arc pattern while we walked the other way, acting as the “distraction unit.”

Once Effie was within about 100 feet she carefully aimed and fired. The filly jumped forward, startled, as the dart landed dead center on the side of her hip and then bounced out after emptying. She trotted a few steps and stopped, but within a minute was back to

grazing as if nothing had ever happened.

If the effort is successful, Limerick will not foal next year.

Once again, the BLM benefits from its dedicated volunteers and invaluable partnerships. In turn, the Pryor wild horses will see less stress on themselves and the range they call home. The NPS continues to provide visitors with an enhanced experience and realizes an increased ability to better manage the natural resources found in the diverse landscape setting of the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area. And the Cloud Foundation comes away with a deep sense of satisfaction that they are helping the BLM manage wild horses on the range with the hope of one day balancing reproduction and mortality, thus reducing or potentially eliminating future removals.

“We are proud to be working with the BLM, and we hope our partnership with them will continue and may set an example for the management of other wild herds throughout the West,” said Ginger. The BLM Montana/Dakotas hopes so too.



This foal is part of Cloud’s band and was born to an 8-year-old dam called Feldspar. The Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range/Territory EA and HMA Plan identified 5 to 10-year-old wild horses to be maintained as the breeding core of the herd, therefore the current Fertility Control Prescription allows mares in this age class to produce foals while treating all other ages annually.