

Questions and Answers about the Little Fish Lake Wild Horse Gather

Q. Why is the BLM gathering in the Little Fish Lake Herd Management Area?

- Drought conditions in 2013 have resulted in insufficient amounts of forage to support the existing population of wild horses within the Little Fish Lake HMA. Upon review of drought monitoring data, the Tonopah Field Office has decided that wild horse capture and removal is the appropriate Drought Response Action (DRA) for immediate protection of wild horses, rangeland, and wildlife resources. Prior to the conclusion that wild horse removal from the HMA was necessary; other DRAs were examined and deemed infeasible for this particular situation.

Q. What is BLM doing to prevent health problems with wild horses during the gather?

- Additional pen space will be provided for weaker animals to keep them separated from stronger ones for added care.
- Water will be available at the trap location in the event animals cannot be loaded immediately and taken to temporary holding corrals.
- A veterinarian will be on call to address unforeseen issues.

GATHER PROCESS QUESTIONS

Q. Where is the BLM gathering the wild horses?

- The gather area is exclusively within the Little Fish Lake HMA. Actual locations for the trap site, temporary holding, and other gather operations will depend on the location of the wild horses when the gather process begins.
- A map of the Little Fish Lake HMA is available at <http://on.doi.gov/1HtuItD>.

Q. When did BLM last gather in this area?

- 71 horses were gathered from the HMA in July 2005 in association with the U.S Forest Service Little Fish Lake Wild Horse Territory. A total of 323 horses were removed from the HMA and WHT between July 2005 and February 2006.

Q. How many wild horses will be removed during this gather?

- Approximately 150 wild horses will be gathered. Approximately 50 horses will be released back onto the range and 100 will be transported to the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Corrals in Ridgecrest, California.

Q. How does the BLM gather wild horses?

- The BLM uses a gather contractor to gather wild horses from HMAs where the BLM has determined that excess animals exist. The contractor will set up panels and let the wild horses get accustomed to them. Once the wild horses are captured, they will be sorted and loaded onto trailers for transport to Oregon's Wild Horse Corral Facility in Burns, Oregon. If needed, the ground crew may assist by roping the wild horses from horseback.

FERTILITY CONTROL QUESTIONS

Q. Will the BLM use fertility control on this gather?

- Yes. All mares released back onto the range will be treated with the fertility control drug Porcine Zona Pellucidae (PZP-22).

LOCATION AND ENVIRONMENT OF HA QUESTIONS

Q. What is the environment like in the HMA?

- The HMA encompasses an area 7 miles wide and 8 miles long. Elevations within the HMA range from a high of 7,200 feet on the mountain slopes to a low of 6,500 feet in Fish Lake Valley. The area generally receives 8 inches of precipitation in the valley bottoms and up to 12 inches on the mountain slopes. The vegetative communities are dominated by the sagebrush steppe vegetation type, followed by the alkaline meadows and bottoms vegetation type (which tend to occur in the broad valleys), and in the higher precipitation zone are the sagebrush and dispersed pinyon-juniper woodland vegetation types. Important species include Indian ricegrass, bottlebrush squirreltail, winterfat/white sage, and black sage brush. Multiple perennial streams and spring sources are known throughout the HMA, albeit several are on private land.

Q. Does wild horse overpopulation impact wildlife and plants?

- Yes. Wild horses often graze the same area repeatedly throughout the year. Forage plants in those areas receive little rest from grazing pressure, and continuous grazing does not allow plants sufficient time to recover from grazing impacts. Such overgrazing results in reduced plant health, vigor, reproduction, and ultimately to a loss of native forage species from natural plant communities. Over time, this greatly diminishes habitat quality as abundance and long-term production of desired plant communities is compromised. If wild horse populations are not controlled in this area, forage utilization will exceed the capacity of the range.

Q. Why don't you just make more land available to the wild horses?

- The BLM would need approval from Congress to expand herd areas for wild horses and burros. By law, wild horses and burros can only be managed on areas of public lands where they were known to exist in 1971, at the time of the passage of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971.

CONTRACTOR QUESTIONS

Q. How does the BLM select its gather contractors?

- The BLM's national gather contracts were awarded in 2010 following an in-depth technical review of the proposals received from the prospective contractors. Among the key elements of the technical review was evaluation of the prospective contractor's

knowledge, skill, and ability to gather and handle wild horses and burros in a safe, effective, and humane manner.

Q. What contractor will be conducting the Little Fish Lake Wild Horse Gather?

- Cattoor Livestock of Nephi, Utah.

Q. Does the contractor use whips to move the wild horses through the pens and chute?

- The BLM uses flags or noise-making paddles to move wild horses through the pens and chutes. The flags are usually made by attaching a plastic grocery bag to the end of a sorting stick or buggy whip. The flag prevents the stick or whip from hitting the horse with any sort of impact or sting to it. Seeing and hearing the plastic flag motivates the animal to move away from the source of the stimulus. This technique is similar to those used for domestic and wild horses being trained using resistance-free methods.

POST GATHER QUESTIONS

Q. What happens to the wild horses after they are gathered?

- They will be transported to the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Corral in Ridgecrest, California where they will be prepared for the BLM adoption program, or for long-term holding. The animals will be checked by a veterinarian, receive vaccinations and freeze marks, and will be made available for adoption within a few weeks of arriving at the facility. More information about the Ridgecrest Facility can be found at <http://on.doi.gov/1Kzko2n>.

Q. Will any of the wild horses be sent to slaughter?

- No. A December 2004 amendment to the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act authorizes the BLM to sell sale-eligible animals "without limitation," however the BLM has not and is not selling any wild horses to slaughterhouses or to "killer buyers."

Q. Why is the BLM still removing wild horses when there are already 48,194 wild horses and burros in holding?

- The BLM removes wild horses and burros from the range each year to protect public lands from the environmental impacts of herd overpopulation, such as soil erosion, sedimentation of streams, and damage to wildlife habitat. Although the BLM tries to place as many removed animals as possible into private care through adoption or sales, the public's demand for adoptable wild horses has declined sharply in recent years, leaving the agency in the position of gathering excess horses while its holding costs spiral upward.

RANGE/GRAZING QUESTIONS

Q. Is there livestock grazing in this area?

- Currently, no livestock graze in the Little Fish Lake HMA. Permittees in the area have voluntarily not grazed Little Fish Lake Valley for several years (since fall 2013) due to the lack of forage. Previous use has been drastically reduced due to lack of forage.

ADOPTION QUESTIONS

Q. How can I adopt one of the wild horses?

- The excess wild horses removed from the range are offered for adoption to qualified people through the BLM's Adopt a Wild Horse or Burro Program. Potential adopters must have the proper facilities and financial means to care for an adopted animal, and we always hope that they have experience working with a wild horse or burro, which will help ensure the gentling process. During the first year, the government retains title to the animal(s), and will conduct compliance checks throughout the year in an effort to ensure as much as possible that the animal is properly being cared for and has gone to a good home. At the end of the first year, if the adopter has complied with all the adoption stipulations and has properly cared for their mustang or burro for one year, he or she is eligible to receive title, or ownership, from the Federal government.
- Since 1971, when Congress passed the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, the BLM has adopted out more than 230,000 horses and burros.
- To apply to adopt a wild horse or burro on-line, please go to the BLM's adoption website at: <http://on.doi.gov/15QolPH>
- If you are interested in adopting directly from one of the BLM's holding facilities, please visit the agency's facilities page.
- For more information about the BLM's Adopt-A-Horse or Burro program, please visit http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/wild_horse_and_burro.html, or you may call 1-800-4Mustangs with any questions about the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program.