



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Tonopah Field Office

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http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/battle_mountain_field.html

JUN 15 2010

In Reply Refer To:
4700 (NVBM0200)

Dear Reader:

The Preliminary Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Montezuma Peak and Paymaster Herd Management Areas (HMAs) Wild Horse and Burro Gather (EA) DOI-BLM-NV-B020-2010-0113-EA will be available for your review and comment on June 15, 2010. The document may be viewed on-line at http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/battle_mountain_field.html. Hard copies are available from the Mount Lewis and Tonopah Field Offices.

The EA analyzes the potential direct, indirect and cumulative effects to the human environment associated with completion of a gather and removal of excess wild horses and burros from within and outside of the Montezuma Peak and Paymaster HMAs. Should a determination be made that implementation of the Proposed Action or alternative actions would not result in "significant environmental impacts," a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) will be prepared to document that determination, and a Decision Record issued providing the rationale for approving the chosen alternative.

The Tonopah Field Office (TFO) is proposing to conduct a wild horse gather to remove excess wild horses and burros from portions of the Montezuma, Magruder Mountain, Sheep Mountain, Yellow Hills, and Monte Cristo Allotments and from within the Montezuma Peak and Paymaster HMAs as needed. Approximately 119 excess wild horses and 61 excess wild burros would be removed with first priority for removal being excess animals residing outside of the HMA boundaries within the associated allotments.

The post gather population goal for the proposed gather is 3 wild horses and 10 burros in the Montezuma Peak HMA and 23 wild horses in the Paymaster HMA. Wild horses and burros removed from the range during the gather would be transported to BLM facilities for preparation and inclusion into the Wild Horse and Burro Adoption Program or to long term holding pastures (wild horses only).

During the gather, the BLM would collect information on herd characteristics and determine herd health during the gather. Hair samples would be collected for baseline genetics analysis.

The Montezuma Peak HMA is located just to the west of the town of Goldfield, 26 miles south of Tonopah in Esmeralda County, Nevada. The area encompasses an area approximately 9 miles wide and 21 miles long. The majority of the HMA is dominated by shrubs with little grass, particularly in dry years. The area receives only 3 inches of precipitation in the valley bottoms and 12 inches on the mountain tops. This HMA is in the transition zone between the Great Basin (cold desert) and the Mojave Desert (hot desert). Habitat in the Montezuma Peak HMA is well suited for wild burro use, but contains little forage suitable for wild horse use.

The Paymaster HMA lies 7 miles west of Tonopah in Esmeralda County, Nevada, and comprises approximately 100,500 acres. Few fences exist across much of the area, which allow the wild horses unrestricted movement areas outside the HMA boundary as well as the Montezuma Peak HMA. Because of steep terrain, limited forage, and few accessible perennial waters, the Paymaster HMA itself receives little actual use by wild horses, which reside in the Montezuma Allotment outside the boundaries of the HMA.

The gather area encompasses the Montezuma Peak and Paymaster HMAs and the portions of the Montezuma, Magruder Mountain, Yellow Hills, Sheep Mountain, and Monte Cristo allotments outside of the HMAs in which wild horses and burros are commonly present. The area falls under the jurisdictional boundaries of the Tonopah Field Office. Maps of the HMAs and the proposed gather area are located within the Montezuma Peak and Paymaster Wild Horse and Burro Gather EA.

The most recent helicopter population inventory flight of the Montezuma Peak and Paymaster HMAs was conducted in February, 2010 which resulted in a direct count of 129 wild horses and 61 wild burros with 132 of the 190 animals observed (69%) located outside of the HMA boundaries. The anticipated post-foaling population in 2010 will be 149 wild horses and 71 wild burros. Inventory data indicates that the Montezuma Peak and Paymaster HMA herds maintain an average annual rate of increase of 16%.

The Montezuma Peak and Paymaster HMA wild horse and burro gather is needed to:

- remove wild horses and burros from areas outside the HMAs that are not designated for wild horse use,
- remove excess wild horses and burros from within the HMAs to achieve a population size consistent with the established AML, allowing for up to three years of population growth before AML is again exceeded,
- to protect the wild horse and burro populations from diminished health and body condition, and suffering emergency conditions due to a lack of forage and water,
- protect rangeland resources from deterioration associated with an overpopulation of wild horses and burros, and
- restore and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple use relationship on the public lands consistent with the provisions of Section 3(b) (2) of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 (WFRHBA).

By removing excess wild horses and burros and maintaining a population consistent with the established AML, progress would be made towards achievement of Mojave/Southern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Standards for Rangeland Health. Please refer to the EA for more detail about the Montezuma Peak and Paymaster HMAs and the proposed wild and burro horse gather.

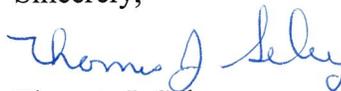
This Preliminary EA is being provided to the interested public for review for 30 days. We welcome your comments and highly encourage you to submit comments, issues, alternatives, recommendations, or other input for inclusion into the Final EA. Comments will be accepted until July 15. In order to provide meaningful input, please submit comments that are applicable to the proposed Montezuma Peak and Paymaster HMA wild horse and burro gather, referencing the Preliminary EA where possible.

Interested individuals should mail written comments to the BLM Tonopah Field Office, P.O. Box 911 (1553 S. Main St.), Tonopah, NV 89049, attention Thomas J. Seley, Tonopah Field Manager. Comments may also be provided through e-mail to this address: Montezuma_gather@blm.gov. Be advised that only the comments received by postal mail or to this specific e-mail address will be considered in the completion of the final EA, FONSI and Decision.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made 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 would rather not remain on the mailing list for Montezuma Peak or Paymaster HMA wild horse and burro gather, and do not wish to receive subsequent documents, please submit your request in writing to the Tonopah Field Office.

All comments received (by postal mail or by e-mail to the above e-mail address) during the public comment period will be fully considered and evaluated for preparation of the Final EA. If you have any questions, please contact Dustin Hollowell, Tonopah Field Office Wild Horse and Burro Specialist, at (775) 482-7847.

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Seley
Field Manager