

## **Stone Cabin Complex Wild Horse Gather *Questions and Answers***

### **Range/Grazing**

#### ***How does the BLM determine if the range has deteriorated – is there sound science involved?***

Yes, the BLM conducts monitoring of public lands for vegetation condition, forage and water availability and wildlife habitat condition.

The BLM maintains an ongoing program of monitoring and analysis of monitoring data including utilization, trend, riparian functioning condition ratings, precipitation, wildlife habitat studies, and wild horse inventory data.

The Proposed Action in the environmental assessment (EA) is consistent with maintaining a thriving natural ecological balance between the wild horse populations, wildlife, livestock and vegetation, and to protect the range from the deterioration associated with an



*Bald Mountain HMA gather January 2009 – wild mares await release back to the HMA.*

overpopulation of wild horses. For decades, the BLM has hired rangeland management specialists, wildlife biologists, as well as wild horse and burro specialists, whose expertise is used to monitor and assess rangeland conditions on public lands.

#### ***Rather than remove the wild horses, why doesn't the BLM eliminate or reduce livestock grazing?***

Livestock grazing is evaluated for conformance with Standards for Rangeland Health and adjusted through appropriate decisions following coordination with the interested public and completion of Environmental Assessments.

Congress made the decision to manage public lands for multiple use purposes, not just a single use. While passing the 1971 Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act, the conference committee specifically stated that: *"The principal goal of this legislation is to provide for the*

protection of the animals from man *and not the single use management of areas for the benefit of wild free-roaming horses and burros.*

Congress affirmed its intent for multiple-use when it passed 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act, requiring the BLM to manage the public lands for a wide variety of uses (including livestock grazing) under the principles of multiple-use and sustained yield.

Livestock grazing is often seasonal in nature. The ranchers will move their livestock to various areas or completely off the range onto their own private lands. Wild horses stay on the range year round.

Ranchers supplement livestock grazing by hauling water. They may hold water rights to the area, and pump water that is also used by wild horses, and wildlife. Closing public lands within HMAs to livestock grazing would not be a long term solution, and would not allow the BLM to greatly increase the number of wild horses on the range. At growth rates averaging 16% percent per year, it wouldn't be long before the BLM needed to remove excess horses. To maintain healthy wild horse population and prevent range damage, we would be required to remove an even larger number of excess wild horses each year.



*Callaghan mares await re-release back to the HMA. Callaghan HMA gather January 2009.*

### ***What data does the BLM use to establish Appropriate Management Levels?***

The BLM determines the appropriate management level of wild horses and burros based on an ongoing program of monitoring over several years involving studies of grazing utilization, trend in range ecological condition, actual use, precipitation (climate), the results of land health assessments, and other factors.

The process generally begins with a management evaluation. Through the evaluation process, resource monitoring data is analyzed and a determination is made as to whether the current management and stocking levels for wild horses and/or burros (or livestock or wildlife) are achieving land health objectives.

If land health objectives are not being met, changes in management or stocking levels are proposed. Results of the BLM's analysis are documented in an environmental assessment (EA), which is provided to interested public for review and comment.

The BLM carefully considers the public's comments before making a final decision. The public also is provided with the opportunity to request administrative review if they disagree with the BLM's final decision.

The Appropriate Management Level (AML) for the Stone Cabin HMA and a portion of the Saulsbury HMA were established through a Consent Decision signed by Administrative Law Judge David Torbet on May 11, 1992, through the Department of Interior Office of Hearings and Appeals, Hearings Division. The Consent Decision established an AML for the Stone Cabin Allotment (and HMA) of 364 wild horses, and the Ralston allotment portion of the Saulsbury HMA at 10 wild horses. The AML for the portion of the Saulsbury HMA in the Hunts Canyon Allotment was established as 30 wild horses through a Final Multiple Use Decision (FMUD) in 1996. The FMUD was issued following an interdisciplinary analysis of monitoring data, the completion of Allotment Evaluation for the allotment, and the involvement of interested public.

### ***Why doesn't the BLM manage Herd Management Areas principally for wild horses?***

Congress intended to manage wild horses as one of the many uses of the public lands, not a single use. Therefore, the BLM is required to manage wild horses in a manner designed to achieve a thriving natural ecological balance between wild horse and burro populations, wildlife, domestic livestock, vegetation and other uses. However, the BLM may designate specific herd management areas to be managed principally, but not necessarily exclusively, for wild horse or burro herds.

### ***What are Wild Horse and Burro Ranges? What is the difference between an HMA and a Range?***

An HMA may be considered for designation as a WH&B Range to be managed principally, but not necessarily exclusively, for WH&B. Criteria for consideration as a WH&B Range should include the presence of one or more of the following: unique herd characteristics, outstanding viewing opportunities, unique landscape, or significant historical or cultural features (H-1601-1: Appendix D). The authorized officer, currently only the Director or Assistant Director (AD) (refer to BLM Manual 1203: Delegation of Authority), may establish a WH&B Range after a full assessment of the impact on other resources through the LUP process.

BLM manages four Wild Horse and Burro Ranges:

- Nevada Wild Horse Range, Nevada (1962)
- Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range, Montana (1968)
- Little Bookcliffs, Colorado (1980)
- Marietta Burro Range, Nevada (1991).

HMA's are designated in those HAs within which WH&B can be maintained over the long term. HMA's are designated with the BLM's Land Use Plans at the District Office level, and are managed within the multiple use concept.

***How does the BLM determine when a gather to remove excess wild horses is needed?***

The BLM monitors grazing utilization, trend in range condition, actual use, population data, and other factors to determine if excess animals are present and removal is necessary to restore the range to a thriving natural ecological balance and prevent a deterioration of the range.

***What is a TNEB?***

TNEB means thriving natural ecological balance. The goal of wild horse and burro management is to maintain a thriving natural ecological balance between wild horse and burro populations, wildlife, livestock and vegetation, and to protect the range from the deterioration associated with overpopulation of wild horses and burros.

To achieve a balance, wild horses and burros are managed to assure significant progress is made toward achieving land health standards for upland vegetation and riparian plant communities, watershed function, and habitat quality for animal populations. Wild horse and burro herd health is promoted by achieving and maintaining a thriving ecological balance.

***Is there livestock grazing in this area?***

Yes. Several livestock allotments overlap portions of the Stone Cabin Complex. Use by livestock within the HMA's has been in accordance with the grazing permits. Actual use has typically been below the permitted use. Refer to Section 3.3 of the EA for more information.

***Is the BLM removing excess wild horses merely to increase livestock grazing use?***

No. The fact is that there has been a 43 percent reduction in authorized livestock use on public lands since 1941. Since the most recent wild horse gathers in these areas, livestock use has not increased and has been at levels considerably lower than the permitted use in some cases. Current livestock grazing permits do not exist within the Ralston Allotment, though it has a history of trespass livestock use. The BLM is currently in legal litigation with the alleged trespass operator.

***Does wild horse overpopulation impact wildlife and plants?***

Yes, it can. A wide variety of wildlife species common to the Great Basin can be found in the Stone Cabin Complex. These include coyote, black-tail jackrabbit, Pronghorn antelope, Desert Bighorn sheep, desert cottontail, bobcat, and numerous raptors, reptiles, and other small mammals. The area provides habitat for mule deer, and pronghorn on a seasonal or yearlong basis. BLM protects by policy, *special status* plant and animal species. The list

includes certain species designated by the state of Nevada, as well as species designated as “sensitive” by the Nevada BLM State Director. As many as 20 Special status species may utilize the proposed gather area for their habitat. Many species of migratory birds also utilize the area for portions their lives. As part of its multiple-use mission, the BLM is mandated to protect habitat to support these wildlife species.

***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. By law, wild horses 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 Horse and Burro Act of 1971.