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United States Department of the Interior

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In Reply Refer To:
4700 (NV-020, NV-030)

Memorandum

To: State Director, Nevada

7/19/07

From: Gail Givens and Don Hicks
Field Manager, Winnemucca and Carson City

Donald T. Hicks 7/20/2007

Subject: Recommendation to Approve Wild Horse and Burro Standards and Guidelines Developed by the Sierra Front-Northwest Great Basin Resource Advisory Council

The Sierra Front-Northwest Great Basin Resource Advisory Council has revised its proposed standards and guidelines in cooperation with BLM to assure conformance with the *Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan* (signed on May 11, 2001) as well as the *Sonoma-Gerlach* and *Paradise-Denio Management Framework Plans* (both signed on October 6, 1982) and the *Resource Management Plan for the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area and Associated Wilderness, and other Contiguous Lands in Nevada* (signed July 15, 2004), as outlined by 43 CFR 1610.5 and BLM Manual Section 1617.3 and as requested by Deputy State Director Meg Jensen on September 25, 2005.

The revised standards and guidelines (copy attached) developed for wild horses and burros by the Sierra Front-Northwest Great Basin Resource Advisory Council are technically adequate and are consistent and in conformance with the applicable land use plans. The standards and guidelines are also in conformance with the applicable laws, regulations and policies, and are in compliance with NEPA.

Based on the above, we recommend they be approved.

Attachment

The Standards and Guidelines for Wild Horses and Burros developed by the Sierra Front-Northwest Great Basin Resource Advisory Council are hereby approved.

Ron Werbel
State Director, Nevada

August 30, 2007
Date

Standards and Guidelines for Management of Wild Horses and Burros of the Sierra Front-Northwest Great Basin Area

Preamble

It is a policy of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to establish Standards and Guidelines to aid in management of public land resources. The following Standards and Guidelines are developed by the Resource Advisory Council (RAC) to guide management of wild horses and burros found on the public lands within the Sierra Front-Northwest Great Basin Area. These Standards and Guidelines are in effect upon approval by the BLM. The Standards outlined below state the goals to be achieved and the Guidelines provide the methods for attaining the Standards.

The RAC expects the **Wild Horse and Burro Guidelines** included in this document will be incorporated into the 1982 Sonoma-Gerlach and Paradise-Denio Management Framework Plans, the Winnemucca Field Office administered portions of the 2004 Resource Management Plan for Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area and Associated Wilderness, and Other Contiguous Lands in Nevada, and the 2001 Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan developed by Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Carson City and Winnemucca Field Offices, Nevada. These areas include the Sierra Nevada, Malheur High Plateau, Humboldt, Fallon-Lovelock, and Carson Basin major land resource areas as defined by the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

Management of wild horses and burros under the Standards and Guidelines outlined below is to be consistent with the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971, the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976, and the Public Rangeland Improvement Act (PRIA) of 1978, and any subsequent amendments.

Standards and Guidelines for attaining rangeland health by livestock are currently in effect for the Sierra Front-Northwestern Great Basin area and the necessary management actions are being implemented. It is recognized that wild horse and burro habitat needs are very similar to those of livestock. Therefore meeting the livestock needs will also provide healthy wild horse and burro habitat. However, long term maintenance of wild horses and burros is also dependent on achieving reproductively viable herds. Consequently, a new Standard No. 6 is being added to assure the health of individual animals and the maintenance of reproductively viable herds.

Background

Wild horse and burro management practices based on the following Standards and Guidelines will consider both the economic and physical environment and will be consistent with other multiple uses including but not limited to: recreation, minerals, cultural values, wildlife, domestic livestock, areas of critical environmental concern (ACEC's), designated wilderness and wilderness study areas (WSA's), and land acquisition and disposition activities.

With approval of these Standards for wild horses and burros maintaining animal health and population viability will focus primarily on controlling population size and herd composition within the Appropriate Management Level (AML) of the Herd Management Areas (HMA) as established in Sierra Front-Northwestern Great Basin planning decisions. The Guidelines outlined below are designed to achieve the existing Rangeland Health Standards for the Sierra Front-Northwestern Great Basin as well as the proposed Wild horse and Burro Standards.

Existing Rangeland Health Standards for Wild Horse and Burro Management:

The five (5) Standards outlined below are included in the approved **Standards and Guidelines for Rangeland Health in the Nevada's Sierra Front-Northwestern Great Basin Area** and are adopted as Standards for wild horses and burros.

STANDARD 1. SOILS:
Soil processes will be appropriate to soil types, climate and land form. As indicated by:

- Surface litter is appropriate to the potential for the site;
- Soil crusting formations in shrub interspaces, and soil compaction are minimal or not in evidence allowing for appropriate infiltration of water;
- Hydrologic cycle, nutrient cycle, and energy flow are adequate for the vegetative communities;
- Plant communities are diverse and vigorous, and there is evidence of recruitment; and
- Basal and canopy cover (vegetative) is appropriate for the site's potential.

STANDARD 2. RIPARIAN/WETLANDS:
Riparian/Wetlands systems are in properly functioning condition. As indicated by:

- Sinuosity, width/depth ration, and gradient are adequate to dissipate stream flow without excessive erosion or deposition;
- Riparian vegetation is adequate to dissipate high flow energy and protect banks from excessive erosion; and
- Plant species diversity is appropriate for riparian-wetland systems.

STANDARD 3. WATER QUALITY:
Water quality criteria in Nevada State Law shall be achieved or maintained. As indicated by:

- Chemical constituents do not exceed the water quality Standards;
- Physical constituents do not exceed the water quality Standards;
- Biological constituents do not exceed the water quality Standards; and
- The water quality of all water bodies, including ground water located on or influenced by BLM lands will meet or exceed the applicable Nevada water quality Standards. Water quality Standards for surface and ground waters include the designated beneficial uses, numeric criteria, narrative criteria, and anti-degradation requirements set forth under State law, and as found in the Section 303(c) of the Clean Water Act.

STANDARD 4. PLANT AND ANIMAL HABITAT:
Populations and communities of native plant species and habitats for native animal species are healthy, productive and diverse. As indicated by:

- Good representation of life forms and numbers of species;
- Good diversity of height, size, and distribution of plants;
- Number of wood stalks, seed stalks, and seed production adequate for stand maintenance; and
- Vegetative mosaic, vegetative corridors for wildlife, and minimal habitat fragmentation.

STANDARD 5. SPECIAL STATUS SPECIES HABITAT:
Habitat conditions meet the life cycle requirement of special status species. As indicated by:

- Habitat areas are large enough to support viable populations of special status species;
- Special status plant and animal numbers and ages appear to ensure stable populations;
- Good diversity of height, size, and distribution of plants;
- Number of wood stalks, seed stalks, and seed production adequate for stand maintenance; and
- Vegetative mosaic, vegetative corridors for wildlife, and minimal habitat fragmentation.

STANDARD 6. SELF-SUSTAINING POPULATIONS OF HEALTHY WILD HORSES AND BURROS:
Wild horse and burro populations are healthy and self-sustaining (reproductively viable). As indicated by:

- Herd size, age structure, and sex ratios appropriate for maintaining reproductively viable herds.
- Herds display no significant deleterious genetic conditions.
- Herd Management Areas provide adequate food, water, and living space for long term maintenance of healthy wild horses and burros.
- Adult animals have sufficient Henneke body condition class to withstand short term (3-4 months) forage loss due to adverse winter conditions or other habitat destruction.

GUIDELINES FOR WILD HORSES AND BURROS:

It is the BLM's policy to manage wild horses and burros in a manner which will achieve self sustaining populations of healthy animals, in a thriving natural ecological balance, in a sustainable multiple use relationship with other public land uses. The following Guidelines are intended to be consistent with this BLM policy and to meet the Standards for the Sierra Front-Northwestern Great Basin area.

1. To maintain their free-roaming nature, fencing and management activities within HMA's will be at the minimum feasible level needed to meet the Standards outlined above.

2. Set AML upper and lower levels so that population adjustments are employed as infrequently as practical to meet objectives of resource plans and applicable Standards, and to promote efficient management.

3. Set wild horse and burro AML's at a level that allows maintenance of Rangeland Health Standards. When monitoring indicates these Standards are not being met, excess animals should be removed, AML's adjusted or other appropriate management actions taken.

4. Set AML's at a level that will allow forage plants to complete their life cycle and maintain healthy habitat. Utilization of forage species, which are primarily grasses, should be maintained at a level that will allow these plants to produce seed and new plants to reach

maturity. Monitoring should be conducted to determine the amount of utilization and associated resource impacts attributable to each forage user. Adjustments in management of the causal species should be made in proportion to their impacts.

5. Adjust population levels when (1) resource evaluation indicates that excess wild horse and/or burros are a significant cause for failure to meet habitat Standards; or (2) where an adjustment is needed to meet Standards for protecting the health of the herd or individual animals. Under these circumstances, excess animals should be removed before the next growing season.

6. When monitoring shows unsustainable damage to Special Status Species or their habitat, the access of wild horses and burros should be limited or the animals should be removed.

7. Remove wild horses and burros as needed to allow plant species to be re-established following fire or other significant damage. Reintroduction should not occur until monitoring shows that forage plants can withstand grazing.

8. Motor vehicle racing, air racing, or other intrusive activities which could result in harassment of wild horses and burros will not be permitted in Herd Management Areas unless impacts are determined to be minimal.

9. Wild horses and burros removed for short periods should be returned to their herd area whenever feasible.

10. Maintain reproductively viable wild horse and burro populations by setting herd size, age structure, and sex ratios that are consistent with management of healthy, self-sustaining populations.

11. Procedures for maintaining a reproductively viable population may include periodic animal removals, reduction of reproduction through contraception, adjustment of age structure, introduction of animals from other herds, and modification of sex ratios.

12. Protect wild horses and burros from deleterious genetic changes by maintaining sufficient number of breeding animals in each herd. Animals with obvious genetic problems should be removed from the herd.

13. Consider the adoptability of wild horses and burros in managing the herds. However, adoptability should not be a primary reason for modifying the characteristics of wild horse and burro populations or for determining which animals are to be removed.

14. All wild horses and burros found living year around outside of HMA should be removed.

15. Remove all wild horses and burros when the herd is not viable or there is insufficient water or habitat.

Implementation

Following adoption of the Standards and Guidelines for Wild Horses and Burros, subsequent planning decisions and management actions must be consistent with the Standards and Guidelines. Standards and Guidelines for Wild Horses and Burros as outlined above will be implemented through a multi-step process involving:

1. Development of herd management area plans and establishment of long-term objectives for managing wild horses and burros and their habitat; initiation of the necessary management actions; monitoring to assess progress toward achievement of plan objectives; periodic adjustments of population levels to maintain AMLs; and periodic evaluation of management actions to assure they are being implemented and effective in achieving plan objectives.

2. Herd management area plans (HMAPs) will be the vehicle for determining the management and objectives for the herds and their habitat. Assessments of wild horse and burro herds and individual animals will occur through periodic censuses of the animals as well as notation of the condition, age, and sex of animals that have been captured. Monitoring and evaluation of habitat will be conducted largely through the livestock management monitoring and evaluation process with supplemental monitoring when needed for specific habitat requirements unique to wild horses and burros.

3. When evaluation of resource monitoring data indicates that failure to meet Standards is being caused by excess wild horses and burros, short term adjustments in population levels, changes in AML's, or other appropriate management actions should be taken.

4. Guidelines may be revised, as needed, based upon new data, research, case law or other factors.