

Questions and Answers about the Clan Alpine Herd Management Area Wild Horse Gather

Why is the BLM gathering in the Clan Alpine Herd Management Area (HMA)?

The BLM plans to gather approximately 580 wild horses, treat approximately 232 mares with a fertility control vaccine and release the horses back into the Clan Alpine HMA. If gather efficiency exceeds 80% additional mares will be treated and released back into the HMA.

Wild horses residing outside the HMA boundaries, and any weaned foals, yearlings, and orphaned foals within the HMA may be removed and made available for adoption to qualified individuals. Excess wild horses removed from within the HMA will be offered for adoption to qualified individuals through the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Adoption Program. Un-adopted horses will be placed in long-term pastures where they will be humanely cared for and will retain their "wild" status and protection under the 1971 law. The BLM does not sell or send any horses to slaughter.

The gather is tentatively scheduled to begin in early-February 2011.

Why are you treating the mares with a fertility control vaccine?

Treating selected mares with a two year fertility control vaccine on the Clan Alpine HMA gather will assist in maintaining the Appropriate Management Level (AML) of horses and reduce the number of excess wild horses that would need to be removed in the future. The utilization of the PZP-22 vaccine will help reduce population growth and assist in maintaining a population size within the AML. This action is needed in order to maintain a population size within the established AML, protect rangeland resources from deterioration or impacts associated with excess wild horses within the HMA, and restore/maintain a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple use relationship in the area as authorized under Section 3(b) (2) of the *Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971* (1971 WFRHBA).

What is the estimated wild horse population in the HMA and when did BLM last gather them?

It is estimated that approximately 724 wild horses are residing within the Clan Alpine HMA. The last gather was conducted in 2006 when 88 horses were removed from the HMA. In 2000, several large wild fires burned substantial areas of the Clan Alpine HMA necessitating emergency removals of 233 animals. Since the unburned areas of the Clan Alpine HMA could only support several hundred wild horses the population was reduced below the low end of the AML. In February, 2000, 96 mares were treated with fertility control PZP-22 vaccine and freeze-marked for future identification.

Clan Alpine HMA Environmental Assessment Questions

What is the Proposed Action and other alternatives considered in the Preliminary Environmental Assessment (EA)?

The Proposed Action is to gather and treat approximately 232 mares within the Clan Alpine HMA with Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP-22), a two-year fertility control vaccine, to slow herd reproduction and reduce the number of excess wild horses that would need to be removed in the

future.

The proposed action is needed to achieve compliance with the CRMP, provide for public safety, improve rangeland health, and enhance the health and safety of the wild horses. Management of wild horses at the AMLs protects rangeland resources from deterioration that could result from wild horse overpopulation and movement to areas outside the HMA. The action would also result in fewer wild horses being placed in short/long-term holding facilities and the adoption sale pipeline over time.

No Action Alternative: Under the No Action Alternative the BLM would not conduct a capture/gather at this time. Direct management of the wild horse populations in Clan Alpine HMA would be deferred to a later date. The horse population would not be maintained at the low end of AML. The fertility control vaccine would not be administered to mares within the HMA. A greater number of excess wild horses would need to be removed in future gathers to achieve AML and to reverse resource degradation from an overpopulation of wild horses. It is projected that by not applying a fertility control vaccine to mares, future gathers would need to remove excess wild horses from the HMA in order to achieve low range of AML. Compliance with the CRMP or with promoting a healthy natural ecological habitat in conformance with rangeland health standards and the provisions of Section 1333 (a) of the WFRHBA would not be met.

Alternatives Considered But Eliminated From Detailed Analysis

Use of Bait and/or Water Trapping: The use of bait and water trapping, though effective in some specific areas and circumstances, would not be timely, cost-effective or practical as the primary gather method. The number of water sources on both private and public lands within and outside the HMA would make it almost impossible to restrict wild horse access to selected water trap sites. As a result, this alternative was dismissed from detailed analysis.

Remove or Reduce Livestock within the HMA: This action would not be in conformance with the existing land use plan and is contrary to the BLM's multiple-use mission as outlined in the 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). Additionally this would only be effective for the very short term as the horse population would continue to increase. Eventually the HMA and adjacent lands would no longer be capable of supporting the horse populations. Treating released mares with a fertility control vaccine would delay the need for future removal of excess horses. Horse populations can double every four to five years without fertility control.

Where would the BLM gather horses?

An estimated four to five gather sites (traps) would be used to gather wild horses from within the HMA. Actual trap locations will depend where the horses are actually located when the gather process begins.

Description of the Environment

The Clan Alpine Herd Management Area (HMA) is located approximately sixty miles east of Fallon, Nevada. The topography of the HMA ranges from flat valleys through mountainous terrain up to over 9,000 feet in elevation. The HMA contains approximately 314,986 acres of

public and private land within the BLM-Carson City District-Stillwater Field Office.

Will BLM remove all the horses that are gathered?

The BLM plans to gather approximately 580 wild horses, treat approximately 232 mares with a fertility control vaccine and release the horses back into the Clan Alpine HMA. Wild horses residing outside the HMA boundaries, and any weaned foals, yearlings, and orphaned foals within the HMA may be removed and made available for adoption to qualified individuals.

Will the BLM use fertility control on this gather?

Yes, fertility control treatments and modification of sex ratios of released animals to slow population growth will be used on the Clan Alpine HMA gather.

How are fertility control and adjusting the sex ratio implemented?

Fertility control treatments and modification of sex ratios of released animals would slow population growth and could increase the time period before another gather was required. If the gather efficiency exceeds 85-88% then the following management actions would be implemented to the degree possible while still achieving the low range AML:

- All mares selected for release, including those previously treated with fertility control, would be treated/retreated with a two-year Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP-22) or similar vaccine and released back to the range. Immuno-contraceptive research would be conducted in accordance with the approved standard operating and post-treatment monitoring procedures. Mares would be selected to maintain a diverse age structure, herd characteristics and conformation.
- Studs selected for release would be released to increase the post-gather sex ratio to approximately 60% studs in the remaining herds. Studs would be selected to maintain a diverse age structure, herd characteristics and conformation.

Animals would be removed using a selective removal strategy to the extent possible. Selective removal criteria include:

1. First Priority: Age Class-Four Years and Younger
2. Second Priority: Age Class-Eleven to Nineteen Years Old
3. Third Priority: Age Class Five to Ten Years Old
4. Fourth Priority: Age Class Twenty Years and Older

Post-gather, every effort would be made to return released horses to the same general area from which they were gathered.

How does the BLM gather horses?

The BLM uses a private gather contractor to gather wild horses from HMAs where the BLM has determined that excess animals exist or where we wish to treat mares with the Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP-22) vaccine. The contractor uses a helicopter to locate and herd horses towards a set of corrals where the horses are gathered. The helicopter is assisted by a ground crew and the use of a Parada, a domesticated horse, to move the excess horses into the corrals. If needed, the ground crew may assist the helicopter by roping the horses from horseback.

Wild horses gathered would be transported from the gather sites to a temporary holding corral in goose-neck stock trailers or single-deck semi-tractor trailers. At the temporary holding facility, the wild horses would be aged and sorted into different pens based on sex. The wild horses would be provided an ample supply of good quality hay and water. Mares and their unweaned foals would be kept in pens together. Any wild horses identified for retention would be penned separately from those animals identified for removal as excess.

At the temporary holding facility, a veterinarian would provide recommendations to the BLM regarding care, treatment, and if necessary, euthanasia of the recently captured wild horses. Any animals affected by a chronic or incurable disease, injury, lameness or serious physical defect (such as severe tooth loss or wear, club foot, and other severe congenital abnormalities) would be humanely euthanized using methods acceptable to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA).

Why does the BLM use helicopters to gather horses - isn't that inhumane?

The 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, as amended, authorizes the BLM and the Forest Service to use helicopters to gather animals, as well as motorized vehicles to transport gathered animals. The use of helicopters and motorized vehicles has proven to be a safe, effective, and practical means for the gather and removal of excess wild horses and burros from the range. This is demonstrated by the gather of nearly 25,000 wild horses and burros during fiscal years (FY) 2004-2008 with a mortality rate of less than one half of one percent.

Though the horses experience a heightened stress level for the short period of time that the helicopter is herding the animals towards the gather corrals, animals calm down quite quickly afterwards. Helicopter gathers require less than a third of the time of traditional water or horseback trapping methods.

Other methods of gathering horses on horseback or water trapping can be effective in small gathers and in confined spaces, but they are not nearly as efficient as helicopter gathers. Water trapping can be very effective when water resources are scarce but nearly impossible otherwise. Also, this method is very time consuming.

Using horseback riders to herd the horses into gather corrals is very difficult in large open areas of public lands. This practice is very hard on the domestic horses and the riders; both have a high likelihood of being hurt. This method is very inefficient and takes an enormous amount of time to complete.

For the Clan Alpine Herd Management Area Wild Horse Gather, gathering on horseback would not be effective in most of the HMA due its sheer size and rough terrain.

Does the public have input regarding the use of helicopters and motorized vehicles in managing wild horses and burros?

Yes, Section 9 of the 1971 Act requires that a public hearing be held prior to the use of helicopters and motorized vehicles. Hearings are held annually. The purpose of the hearings is to hear public concerns so that BLM can review its Standard Operating Procedures to assure animals are treated humanely. The BLM Nevada State Office held a public hearing on July 1, 2010. BLM reviewed its Standard Operating Procedures in response to the views and issues that were raised at the public meeting and determined that no changes to the SOPs were warranted.

Is this an emergency action?

It is not currently, but could become, due to limited forage and water resources on public land. If this population management action is not completed in the near future, the likelihood of an emergency situation increases due to limited winter forage and reduced water availability caused by excess wild horses and severe weather conditions.

How many horses would be removed?

Wild horses residing outside the HMA boundaries, and any weaned foals, yearlings, and orphaned foals within the HMA may be removed and made available for adoption to qualified individuals.

What happens to the horses that don't go back to the range?

Wild horses removed from the range will be shipped to a short-term holding facility in either Fallon or Palomino Valley (north of Sparks), Nevada, to be prepared for the BLM wild horse adoption program or for long-term pastures. They will be checked by a veterinarian and receive vaccinations and freeze marks.

Currently there are more than 30,000 wild horses and burros maintained at short and long-term holding facilities and pastures. In the case of long-term holding pastures, un-adopted and unsold horses live out the rest of their lives in these grassy prairie-land areas of the Midwest, and are cared for by contractors. New contracts for long-term holding pastures will allow an additional 8,000 head to be cared for in long-term holding pastures, and these pastures will become available in the next couple of months to accommodate the horses gathered in the Eagle HMA and from other gathers. Animals are held between 10 and 25 years depending on their age when they enter lifetime holding. In contrast, only a small percentage of wild horses roaming public rangelands live past the age of 15 because of the harsher living conditions.

Population Questions

What is the current population of the herd?

The current wild horse population within the HMA is approximately 724 animals.

Why doesn't the BLM gather to the high range of AML?

This alternative does not comply with the 1971 WFRHBA because management within AML would not be achieved, and it would not allow for removal of sufficient excess animals to achieve or maintain a thriving natural ecological balance. The HMA would immediately exceed the established AML following the 2011 foal crop, extending the overpopulation that would result in ongoing impacts to the rangelands and prevent the BLM from managing wild horses at a level that achieves a thriving natural ecological balance within the area.

Contractor Questions

How does the BLM select its gather contractors?

The BLM's national gather contracts were awarded in 2006 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. The BLM's

contractors have demonstrated the knowledge, skill and ability to gather and handle these animals safely, effectively and humanely.

What contractor will be conducting the Clan Alpine gather?

Cattoor Livestock Roundup Company of Utah.

Range/Grazing Questions

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 Proposed Action in the Environmental Assessment is consistent with maintaining a thriving natural ecological balance between the wild horse population, wildlife, livestock and vegetation, and to protect the range from the deterioration associated with an 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.

What are the drought conditions like in this area?

The West has been in a drought for more than a decade. In the Great Basin high desert of Nevada, where this HMA is located, the average annual precipitation is often less than 10 inches. Drought conditions can occur as frequently as 6 out of every 10 years. Climate data from the National Weather Service shows that precipitation for the current water year (beginning October 1, 2009) is approximately 30 percent below the thirty-year average.

Is there livestock grazing in this area?

Yes, there are three grazing allotments in this area, which include:

Clan Alpine Livestock Grazing Allotment: a standards and guidelines rangeland health assessment is in progress. The 2009 utilization data showed moderate use for the last growing season. In the past when the wild horse population was above AML, utilization data indicated heavy use resulting in a determination that excess wild horses were a contributing factor for the over utilization of forage grasses.

Cow Canyon Livestock Grazing Allotment: during the period covered by the 2009 standards and guidelines rangeland health assessment, wild horse population was within AML. The only problem area where there was over grazing by cattle and wild horses was at the mouth of Dyer Canyon. By contrast, when wild horse numbers were above AML, use pattern mapping documented heavy use in several areas throughout the allotment.

Dixie Valley Livestock Grazing Allotment: a rangeland health analysis has been completed and the standards and guidelines assessment was to be completed in summer 2010. A riparian functionality assessment was completed in summer 2010. The use pattern mapping data indicates moderate use when the wild horse numbers are within the AML range and heavy use

when the wild horse numbers are above the upper end of AML. The Dixie Valley Allotment utilization category is currently moderate.

Is the BLM removing excess wild horses and burros 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.

Does wild horse overpopulation impact wildlife and plants?

Yes, it can. A wide variety of wildlife species common to the Great Basin ecosystem can be found in the Lahontan HMA. These include mule deer, coyote, black-tail jackrabbit, desert cottontail, bobcat, and numerous raptors, reptiles, and other small mammals. As part of its multiple-use mission, the BLM is mandated to protect habitat to support these wildlife species.

Wild horses often graze the same area repeatedly throughout the year. Forage plants in those areas receive little rest from grazing pressure. 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.

Why don't you just make more land available to the 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 Horses and Burros Act of 1971.

Adoption Questions

How can I adopt one of the horses?

The excess wild horses and burros 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. The BLM has placed nearly 225,000 wild horses and burros into private care since the adoption program began in 1971.

To apply to adopt a wild horse or burro on-line, please go to the BLM's adoption website at: http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/wild_horse_and_burro/What_We_Do/wild_horse_and_burro

0.html. 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.

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