

Questions and Answers

Antelope and Antelope Valley HMA Horse Gather

October 2012

Why is the BLM gathering wild horses from the Antelope and Antelope Valley Herd Management Areas?

The Antelope and Antelope Valley Herd Management Area (HMA) Wild Horse Gather is being conducted to remove wild horses that are at risk of death if they remain on the range. The helicopter gather is necessary to prevent a further decline in animal condition caused by minimal forage growth and reduced water availability due to severe drought conditions.

Appropriate Management Level (AML) for the Antelope HMA is 150-324 wild horses. The current population is 468 wild horses. AML for the Antelope Valley HMA is 115-259 wild horses. The current population is 641 wild horses. BLM has been monitoring the condition of the wild horses due to the on-going drought conditions. Wild horses in in the Antelope and Antelope Valley HMAs are in moderately thin to very thin body condition with further declines beyond the point of recovery anticipated if actions are not taken.

The affected parts of the HMAs are within the Boone Springs, Valley Mtn., Antelope Valley, West White Horse, White Horse, Sugarloaf, Ferber Flat, Utah Nevada South, Badlands, Goshute Mtn., Deep Creek and Chin Creek Allotments.

When did the BLM last gather in these HMA?

The BLM last gathered and removed excess wild horses from the Antelope Complex in January 2011. The complex consists of the Antelope HMA that is managed by the BLM Ely District, Schell Field Office; and the Antelope Valley, Goshute, and Spruce-Pequop HMAs which are managed by the Elko District, Wells Field Office. The BLM gathered 1,398 horses. The BLM returned 32 wild horses to the range, of which 21 mares were treated with the fertility control vaccine, Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP-22).

Is the BLM removing wild horses to make room for more livestock grazing?

No. There are no livestock currently grazing in the Antelope Valley HMA. The Wells Field Office has asked permittees to take measures to locate additional forage/pasture for the 2012-2013 grazing year, but no formal closures have been issued. The Chin Creek allotment had cows grazing until May 1 when they were removed by the livestock operator (30 days early). The Badlands allotment has some sheep use in the winter and spring months.

Authorized livestock grazing on BLM-managed lands has declined nearly 50 percent since the 1940's; of that authorized use, actual use has declined by 30 percent since 1971 (the time of enactment of the WFRHBA).

Was the Proposed Action considered in the Final EA?

The potential impacts of the actions that will be taken during the gather operations have been analyzed in the Antelope Complex Capture Plan and Environmental Assessment signed in December 2010.

Population Questions

What are the estimated wild horse populations for this HMA?

A population inventory conducted in February 2012 documented 1109 wild horses in the Antelope and Antelope Valley Herd Management Areas (HMAs).

What is the foaling season of wild horses?

Generally wild horses foal from March through June, but could also foal year-round.

Gather Process Questions

Where is the BLM gathering horses?

Actual gather locations will depend on where the wild horses are located when the gather process begins. Previous gather sites may be used or new locations could be utilized. The BLM will provide the public with information on meeting places during gather operations.

What is the description of the environmental setting where the gather will take place?

The gather area is located approximately 60 miles south of Wells and 50 miles north of Ely, Nev., within Elko and White Pine counties. The topography of the HMA ranges from flat valleys through mountainous terrain from 5,000 feet to 9,500 feet in elevation. The dominant vegetation consists of Utah juniper (*Juniperus ostosperma*), bottlebrush squirreltail (*Sitanion hystris*), big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), Nevada ephedra (*Ephedra nevadensis*), Indian ricegrass (*Oryzopsis hymenoides*), Sandberg bluegrass (*Poa secunda*), Needle-and-thread (*Stipa comata*), desert needlegrass (*S. speciosa*), bluebunch wheatgrass (*Agropyron spicatum*).

Will the BLM remove all the wild horses that are gathered?

Yes.

How does the BLM gather wild horses?

Gather operations would include the use of a helicopter. All gather and handling activities would be conducted in accordance with Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) (See Appendix B of the Final EA).

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

The WFRHBA authorizes the BLM to use helicopters to gather wild horses, 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. Since July 2004, Nevada has gathered 26,000 animals with a mortality rate of 1.1 percent (of which 0.5 percent was gather related) which is very low when handling wild animals. The BLM also avoids gathering wild horses prior to and during the peak foaling period and does not conduct helicopter removals of wild horses during March 1 through June 30 unless under emergency situations.

Though the wild 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 quickly afterwards. Helicopter gathers require less than a third of the time of traditional water or horseback trapping methods.

Other methods of gathering wild 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 injured. This method is very inefficient and takes an enormous amount of time to complete.

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

Section 9 of the WFRHBA requires that a public hearing be held prior to the use of helicopters and motorized vehicles. A public hearing is held annually on a State-wide basis regarding the use of motorized vehicles, including helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft, in the management of wild horses. During these meetings, the public is given the opportunity to present new information and to voice any concerns regarding the use of the motorized vehicles. The Ely District Office hosted the State-wide meeting on June 15, 2011; the current gather operation SOPs were reviewed in response to concerns expressed and the BLM determined that no changes to the SOPs were warranted.

Do personnel 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.

Is this an emergency action?

No, but the animals are at risk of death if they remain on the range. The helicopter gather is necessary to prevent a further decline in animal condition caused by minimal forage growth and reduced water availability due to severe drought conditions.

What happens to the wild horses that are removed from the range?

Wild horses removed from the range would be transported to a short-term holding facility at the National Wild Horse and Burro Center in Palomino Valley, near Reno, Nevada, or the Gunnison Correctional Facility in Gunnison, Utah, using trucks with stock trailers. Animals would be segregated by sex and age, and loaded into separate compartments. Upon arrival at the short-term holding facility, the wild horses would be off-loaded and placed into holding pens where they are provided water and hay. After some time of adjustment to the short-term holding facility, the animals would be prepared for adoption. Veterinary care and preparation includes freeze-marking with a unique identification number, vaccination from common diseases, castration of studs, and deworming. Individual animals not placed into adoption would be transported to long-term pastures in the Midwest.

Will any of the wild horses be sent to slaughter?

In accordance with BLM, no wild horse will be sold to slaughterhouses or to persons that would sell the animals to slaughterhouses.

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. 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 gather?

Sun J Livestock of Vernal Utah

Range/Grazing Questions

Is there livestock grazing in this area?

There are no livestock currently grazing in the Antelope Valley HMA. The Wells Field Office has asked permittees to take measures to locate additional forage/pasture for the 2012-2013 grazing year, but no formal closures have been issued. The Chin Creek allotment had cows grazing until May 1 when they were removed by the livestock operator (30 days early). The Badlands allotment has some sheep use in the winter and spring months.

Does the wild horse overpopulation impact wildlife and plants?

Yes. A wide variety of wildlife species common to the Great Basin ecosystem can be found in the HMA, including: mule deer, pronghorn antelope, bighorn sheep, 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 provide habitat to support these various 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 by wild horses 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 wild horses and burros?

Under the WFRHBA, wild horses can only be managed on areas of public lands where they were known to exist in 1971 (the time of enactment of the WFRHBA).

Adoption Questions

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 BLM 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 wild horse 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_burro0.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 call 1-800-4Mustangs with any questions about the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program.

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