



Silver King

Lincoln County

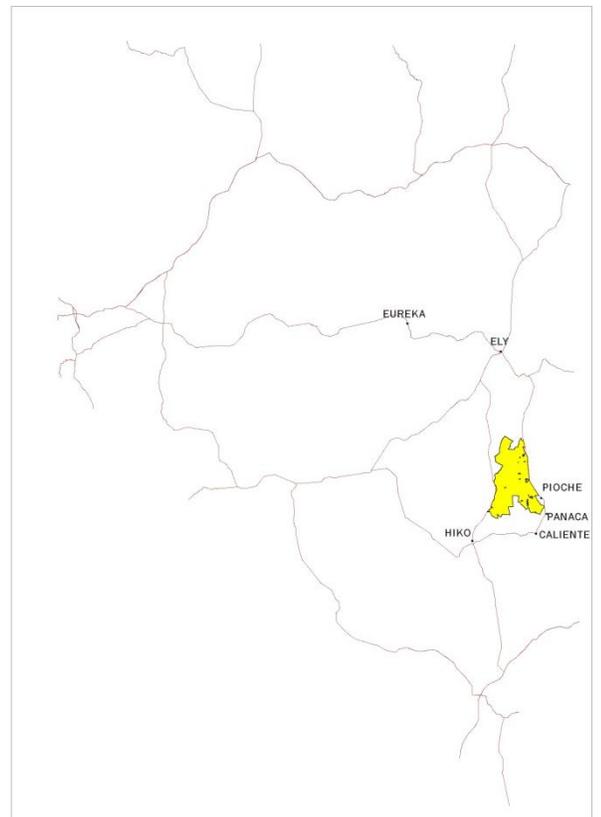
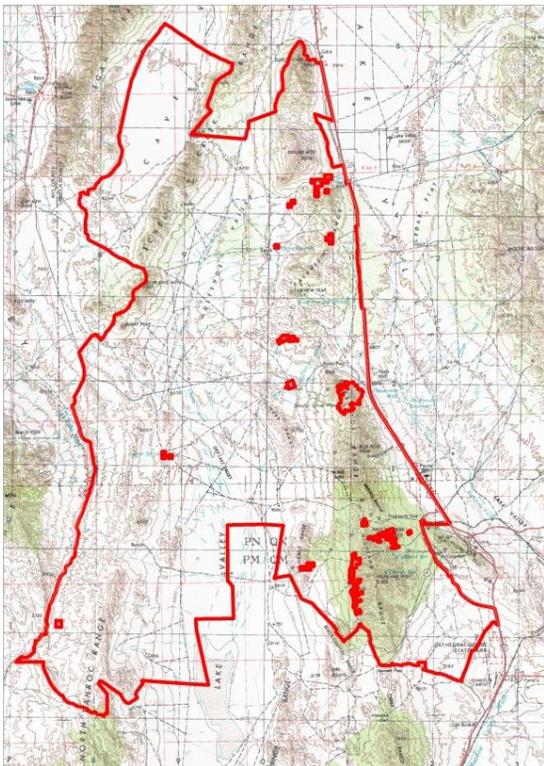


Location/Habitat

The Silver King Herd Management Area (HMA) is located in Lincoln County, Nevada. The HMA comprises approximately 606,000 acres. The area which includes the Silver King HMA is very remote. Access to the Silver King HMA is accomplished via dirt roads and trails. The only significant human settlement in the area aside from a couple of small ranches, are the towns of Pioche, Panaca, Lund, and Calienta.

The layout of the Silver King HMA consists of 3 large valleys (Dry Lake, Muleshoe, and Cave) and bounded on the sides by large mountain ranges (Schell Creek, Pahroc, Bristol, Fairview, and Highland). Elevations range from about 4,600 feet in the valleys to the 8,929 feet on Roe Peak in the Bristol Range.

The Silver King HMA affords a classic Great Basin environment marked by extremes of almost every kind. Summertime temperatures can exceed 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and winter lows can fall well below zero or lower. Precipitation in eastern Nevada occurs mostly in the winter in the form of snow with sparse summer moisture. Summer rains are localized, short and very intense while winter/spring rains are gentler and over a wider area. Annual average precipitation varies from approximately 16 inches at the higher elevations to 8 inches or less at the lower elevations.



Water is critical to every animal in the Silver King HMA. Water is very limited and occurs only at very few natural springs and fresh water seeps. As a result of limited water, the Silver King HMA is prone to drought every few years. When this occurs, horses can rapidly cause extensive ecological damage to their environment as they stay close to water.

Wildlife in the area includes mule deer, elk, pronghorn antelope, mountain lions, coyotes, bobcats, kit foxes, cottontail rabbits, badgers, jackrabbits, and several species of ground squirrels. There are also Sage grouse, blue grouse, Chukar, golden eagles, several species of neo-tropical birds, and occasionally in the winter bald eagles. Reptiles include many species of lizards, poisonous (rattlesnakes) and non-poisonous snakes.

Human interest in the Silver King HMA has been historically limited to livestock ranching, hunting, prospecting, hiking, camping, firewood, and pine nut harvesting. In recent years, outdoor tourism has become increasingly important, and eastern Nevada is evolving into an important area for those seeking vast unoccupied expanses of public lands.

Vegetation

Vegetation in the Silver King HMA is also characteristic of the Great Basin with dominant plants having evolved to survive the extremes. Typical vegetation varies according to elevation with the upper mountain slopes generally covered with stands of pinion and juniper trees are dominant and often form closed stands which prevent other vegetation from growing. As the elevation and moisture supply falls, the vegetation shifts towards shrub dominated community. Sagebrush is the most common shrub along the pinion juniper perimeter. Sagebrush gives way to white sage, black sage, saltbrush, and other "salt Desert shrub" type communities.

Herd Description

The Silver King HMA wild horse herd is managed by the Schell Field Office (Ely District) for an appropriate management level of 60-128 wild horses. This number was developed based on evaluation of the horses' habitat which indicated that between 60 and 128 wild horses could be sustained in the area without interrupting the delicate balance of the ecosystem. In order to keep wild horse numbers in balance with their environment, the BLM periodically gathers some of these wild horses and places them into the National Wild Horse and Burro Adoption program. Between 1985 and 2006, a total of 792 wild horses were removed from the Silver King HMA.

Wild horses in the area can be found throughout the HMA at different times of the year. Typically, horses will remain in the pinyon-juniper on lower benches during the day and graze in the valley bottoms in the evening and early morning. During open winter when there is little snow in the mountains, the horses will stay higher on the mountain slopes. In the valley bottoms they exist on the sparse grasses such as sandberg bluegrass, needle-and-thread grass, and Indian ricegrass. In addition to grasses, horses in the region have adapted to a diet of dominant shrubs such as white sage and saltbush.

The history of the Silver King HMA wild horse herd is somewhat clouded. It is known that these horses are descendants of ranch stock, miners, and settlers in the area. There is also some evidence that the Army Remount Service was active in at least part of the area. These horses are probably descended from quarterhorse, thoroughbred, morgan and some draft breeds.

Due to the probable ancestry of the Silver King HMA wild horses, and the rigors of survival in this harsh environment, Silver King HMA wild horses can be very dependable, sturdy riding, and packing horses. Average heights vary depending whether horses were born during drought years or not, but tend to be around 13 to 14

hands. Colors are also variable, but are dominated by darker black, bay, and sorrel with flaxen manes and tails. Wild horse foals in eastern Nevada are born in the spring, mostly during the months of April or May. Births are timed to coincide with spring green-up which affords the most nutritious forage to nursing mares and foals.

Wild horses are very social creatures and are formed into what is known as a “Matriarchal Society.” A matriarchal society is one which is led by a dominant female. This dominant mare is responsible for daily activities of the band. Contrary to popular belief, the stud serves the band in a secondary role only. He does influence the structure of the band and is responsible for gathering up the component mares and maintaining and protecting the group, but has little to do with daily activities. Bands can range in size from two to more than twenty animals. Wild horse bands generally consist of one dominant stud, and one to several unrelated mares. Offspring either wander off or are forcibly ejected from the group before becoming reproductively mature to limit inbreeding. Young mares which leave their parental band are quickly gathered up into surrounding bands, while young studs join together into bachelor groups. Young studs will remain in bachelor herds for several years until they are mature enough to take their own mare group.