

Cumulative impacts be continued degradation of rangeland resources due to the failure to manage wild horses in balance with available water and forage. Over-utilization of vegetation and other habitat resources would occur as wild horse populations continued to increase. Wild horse populations would be expected to eventually crash at some ecological threshold; however wild horse, livestock, and wildlife would all experience suffering and possible death of individual animals as rangeland resources continued to degrade. Attainment of RMP objectives and Standards for Rangeland Health and Wild Horse and Burro Populations would not be achieved.

Under the No Action Alternative, AML would not be achieved or sustained throughout the CESA and therefore the collection and analysis of scientific data necessary to evaluate AML levels, in relationship to rangeland health standards and whether a thriving natural ecological balance is being met or achieved, could not be undertaken.

Impacts to the human environment across the CESA would be compounded should the current population of horses be allowed to remain and expand.

The combination of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, along with the proposed action and Alternative B, should result in more stable wild horse populations, healthier rangelands, healthier wild horses, and fewer multiple-use conflicts within the Silver King HMA.

6.0 Mitigation Measures and Suggested Monitoring

Proven measures to mitigate impacts of the gather on wild horses and on rangeland resources, along with monitoring are incorporated into the proposed action through standard operating procedures, which have been developed over time. These SOPs (Appendix II, III and IV) represent the "best methods" for reducing impacts associated with gathering, handling, and transporting wild horses and for collecting herd data. Hair samples to establish a genetic baseline for the Silver King HMA wild horses will be collected; additional samples will be collected during future gathers (in 10-15 years) to determine trend. Should monitoring indicate genetic diversity is not being adequately maintained, 2-10 mares and/or studs from HMAs in similar environments would be added every generation (every 8-10 years) to avoid inbreeding depression/maintain acceptable genetic diversity. Ongoing resource monitoring, including climate (weather), and forage utilization, population inventory, and distribution data will continue to be collected.

7.0 Consultation and Coordination

Public hearings are 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 (or burros). 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 Elko District Office held the state-wide meeting on July 1, 2010; thirteen public participants attended and their comments were entered into the record for this hearing. Specific concerns included: (1) whether Most were in support of the use of helicopters and the gathering of excess wild horses. Standard Operating Procedures were reviewed in response to these concerns and no changes to the SOPs were indicated based on this review.

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 total mortality of 1.1% (of which 0.5% was gather related) which is very low when handling wild animals. BLM also avoids gathering wild horses six weeks prior to or after peak foaling and therefore does not conduct helicopter removals of wild horses from March 1 through June 30.

The Schell and Caliente Field Offices have coordinated with Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) during the yearly coordination meeting on these gathers.

A Tribal Coordination meeting was held in Ely on May 20, 2010. No issues were identified during this meeting.

A preliminary environmental assessment was made available to interested individuals, agencies and groups and posted on the Ely District website www.nv.blm.gov/ely for a 30 day public review and comment period on June 15, 2010 and closing on July 16, 2010. Written comments were received from seven individuals and e-mail comments were received from 2,847 individuals, which 2,811 were form letters. Many of these comments contained overlapping issues/concerns which were consolidated into 24 distinct topics. Refer to EA, Appendix VI for a detailed summary of the comments received and how BLM used these comments in preparing the final environmental assessment. The final Environmental Assessment / Gather Plan for Silver King is available on the BLM's web site at www.nv.blm.gov/ely, or contact the Ely BLM District Office.

Internal District Review

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8.0 REFERENCES, GLOSSARY AND ACRONYMS

8.1 References Cited

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