



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Las Vegas Field Office
4701 North Torrey Pines Dr
Las Vegas NV 89130
www.nv.blm.gov



In Reply Refer to:

4700 (NV052)

September 17, 2007

Dear Interested Party:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is asking the public to review and comment on the enclosed **Nevada Wild Horse Range Preliminary Gather Plan and Environmental Assessment (EA NV-052-2007-362)** no later than October 17, 2007. The Environmental Assessment is also posted at www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/lvfo.html

The BLM Las Vegas Field Office is proposing to remove about 800-820 excess wild horses from the Nevada Wild Horse Range (NWHR) in December 2007. Fertility control would be applied to mares released back to the range following the gather. The purpose of the Proposed Action is to achieve the appropriate management level (AML) of wild horses on the range.

A Wild Horse Information Session will be held on Thursday, October 4 from 6 to 8:15 p.m. No formal briefings are planned. Instead, the evening will begin with an open house designed to provide information about the Nevada Wild Horse Range (from 6 to 6:30 p.m.) Attendees will then be invited to participate in a structured conversation which will provide an opportunity to hear diverse community perspectives and feedback (from 6:30 to 7:45 p.m.) Attendees may also give their verbal comments to a court reporter (from 7:45 to 8:15 p.m.)

Comments should be submitted in writing to:

Patrick Putnam, Assistant Field Manager
Bureau of Land Management, Las Vegas Field Office
4701 N. Torrey Pines Drive, Las Vegas, Nevada 89130-2301

BLM is particularly interested in knowing if the public has any additional information, data or analysis which should be considered. Examples of helpful information might be:

- Are there additional issues, concerns, or opportunities (not already identified) which BLM should consider?
- Are there additional alternatives (not already identified) which BLM should consider?

For additional information, please refer to the accompanying **Questions and Answers**.

Sincerely,

Patrick Putnam
Acting Assistant Field Manager
Recreation and Renewable Resource

Enclosures (2)

Questions and Answers

Q – What is BLM asking the public to do?

A – The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is asking the public to review and comment on the Nevada Wild Horse Range Preliminary Gather Plan Environmental Assessment no later than October 17, 2007. Comments should be submitted in writing to:

Patrick Putnam
Assistant Field Manager
Bureau of Land Management
Las Vegas Field Office
4701 N. Torrey Pines Drive
Las Vegas, Nevada 89130-2301

Q – What kind of comments would be most helpful?

A – BLM is particularly interested in knowing if the public has any additional information, data or analysis which should be considered. Examples of helpful information might be:

- Are there additional issues, concerns, or opportunities (not already identified) which BLM should consider?
- Are there additional alternatives (not already identified) which BLM should consider?

Q – Will a public meeting be held on this issue?

A - A Wild Horse Information Session will be held on Thursday, October 4 from 6 to 8:15 p.m. No formal briefings are planned. Instead, the evening will begin with an open house designed to provide information about the Nevada Wild Horse Range (from 6 to 6:30 p.m.) Attendees will then be invited to participate in a structured conversation which will provide an opportunity to hear diverse community perspectives and feedback (from 6:30 to 7:45 p.m.) Attendees may also give their verbal comments to a court reporter (from 7:45 to 8:15 p.m.)

Q – Why is BLM considering a gather to remove excess wild horses?

A – BLM is considering removal of approximately 800-820 wild horses from the Nevada Wild Horse Range because the animals have greatly exceeded the Appropriate Management Level (AML.) AML is defined as the “optimum number” of wild horses (or burros) which results in a thriving natural ecological balance and avoids a deterioration of the range. Wild horses exceed AML by 370 percent. Water is limited due to continuing drought and the current overpopulation of wild horses. The Air Force has been providing supplemental water to wild horses since 2005. Forage utilization by wild horses is heavy within a 1-3 mile circumference of available water and animals are traveling long distances (2-8 miles) to/from water and food.

Q – What is the Appropriate Management Level for the Nevada Wild Horse Range?

A – The Appropriate Management Level (AML) was set as a population range of 300-500 wild horses in the July 2004 Record of Decision for the Approved Nevada Test and Training Range Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

Q – What is the current number of wild horses in the Nevada Wild Horse Range?

A – The wild horse population is estimated at 1,100-1,120 animals. The current population of wild horses was estimated based on aerial census conducted in July 2007, when a population of 1,350-1,370 was determined, minus 178 for emergency gather in July 2007, minus 71 wild

horses that died from nitrate poisoning in July 2007. When death and yearly birth rates are factored in, the current population of wild horses is 1,100-1,120 animals.

Q – How many animals will remain on the range post-gather with the Proposed Action?

A – The Proposed Action represents the low point of the Appropriate Management Level and would allow the wild horse population to slowly increase over the next four to five years. About 300 wild horses will remain on the range following the gather.

Q - What is the relationship between the Air Force and BLM for the Nevada Wild Horse Range?

A – The Nevada Wild Horse Range was established in 1962 by a Cooperative Agreement with the Commander, Nellis Air Force Base and the State Director, Nevada Bureau of Land Management. The Nevada Wild Horse Range was the first wild horse area established in the United States. While the primary purpose of the Nellis Range Complex (a complex withdrawn from public use) is weapons development and flight training, the existence of wild horses on the Nevada Wild Horse Range is a secondary use of the lands. No photographs of the area or visitor access is allowed for National Defense security reasons.

In 1971, Congress passed the Wild Horse and Burro Act and promulgated 43 Code of Federal Regulations 4700 to implement the Wild Horse and Burro Act. In 1977, a five-party agreement was developed for protecting, developing, and managing the natural resources of fish and wildlife, vegetation, watershed, and wild horses with the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Energy, Bureau of Land Management and the Nevada Division of Wildlife.

Q - When excess wild horses are removed from the range, where do they go?

A- Any wild horses removed from the Nevada Wild Horse Range will be transported to BLM facilities (likely locations include: Ridgecrest, California or Palomino Valley, near Sparks, Nevada.) There the animals will receive a veterinarian inspection, and will be freeze marked, vaccinated and de-wormed. The animals will then be sent to adoption events or to long-term facilities. The Department of the Interior's Fiscal Year 2005 Omnibus Appropriation Act (PL 108-447, Division E, Title 1, Section 142), which amended the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act (PL 92-195), requires the BLM to sell gathered wild horses and burros that are more than 10 years of age or have been offered unsuccessfully for adoption at least three times.

BLM is asking anyone who is interested in adopting a wild horse from the Nevada Wild Horse Range and who meets BLM's adoption and facilities requirements to mail a completed adoption application to the BLM Las Vegas Field Office, Attn: Jerrie Bertola. Adoption arrangements for these animals will be determined based on number of applications received. Jerrie will follow-up individually with all applicants. Adoption applications can be found at www.wildhorseandburro.blm.gov or through the Las Vegas Field Office at 702-515-5000.

Q – How can I get a copy of the Nevada Wild Horse Range Preliminary Gather Plan Environmental Assessment?

A- The Preliminary Gather Plan Environmental Assessment will be mailed in September to all individuals, groups and agencies who have requested to be on the Las Vegas Field Office's wild horse and burro interested party list. The document is also available at: www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/lvfo.html

Q - When will BLM make a final decision and who will make the decision?

A – BLM will make a final decision about the Proposed Action in early December 2007 at Las Vegas Field Office level. The decision of the authorized officer will be implemented effective upon issuance under authority provided in 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 4770.3 (a) and (c). Administrative review of the authorized officer's decision by the Interior Board of Land Appeals may be requested by filing an appeal in accordance with authority provided in 4770.3 (a) and 43 CFR part 4.

Q- What caused the emergency gather of horses in July?

A – In July 2007, BLM conducted an emergency gather of 178 wild horses on the eastern side of the Nevada Wild Horse Range (near Cedar Spring) that were suffering from lack of water. BLM crews filled Cedar Well trough with 14,000 gallons of water to ensure the horses had water and conducted repairs on a water development in an effort to regenerate water flow. The crew reestablished a minimal flow, but it was not sufficient to meet the needs of the horses.

Q- What was the cause of death of 71 wild horses in July?

A - Diagnostic and toxicology results indicate that nitrate toxicity is the most likely cause of death in July for 71 wild horses on the Nevada Wild Horse Range. High levels of nitrates were found in some water samples taken from a pond the horses used for drinking on a dry lake bed and also in the deceased horses' blood serum and ocular fluid. Water test results indicated nitrate levels of more than 3,000 parts per million (ppm). The United States Health Service standard for drinking water for human consumption is less than 45 ppm. Livestock can tolerate higher levels but problems are known to occur when levels exceed 400 ppm and acceptable levels should be below 100 ppm. Additional testing is ongoing to determine the source of the nitrates.