

Mojave Southern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council
Southern Nevada District Manager's Report
Mary Jo Rugwell, District Manager
March 16, 2011

National BLM/DOI:

BLM Accelerates Fundamental Reforms to Wild Horse and Burro Program: Director of the Bureau of Land Management Bob Abbey announced that following an extensive public process, the agency is accelerating fundamental reforms to how it manages wild horses and burros on public lands.

The proposed strategy includes reducing the number of wild horses removed from the range for at least the next two years; reaffirming the central role that the National Academy of Sciences (NAS)'s on-going review of the program will have on science-based management decisions; increasing adoptions; significantly expanding the use of fertility control to maintain herd levels; and improving its care and handling procedures to enhance the humane treatment of the animals. The BLM will continue to oppose the killing or slaughter of wild horses or burros as a management practice.

These reforms respond to the input of more than 9,000 members of the public who commented on last year's Wild Horse and Burro Program Strategy Development Document through public meetings and written statements.

Specifically, the BLM proposes to:

NAS study—The BLM has commissioned the National Academy of Sciences to review previous wild horse management studies and make recommendations on how the BLM should proceed in light of the latest scientific research. The NAS review is expected to be completed in early 2013. Specifically the study will look at the methods for population modeling, the annual rates of population growth, fertility control methods, evaluation of carrying capacity of various lands to support wild horse herds, genetic diversity in wild horse herds, and predator impact on wild horse population growth.

Issue Procedures to Facilitate Long-term Care by Partners -- The BLM will release within the next 30 days specific procedures by which members of the public can apply to enter into partnerships with the federal government for long-term care of wild horses that are removed from the public rangeland.

Increase Science-Based Fertility Control. The BLM proposes to significantly increase the number of mares treated with fertility control – from 500 in 2009 to a target of 2,000 in each of the next two years during the NAS study, pending sufficient budget allocations. Director Abbey said the BLM's ultimate goal is to make various fertility control measures the primary means to maintain healthy population levels. He said the BLM intends to work closely with the Humane Society of the United States to implement and monitor this expanded effort.

Reduce Removals – The BLM intends to reduce the annual number of wild horses removed for at least the next 2 years from 10,000 to 7,600 – a level that would essentially maintain the current number of wild horses and burros on the range. The NAS review would be completed in early 2013. Abbey said that while drought or other emergencies may require the removal of more than 7,600 animals, the BLM has decided to adopt this more conservative approach pending input from the NAS regarding the number of horses that can be safely and humanely left on the open range.

In addition, Director Abbey said the BLM will continue to strengthen areas on which it has already started. These include:

Enhance Humane Animal Care and Handling Practices. Director Abbey said the agency will conduct thorough reviews and add appropriate controls to the agency's contracts and policies to strengthen humane animal care and handling practices. This will apply to both gathering contracts and short- and long-term holding facility contracts.

Promote Volunteerism in the Management of Wild Horses. The proposal calls for increased engagement of the public by enhancing public outreach, recruiting local volunteers to assist in monitoring the health of the rangelands where animals roam, and encourages partnerships to increase herd-related ecotourism.

Improve Transparency and Openness. Director Abbey also said it is important to reaffirm throughout the agency the BLM's fundamental commitment to transparency in all facets of the wild horse and burro program. This includes increasing public viewing opportunities during gathers and at short-term corrals and long-term care facilities to the highest extent possible without compromising the safety of staff, members of the public, or the animals. The BLM is also committed to the accurate, prompt, and public release of information related to the program.

An analysis of the public's comments and a detailed proposed implementation strategy will be posted at www.blm.gov. The public is invited to review and provide comments to the BLM on this strategy through March 30, 2011, and should be submitted by email to wildhorse@blm.gov with "Comments on Strategy" in the subject line.

Southern Nevada District Office (SNDO):

Law Enforcement

Law Enforcement Rangers to Make Video: BLM Law Enforcement Rangers, along with rangers from the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Forest Service, will work with East Career Technical Academy to develop information and educational videos. The videos will include information about the history of Service First and the Southern Nevada Agency Partnership. Managers from each agency will star in the video with the Law Enforcement Rangers.

SNPLMA Division

Round 12 Nominations: SNPLMA staff to present Round 12 Nominations during March 16 meeting.

Field Offices:

Las Vegas Field Office:

Las Vegas Field Office Seeks Public Comment on Recreation Plan: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) held public scoping open house meetings in five locations to encourage public participation in the development of a travel and recreation implementation plan for the Las Vegas Field Office. This plan will consist of Recreation Area Management Plans (RAMPs) and Comprehensive Transportation and Travel Management plans (CTTM) to identify the actions that are necessary to manage a variety of recreational activities and implement recreation programs throughout the Las Vegas Field Office. The plan will address transportation and travel issues, including motorized recreation and actions related to route evaluation, permits and use restrictions, fees, and facilities and services in the planning area. The planning area is located in Clark County and encompasses approximately 3.4 million acres of public land. Along with the travel and recreation implementation plan, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be developed to understand the effects of land management actions on public land users and natural resources.

Scoping open house meetings were held in Searchlight, Mesquite, Las Vegas, Goodsprings, and Overton

The purpose of the public scoping process is to determine relevant issues that will influence the scope of the environmental analysis and guide the planning process. BLM is interested in public comments regarding this plan. At this point, the following information would be the most useful:

- Are there additional issues, concerns, or opportunities (not already identified) that BLM should consider?
- Are there recreation facilities or infrastructure you would like to be developed?
- Are there hiking, mountain biking, equestrian, or OHV routes you would like to be designated?

The public scoping period for the travel and recreation implementation plan began with the publication of the Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register on January 28, 2011 and will last until April 11, 2011. Public comments must be provided to the BLM by March 28 in order to be formally analyzed and included in the Scoping Report.

Nellis Dunes Dust Study Released: The Las Vegas Field Office received a study that characterized dust emissions in the Nellis Dunes Recreation Area as part of a regulatory dust mitigation plan conducted by University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Sampling data from the dust study identified a mineral that is similar to asbestos and elevated levels of arsenic.

BLM does not know whether the elevated levels of arsenic pose a health risk to recreational and other users of the Nellis Dunes Recreation Area (NDRA). As a result, BLM has requested researchers to conduct a Human Health Risk Assessment (Health Risk Assessment) of the area. The study will take approximately three years to complete -- preliminary data will be available and released to the public sooner -- and will provide BLM with information concerning

whether these materials present a human health risk to recreational and other users using NDRA. If the materials identified in the dust study are found to pose a potential threat to human health and safety, the Health Risk Assessment will help BLM determine what, if any, safety measures should be taken at NDRA.

While awaiting the Health Risk Assessment results, signs will be posted at NDRA and information will be posted on the BLM's website. The dust study and Health Risk Assessment results will be incorporated into the revision of the BLM's Las Vegas Field Office Resource Management Plan, which is expected to be available for public comment in summer 2011 and the Las Vegas Field Office Recreation Area Management Plan in which public scoping occurred early March

Key results of the dust study include the following findings:

- Nearly all dust samples taken in the area contain palygorskite—a mineral with many of the same characteristics as asbestos. Minerals with these characteristics are called “~~asbestiform~~.” Palygorskite, like asbestos, is naturally occurring; however, unlike asbestos, it is not regulated.
- The concentrations of naturally occurring arsenic in soil samples at NDRA are substantially higher (3.49 to 83.02 ppm) than soils elsewhere in the United States (3.6 to 8.8 ppm.) Currently there are no standards in the United States for arsenic in recreational settings.

Additional information, including the study itself, is posted online at www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/lvfo.html.

BLM Seeks Public Comment on Plan to Transfer 160 Acres for Airport: The Las Vegas Field Office is seeking public comment on a proposal to transfer 160 acres of public land in Clark County for the continued operation of the Henderson Executive Airport. Interested parties may submit written comments regarding the proposed conveyance for 45 days until April 15. The Notice of Realty Action was published in the March 1 *Federal Register*. The BLM is seeking comments regarding whether the BLM followed proper administrative procedures in publishing the decision to convey the land. The Clark County Department of Aviation currently holds an airport lease for 140 acres of the 160 acres found suitable for conveyance. The proposed conveyance is consistent with applicable Federal and county land use plans and will help meet the needs of the community.

The Federal Aviation Administration determined that it is the best interest of civil aviation that the entire 160 acres be conveyed in a fee simple, no cost conveyance to Clark County for the Henderson Executive Airport. The county currently pays \$655,000 in rental fees to lease a 140-acre portion of the lands proposed for conveyance.

For more information, please call: Philip Rhinehart, 702-515-5182, or e-mail: prhineha@blm.gov.

Red Rock/Sloan Field Office:

Red Rock Visitor Center Wins Design Awards: Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area is well known for its scenic beauty, varied recreation opportunities and now its award winning visitor center. So far the unique indoor-outdoor facility has won three awards including: McGraw Hill Southwest Contractor Best of Nevada - Best Green Project, McGraw Hill Southwest Contractor Best of Nevada - Honorable Mention for Architectural Design and AIA Southern Arizona – Merit Award for the Contact Station.

The visitor center, which opened in April 2010, offers an information station, outdoor interpretive exhibits, a larger bookstore and an amphitheater. Funded by the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, the new visitor center replaced the original visitor center which was built in 1982 when Red Rock had about 20,000 visitors a year; now more than a million people visit a year.

Open House for Red Rock and Sloan Canyon National Conservation Areas: On March 17, the Red Rock/Sloan Field Office will hold the first in a series of monthly open houses to give the public an opportunity to meet staff, get information about projects and planning and ask questions about the management of Red Rock and Sloan Canyon National Conservation Areas and Walking Box Ranch. These meetings will be held the third Thursday of each month from 2 to 7 p.m. and will feature short presentations. The March open house topic will be fuels management in Red Rock Canyon.

Pahrump Field Office

On March 18 the Pahrump Field Office staff and local officials will conduct a site inspection of an area of Pahrump, just north of Bell Vista road, where illegal shooting and dumping occur. The area is not currently within the disposal area; however, the County has nominated it to be included in the disposal area through the RMP revision.

On May 6, the staff of the Pahrump Field Office will take students from Pahrump Valley High School on a field trip aimed at exposing the students to the agency. The trip will include a stop in Ash Meadows, devils hole, and Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area.

The annual Pahrump Field Office open house is tentatively scheduled for June 16 in Pahrump.