

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

Finding of No Significant Impact

**Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-UT-C010-2014-0035-EA**

June 2014

Bible Spring Complex Wild Horse Gather and Removal and Fertility Treatment Plan

***Location:* Beaver and Iron Counties, Utah**

***Applicant/Address:* None**

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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
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INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has conducted an environmental analysis (DOI-BLM- UT-CO10-2014-0035-EA) to authorize wild horse gathers approximately two to four times over a six to ten year period to remove excess wild horses until the Bible Springs Complex wild horse population reaches the lower Appropriate Management Level (AML). The first gather will be planned for the summer of 2014. If the lower AML is reached before the end of the 10 year period, additional gathers will be conducted to maintain the wild horse population in the Bible Spring Complex to within the AML. The gather, removal and fertility treatment numbers will vary over the 10 year period to accomplish the objective of achieving and maintaining the wild horse population to within AML.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based upon a review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the project is not a major federal action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as defined in 40 CFR 1508.27, nor do the environmental effects exceed those described in the Pinyon Management Framework Plan. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed.

This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below.

Context: The project is a site-specific action on BLM administered public land and does not in and of itself have international, national, regional, or statewide importance. The gathers will be conducted in four Herd Management Areas located in Iron and Beaver counties, Utah.

Intensity: The following discussion is organized around the Ten Significance Criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27 and incorporated into resources and issues considered (includes supplemental authorities Appendix 1 H-1790-1) and supplemental Instruction Memorandum, Acts, Regulations and Executive Orders. The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this proposal.

Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse: The environmental analysis considered both the beneficial and adverse impacts of the Proposed Action on resources and issues as described in the EA. The gathers will benefit the health of the rangeland by decreasing the removal of vegetation by wild horses. This will benefit riparian and soils resources, as well. A decrease in competition for forage will benefit livestock grazing and wildlife. A decrease in wild horse numbers will reduce soil compaction from horse trampling, Wild horses will be

impacted by being gathered and removed from the range. Design Features and Standard Operating Procedures will be implemented to reduce impacts to wild horses during the gathers. None of the environmental impacts disclosed above and discussed in detail in the EA are considered significant.

The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety: The gathers will be conducted in accordance with the specifications and procedures outlined in the EA, insuring compliance with all health and safety regulations and requirements.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas: The project area is not proximate to any park lands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. This gather will have no effect to significant cultural resources. The corral locations will be located on an area of existing disturbance. The possibility of finding intact cultural resources in these areas is minimal to non-existent. If an existing disturbed area cannot be located for the corral area, a cultural resource inventory will take place prior to the gather. If cultural resources are located during this inventory, the corral area will be moved to another location, which does not contain cultural resources.

The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial: No anticipated effects have been identified that are scientifically controversial. Comments received during the public comment period for the EA provided no expert scientific evidence supporting claims that the project will have significant effects. Some comments expressed concern that current gather policies are disputed by the National Academy of Sciences, in the findings and recommendations of its report, "Using Science to Improve the BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program: A Way Forward". It is the opinion of the authorized officer that nothing in this report refers to the scientific community being in dispute about the proposed action nor is the proposed action controversial in the scientific community.

The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks: The proposal is not the first of its kind, nor are the effects of gathering wild horses highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. There have been hundreds of like actions that have occurred since the passage of the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act that have been evaluated in environmental assessments and none were found to require an EIS.

The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration: The Proposed Action will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. Actions were considered by the Interdisciplinary Team within the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Any future projects within the area or in the surrounding areas will be analyzed on their own merits and implemented or not, independent of the actions currently selected. A complete analysis of the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the selected alternative, and all other alternatives considered, is described in Chapter 4 of the EA.

Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts - which include connected actions regardless of land ownership: The interdisciplinary team evaluated the possible actions in context of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions. Significant cumulative effects are not predicted. A complete disclosure of the effects of the action is contained in Chapter 4 of the EA.

The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources: This gather will have no effect to significant cultural resources. The corral locations will be located on an area of existing disturbance. The possibility of finding intact cultural resources in these areas is minimal to non-existent. If an existing disturbed area cannot be located for the corral area, a cultural resource inventory will take place prior to the gather. If cultural resources are located during this inventory, the corral area will be moved to another location, which does not contain cultural resources.

The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, or the degree to which the action may adversely affect: 1) a proposed to be listed endangered or threatened species or its habitat, or 2) a species on BLM's sensitive species list: The Utah prairie dog is listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. The Bible Spring Wild Horse Complex is adjacent to three Utah prairie dog complexes: Pine Valley, Water Hollow and Jockey Springs. Developed conservation measures will be applied which will result in no direct adverse impacts to Utah prairie dogs or their habitat during the Bible Springs Complex gather.

A portion of the Tilly Creek Herd Management Area contains greater sage-grouse brood-rearing habitat. A temporary short-term impact to greater sage-grouse and/or its habitat could be impacted through disturbance and/or displacement. Removal of wild horses could benefit sage-grouse in the short-term through improved access to water sources and in the long-term through improved habitat conditions, both at water sources/riparian areas and in upland habitat containing sagebrush. In accordance with BLM Greater Sage-Grouse Interim Management Policies and Procedures (IM 2012-043), mitigation measures have been incorporated into the design features of the Proposed Action.

There is the potential that wild horses might trample and collapse underground dens and burrows of species such as the kit fox, pygmy rabbit, and burrowing owl. If occupied dens are collapsed, the inhabitants could be crushed and killed. If they are not killed, additional stress and energy could be expended to dig out the collapsed burrow or dig a new burrow, which could affect the individual fitness of the animal. Temporary displacement may occur during the gather however, the impacts are expected to be minimal to these species.

Whether the action threatens a violation of a federal, state, local, or tribal law, regulation or policy imposed for the protection of the environment, where non-federal requirements are consistent with federal requirements: The Proposed Action will not violate or threaten any Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection

of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA. State, local and tribal interests were presented with the opportunity to participate in the environmental analysis process.

/s/ Dan Fletcher (Acting For)

June 23, 2014

Elizabeth R. Burghard
Cedar City Field Office Manager

Date