4.20. WILD HORSES

Impacts from decisions concerning paleontological resources, soils and watershed, special status species, visual resource management, and woodland and forests would have negligible or minor impacts on wild horse forage and water availability, or herd health and sustainability in the VPA; therefore, they will not be discussed further in this analysis. Impacts from decisions concerning cultural resources, fire management, forage allocation, lands and realty management, livestock grazing, mineral resources, recreation, riparian resources, special designations, travel, vegetation resources, wild horse management, and wildlife and fisheries management would potentially impact wild horses in the VPA. Decisions relating to these resources and resource uses would have short-term or long-term direct or indirect impact on wild horses in the VPA.

There are currently one herd area (HA) and two herd management areas (HMAs) in the VPA: the Bonanza HMA, Winter Ridge HA, and Hill Creek HMA. The Proposed RMP and all alternatives vary in their impacts on maintaining the wild horse herds in these areas, as summarized in Table 4.20.1.

Table 4.20.1. Maintaining Wild Horse Herds, Proposed RMP and all Alternatives

	Bonanza HMA	Winter Ridge HA	Hill Creek HMA
Proposed RMP	No	No	No
Alternative A	No	Yes	Yes
Alternative B	No	No	No
Alternative C	Yes	Yes	Yes
Alternative D (No Action)	No	No	Yes
Alternative E	Yes	Yes	Yes

There are no known reports of wild burros existing within the VPA; therefore, no further analysis or discussion of wild burros will be made in this section.

4.20.1. IMPACTS COMMON TO THE PROPOSED RMP AND ALL ALTERNATIVES

4.20.1.1. FIRE

Fire management other than prescribed burning, which includes mechanical and chemical treatment methods, would impact wild horses under the Proposed RMP and all of the alternatives. Mechanical and/or chemical treatments and seeding treatments would have direct and indirect, adverse, short-term effects on wild horse herds. Direct impacts would be caused by the removal of forage within the fire treatment areas. Indirect impacts would be produced by fencing the treated areas during vegetation re-growth, which would make forage unavailable to herds until vegetation re-establishment.

4.20.1.2. LANDS AND REALTY

For lands and realty management actions under the Proposed RMP and all of the alternatives, there is the potential that land tenure adjustments (i.e., acquisitions, disposals, and withdrawals) would adversely impact wild horse herds associated with areas where adjustments might be made. The land tenure adjustment process would analyze impacts to wild horses on a case-by-case basis. This would, in turn, adversely increase wild horse harassment, which could disrupt the daily and seasonal activities of the wild horse bands in these areas. Repeated and consistent disruption of the herds would have a long-term, adverse impact on wild horses.

4.20.1.3. RIPARIAN

Riparian management actions would impact wild horses under the Proposed RMP and all of the alternatives by reducing or eliminating their access to riparian areas during efforts to improve riparian resources. Any actions that would have the potential to impact wild horses in the VPA would be further analyzed on a case-by-case basis prior to the implementation of a project, but restricting wild horse access to water within riparian areas would have direct, adverse impacts on wild horses.

4.20.1.4. WILDLIFE

Wildlife management actions under the Proposed RMP and all of the alternatives would adversely impact wild horses. Wildlife has the potential to compete directly and indirectly with wild horses for forage and habitat. However, management decisions have been proposed under all of the alternatives and the Proposed RMP to adequately allocate forage and habitat to wildlife and wild horses to mitigate forage and habitat competition.

4.20.2. PROPOSED RMP AND ALTERNATIVE IMPACTS

4.20.2.1. IMPACTS OF CULTURAL DECISIONS, RECREATION DECISIONS, SPECIAL DESIGNATIONS DECISIONS, TRAVEL DECISIONS, AND NON-WSA LANDS WITH WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS DECISIONS ON WILD HORSES

4.20.2.1.1. PROPOSED RMP AND ALTERNATIVE B

No wild horses would be maintained within the VPA under the Proposed RMP and Alternative B. Therefore, there would be no impacts to wild horses from cultural, recreation, special designations, travel, and non-WSA lands with wilderness characteristics decisions.

4.20.2.1.2. ALTERNATIVES A, C, AND E

The protection of cultural resource areas under these alternatives by limiting OHV travel to designated routes or closed areas to OHV use, and protecting cultural sites from minerals surface disturbances under Timing and Controlled Surface Use leasing stipulations would have indirect, long term, beneficial impacts on wild horses. These management decisions would benefit wild

horses by reducing the potential for herd harassment and disturbances caused by human noise, motion, night lighting, and human presence.

Under these alternatives, substantial areas within the VPA would be managed as designated SRMAs (and each SRMA managed under an integrated activity plan) to provide opportunities for specific recreational experiences. Under Alternative A, 499,588 acres would be proposed for SRMA designation; Alternatives C and E propose 522,604 acres for management within SRMAs. The impacts on wild horses would be the same as discussed for cultural resources above because minerals-related surface disturbances would be managed to ensure satisfactory recreational experiences. Wild horses would benefit indirectly from SRMA designation because OHV use and backcountry and front country activities would be controlled, which would reduce human harassment caused by noise and human presence.

Special designation areas under these alternatives would have impacts similar to those discussed above for SRMAs because these areas would be managed to protect and prevent irreparable damage to scenic, cultural, wildlife, and other natural systems. Thus, minerals-related surface disturbances would be constrained, OHV use would be limited to designated routes or prohibited, and habitat would be protected. Substantial areas are proposed for ACEC designation under these alternatives: Alternative A proposes 345,850 acres for ACEC management; Alternatives C and E propose 681,310 acres for management under ACEC special designations. This would have indirect beneficial impacts on wild horses similar to those for SRMAs because potential human-related wild horse harassment and human presence would be managed to protect the resource values within the ACECs, proposed wild and scenic river segments, and WSAs.

Travel management decisions under these alternatives would have beneficial impacts on wild horses by minimizing areas within the VPA that are open to cross-country OHV travel. Substantial portions of the VPA would either be closed to OHV use or would limit travel to designated routes. Under Alternative A, 6,202 acres would be open to cross-country OHV travel; Alternatives C and E would limit open OHV use to 5,434 acres. These management decisions would indirectly and beneficially preserve wild horse habitat and reduce potential human harassment of herds in the Winter Ridge HA and Hill Creek HMA.

Under Alternative E, 277,596 acres of non-WSA lands with wilderness characteristics would be managed to preserve their wilderness values. These areas would be managed under VRM Class I objectives, closed to OHV use, closed to woodland harvesting, closed to new road construction, and closed to oil and gas leasing. However, management of these areas would allow construction of wildlife waters and fuels treatments. These management decisions would indirectly benefit wild horses in the long term by reducing human presence and the potential for human harassment, and improve water availability and forage conditions in the long term.

Compared to Alternative D (No Action), Alternatives A, C and E would provide a higher degree of protection to wild horses by restricting some activities around designated cultural sites. More acres would be managed as SRMAs and ACECs, more area managed to limit surface disturbances, and greater restrictions would be placed on OHV travel under Alternatives A, C, and E for more beneficial indirect impacts on wild horses than under Alternative D (No Action).

4.20.2.1.3. ALTERNATIVE D (NO ACTION)

Alternative D does not specify designating Seep Ridge, Book Cliff Divide, and Atchee Ridge Roads as BLM Back Country Byways and allows for continued recreational use of the White River with minimal management oversight and unlimited and unconfined recreation in the Book Cliffs. Alternative D (No Action) would maintain current levels of adverse indirect, long-term impacts on wild horses in the HA and HMAs.

4.20.2.2. IMPACTS OF FIRE DECISIONS ON WILD HORSES

4.20.2.2.1. PROPOSED RMP AND ALTERNATIVE B

Fire management decisions would allow prescribed burning on 156,425 acres per decade within the VPA; however, there would be no impacts from fire decisions on wild horses, as in the long term all herds would be removed from the VPA.

4.20.2.2.2. ALTERNATIVES A, C, AND E

Fire management decisions for Alternatives A, C and E would allow for prescribed burning on 156,425 acres per decade (the same as under the Proposed RMP and Alternative B). Short-term, adverse impacts on wild horses, in the form of reduced forage and restricted use of these areas by wild horses, would occur in areas where prescribed burning was applied. However, these prescribed fires would be planned in areas where long-term benefits (including improved forage for wild horses) would be expected as a result of vegetation treatment. Compared to Alternative D (No Action), these alternatives would be more beneficial to wild horses in the long term because more area would be managed for prescribed fire vegetation treatments, which would have more long-term, indirect improvements on wild horse forage conditions.

4.1.1.1.1 Alternative D (No Action)

Fire management under Alternative D (No Action) would allow for prescribed fire on approximately 27,950 acres in the Book Cliffs area. Short-term, adverse impacts on wild horses, in the form of reduced forage and restricted use of these areas by wild horses, would occur in areas subject to such treatments. However, these prescribed fires would be planned in areas where long-term benefits would be realized as a result of the vegetation treatment.

Compared to the other alternatives, Alternative D (No Action) would provide the most protection to wild horses in the short term by potentially disturbing fewer acres of forage through fire treatments. However, the smaller acreage where prescribed burning would be allowed would have fewer beneficial impacts from improved forage in the long term.

4.20.2.3. Impacts of Forage Allocation Decisions on Wild Horses

4.20.2.3.1. Proposed RMP

Under the Proposed RMP, and in the long term, all wild horses would be removed from the VPA, but forage would be temporarily allocated to wild horses until they are removed within the Winter Ridge HA and the Hill Creek HMA. Short term forage allocations within the VPA to wild horses (in the Winter Ridge HA and the Hill Creek HMA) would total 2,340 AUMs. Wild horses were removed in the Bonanza area in 2001, and no forage allocations are proposed for that locality under the Proposed RMP. In the long term, the gradual decrease and reallocation of forage for wildlife and livestock would have no impact on wild horses because they would not be present. In the short term, allocation of forage for the Winter Ridge and Hill Creek localities would be beneficial to wild horses because forage would be available to them until final gathering and removal from the VPA. Compared to Alternative D (No Action), the wild horse forage allocation under the Proposed RMP would be less beneficial because in the long term wild horse forage would reallocated to wildlife and livestock.

4.20.2.3.2. Alternative A

Under this alternative, 2,940 AUMs would be allocated for wild horse herds in the Winter Ridge HA and Hill Creek HMA. This would have long term, beneficial impacts on wild horses because allocated forage would ensure the sustainability and health of herds in these localities. Compared to Alternative D (No Action), this alternative would be more beneficial to wild horse herds because more AUMs would be allocated under Alternative A.

4.20.2.3.3. Alternative B

This alternative would not allocate any forage AUMs to support wild horse herds until they were permanently removed from the VPA. Alternative B forage allocation decisions would have short term, adverse impacts on wild horses within the VPA because no forage would be allocated until gathering had been completed to remove horses from the VPA. The long term impacts would be the same as discussed under the Proposed RMP alternative because all wild horses would be removed from the VPA.

4.20.2.3.4. Alternatives C and E

Under these alternatives, wild horse forage allocations would be 3,960 AUMs: 1,020 AUMs would be allocated within the Bonanza HMA, 1,200 AUMs would be allocated within the Winter Ridge HA, and 1,740 AUMs would be allocated within the Hill Creek HMA. The impacts would be beneficial in the short term and long term because these allocations would provide for the dietary needs, health, and sustainability of wild horses within the VPA.

Proposed management decisions under Alternatives C and E stipulate that if forage conflicts between livestock and wild horses are identified in the Bonanza HMA, use by livestock and wild horses would be reduced, but the wild horse herd forage allocations would not be reduced below 480 AUMs. If forage conflicts are identified between wildlife and wild horses in the Bonanza

HMA, use by wildlife and wild horses would be reduced proportionally. . The impacts of these forage allocation decisions on wild horses would be adverse because reduced forage could affect herd size and health. If additional forage were available in the Bonanza HMA, wild horse use would be increased in accordance with available forage, which would be beneficial to the Bonanza HMA herd because the additional forage would support herd health and population sustainability.

Compared to Alternative D (No Action), these alternatives would be more beneficial because they would allocate more forage for wild horses than Alternative D (No Action) (3,360 AUMs).

4.20.2.3.5. Alternative D (No Action)

There would be no AUM allocation for a wild horse herd in the Winter Ridge HA under Alternative D (No Action) because all wild horses would be removed. Total forage allocation under this alternative would be 3,360 AUMs: wild horse forage in the Hill Creek HMA would be 2,340 AUMs, and forage allocations to wild horses in the Bonanza HMA would be 1,020 AUMs (Note: the 1,020 AUMs allocated in the Bonanza HMA was carried forward into Alternative D (No Action) in error, as the proposed Bonanza Herd Plan Amendment was never approved or implemented). Forage conflicts and additional forage allocations would remain unspecified in the Book Cliffs Locality (Hill Creek HMA and Winter Ridge HA) under Alternative D (No Action).

4.20.2.3.6. Summary of Alternatives for Forage Allocations Decisions

The Proposed RMP, and Alternatives B and D would provide the least protection to wild horses. In the Bonanza HMA, Alternatives C and E would be the most beneficial. In the Winter Ridge HA, Alternatives C and E would be the most beneficial. Alternatives C and E would allocate 1,020 AUMs in the Bonanza HMA. In the Winter Ridge HA and the Hill Creek HMA, the Proposed RMP would allocate the most AUMs (2,340 AUMs), however, the AUMs under the Proposed RMP would be temporarily allocated until the wild horses are removed. Alternative D (No Action) would allocate 2,340 AUMs in the Hill Creek HMA only. Alternatives A, C, and E would allocate 1,200 AUMs in Winter Ridge and 1,740 AUMs in Hill Creek.

4.20.2.4. Impacts of Minerals Development Decisions on Wild Horses

4.20.2.4.1. Proposed RMP and Alternative B

Under the Proposed RMP and Alternative B, all wild horses would be removed from the VPA. Horses would be temporarily authorized until they were removed; therefore, there would be short term direct and indirect impact to wild horses. Direct impacts from well drilling, and access road and infrastructure construction would reduce the AUMs available to wild horses. Indirect impacts would include the general effects of widespread activities that would create motion, noise, and other disturbances to horses.

4.20.2.4.2. ALTERNATIVE A

Alternative A would manage 240,247 acres within the HMAs and HA under Standard and Timing and Controlled Surface Use leasing stipulations, which is 89% of the total area proposed for wild horse management. Minerals development would have long-term direct and indirect, adverse impacts to wild horses. Direct impacts would reduce the AUMs available to wild horses, caused by well pad, infrastructure, and access road construction. Indirect impacts would include the general effects of widespread activities that would create noise, light, movement, human presence and associated disturbances to horses. The acreages that would be available for Standard and Timing and Controlled Surface Use leasing for the Proposed RMP and all alternatives are shown in Table 4.20.2 below. Compared to Alternative D (No Action), the impacts under Alternative A would be greater as more acreage would be affected by these leasing categories under Alternative A.

4.20.2.4.3. ALTERNATIVES C AND E

Under Alternative C, a total of 213,908 acres within the Bonanza and Hill Creek HMAs and the Winter Ridge HA (79% of the total area managed for wild horses within these areas) would be managed under Standard and Timing and Controlled Surface Use leasing stipulations. The impacts to wild horses would be the same as discussed under Alternative A. This is because of the relatively large percentage of these wild horse management areas that would be available for minerals leasing-related surface disturbances.

Alternative E would manage a total of 209,838 acres within the HMAs and HA under Standard and Timing and Controlled Surface Use leasing stipulations (78% of the total area). The impacts would be the same as discussed under Alternative A.

Compared to Alternative D (No Action), Alternatives C and E would have a lower percentage of the HMAs and HAs available for direct minerals-related surface disturbances under Standard and Timing and Controlled Surface Use leasing, with less directly adverse impacts to wild horse range.

4.20.2.4.4. ALTERNATIVE D (NO ACTION)

Under this alternative, the impacts from minerals development would be similar to those described under Alternative A except for the long-term adverse impacts to wild horses, which would maintain current minerals development designation on lands in the HMAs and HA. Minerals leasing under Standard and Timing and Controlled Surface Use would be allowed on 234,010 acres within the existing HMAs and HA. The total area available for Standard and Timing and Controlled Surface Use leasing within the existing HMAs and HA is 234,010 acres, which is 88% of the area currently managed for wild horses in the VPA.

Alternatives C and E would provide the highest degree of resource protection from minerals development by restricting minerals development in the HMAs and HA, followed by Alternative D (No Action). Alternatives A and B would provide no protection, as wild horses would be removed from the VPA.

Table 4.20.2. Acres of Standard and Timing and Controlled Surface-use Minerals Leasing within the HMAs and HA

	Bonanza HMA	Winter Ridge HA	Hill Creek HMA
Proposed RMP	0[1]	0	0
Alternative A	120,023 (96)[2]	20,438 (53)	99,786 (95)
Alternative B	0	0	0
Alternative C	120,000 (96)	7,253 (19)	86,655 (81)
Alternative D (No Action)	119,953 (96)	20,392 (52)	93,665 (91)
Alternative E	115,973 (93)	7,233 (23)	86,632 (81)

Source: BLM GIS 2008

[1] Under Proposed RMP and Alternative B, wild horse herds would be removed and the HMAs and HA would not be maintained.

[2] The number in parentheses is the percentage of the HMA or HA proposed for leasing under Standard and Timing and Controlled Surface Use leasing stipulations.

4.20.2.5. Impacts of Non-WSA Wilderness Area Decisions on Wild Horses

Decisions to protect non-WSA wilderness characteristics areas within the VPA are described under the Proposed RMP and Alternative E. Under the Proposed RMP, 1,378 acres of non-WSA lands with wilderness characteristics lie within the Bonanza HMA. Under Alternative E, 16,396 acres of wilderness characteristics lie within the Hill Creek HMA, and approximately 7,449 acres lie within the Bonanza HMA. The impacts of these decisions on wild horses would be beneficial in the long term because these non-WSA lands with wilderness characteristics that are within the above HMAs would be managed as closed to oil and gas leasing, and closed to woodland harvesting. These areas would also be either closed to cross-country OHV travel (under Alternative E) or would limit OHV travel to designated routes (under the Proposed RMP), managed under VRM I Class or Class II objectives, and managed to preserve their wilderness values. These decisions would have long-term, beneficial impacts on the VPA wild horse herds by restricting surface disturbances within the HMAs, by reducing the impacts to vegetation productivity, and by reducing the impacts of other human-caused disturbances on the herds (e.g., noise, OHV vehicle and human presence). Compared to Alternative D (No Action), this alternative would have more direct and indirect beneficial impacts because it would provide more protection to wild horses and to their range.

4.20.2.6. Impacts of Rangeland Improvements Decisions on Wild Horses

In those areas where wild horses would be maintained, wild horses would directly benefit in the long-term from rangeland improvements through efforts to improve forage and provide improved access to water. Any rangeland improvements would done as a case-by-case determination of need to maintain the health of the VPA herds and would include:

- Conducting vegetation treatments aimed at improving forage composition
- Constructing guzzlers or other reservoirs
- Constructing wells or improving springs
- Installing additional water pipelines

Rangeland improvements for the Proposed RMP and each alternative are shown below in Table 4.20.2.

4.20.2.6.1. PROPOSED RMP

Vegetation treatments for rangeland improvements under the Proposed RMP would occur on 5,750 fewer acres and 23 fewer wells/springs than Alternative D (No Action). Overall, the Proposed RMP would have beneficial long-term rangeland improvement impacts on wild horses similar to Alternative D, as the Proposed RMP would increase the number of guzzlers/reservoirs and miles of water pipeline over those proposed under Alternative D (No Action). Although wild horses would not be managed in the long term under this alternative (and would eventually be removed from the VPA), there would be beneficial impacts to wild horse populations from rangeland improvements until such time as horses are removed.

4.20.2.6.2. ALTERNATIVE A

Vegetation treatments for rangeland improvements under Alternative A would occur on 5,750 fewer acres and 23 fewer wells/springs (the same as discussed above under the Proposed RMP) than Alternative D (No Action). Alternative A would have beneficial long-term rangeland improvement impacts on wild horses similar to Alternative D (No Action), as Alternative A would increase the number of guzzlers/reservoirs and water pipeline miles over those proposed under Alternative D (No Action).

4.20.2.6.3. ALTERNATIVE B

Although wild horses are not managed under Alternative B from the VPA, there would be short term beneficial impacts to wild horse populations from rangeland improvements until such time as horses are removed, as discussed above under the Proposed RMP.

Table 4.20.2. Rangeland Improvements for the Proposed RMP and Each Alternative

	Proposed RMP and Alternative A	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D (No Action)	Alternative E
Vegetation Treatment (acres)	34,640	50,900	45,860	40,390	45,860
Fencing (miles)	68.5	368.5	129.0	65.0	129.0
Guzzlers/reservoirs	812	1,165	811	775	811
Wells/springs	51	78	87	74	87
Water pipeline (miles)	37.5	51.0	29.5	35.0	29.5

4.20.2.6.4. ALTERNATIVES C AND E

Under Alternatives C and E there would be an increased number of acres for vegetation treatment fencing, guzzlers/reservoirs, and wells/springs when compared to Alternative D (No Action). Consequently, Alternatives C and E would have more beneficial long-term impacts on wild horses than Alternative D.

4.20.2.6.5. ALTERNATIVE D (NO ACTION)

This alternative would continue the rangeland improvement currently scheduled to be completed in the areas associated with the wild horse HA and HMAs.

4.20.2.7. IMPACTS OF WILD HORSE DECISIONS ON WILD HORSES

4.20.2.7.1. PROPOSED RMP

4.20.2.7.1.1. Bonanza

The Proposed RMP would not reintroduce a wild horse herd into the Bonanza HMA, wild or feral horses present would be gathered and removed, and forage would be allocated for wild horse use until they were removed from the VPA. The area would be managed as a HA with no specific wild horse management plan, gap fencing and water development for wild horses would be constructed. The impacts to the wild horse herd within this HMA would be adverse in the long term because the herd would be eliminated from this management area.

4.20.2.7.1.2. Winter Ridge

Any wild or feral horses present would be gathered and removed, and forage would be allocated until removal. The area would be managed as a HA with no specific wild horse management plan. No horse grazing permits would be allowed within the HA to grazing permittees, including the Northern Ute Tribe and SITLA. A gathering plan would be prepared for removal of wild horses and these horses would be made available for adoption under the BLM's Adopt-A-Horse program. Also, the BLM would pursue an agreement with the Northern Ute Tribe and issue a MOU with for the gathering and removing of wild and feral horses on federal lands. The impacts to the wild horse herd in this HA would be adverse in the long term because the herd would be removed.

4.20.2.7.1.3. Hill Creek

Any wild or feral horses present would be gathered and removed, and forage would be allocated until their removal.

Under the Proposed RMP, the impacts to wild horse herds would be adverse in the long term because all wild horses would be removed from the VPA; individuals would be gathered and made available for adoption under the BLM's Adopt-a-Horse program, forage allocated until

their removal, and the same stipulations would apply as described above in Section 4.20.2.7.1.2 for Winter Ridge.

4.20.2.7.2. ALTERNATIVE A

4.20.2.7.2.1. Bonanza

The impacts to the Bonanza wild horse herd under Alternative A would be the same as discussed above for the Proposed RMP because the herd would not be maintained or re-introduced.

4.20.2.7.2.2. Winter Ridge

Under this alternative the Winter Ridge herd would be established and maintained with the population ranging between 50 and 100 horses, the HA would be designated as an HMA, and monitoring plan would be prepared. The impacts to the Winter Ridge herd would be beneficial in the long term because the herd population would be adjusted for health and sustainability, and because the population would be monitored under a Management Area Plan to ensure its health.

4.20.2.7.2.3. Hill Creek

The Hill Creek herd would be maintained at a minimum population of 70 horses, a range improvement program and MOU would be pursued with the North Ute Tribe and adjacent private land owners, and a 4-year gathering plan would be implemented. The boundaries of the HMA would be extended to include Wild Horse Bench and Big Pack Mountain (an increase of 53,212 acres). These proposed decisions would have long term beneficial impacts on the Hill Creek herd because the herd range would be expanded; a program would be developed to ensure herd and sustainability through a monitoring program.

Under this alternative, equine diseases could have adverse impacts on the VPA herds, affecting both the Northern Ute Tribe horses as well as wild horses because of the potential for contact between herds. However, proposed fence construction in key areas of concern for management of tribal and wild horse herds would likely reduce this impact.

Compared to Alternative D (No Action), this alternative would have more beneficial impacts on VPA wild horse herds because more specific management decisions and management plans would be implemented to ensure herd health and sustainability than under Alternative D (No Action).

4.20.2.7.3. ALTERNATIVE B

4.20.2.7.3.1. Bonanza, Winter Ridge, and Hill Creek

Horses were removed from the Bonanza HMA in 2001 and area was declared unpopulated. The area would be managed as a HA with no specific wild horse management plan. In the Winter Ridge HA, no horse grazing permits would be allowed or the immediate areas to grazing permittees including the Northern Ute Tribe and SITLA. Alternative B would have the same

impacts on wild horses as discussed under the Proposed RMP because all horses would be removed from the VPA.

4.20.2.7.4. ALTERNATIVES C AND E

4.20.2.7.4.1. Bonanza

Under Alternative C, a wild horse herd would be re-established with a minimum herd size of 40 horses, a herd management plan would be developed, fencing would be constructed to contain the herd, and additional herd watering areas would be developed. Under this alternative, a herd gathering plan would be developed and integrated with the BLM's Adopt-a-Horse Program. All of these management decisions would have long term, beneficial impacts on the Bonanza Herd because they would ensure that the re-established herd would remain healthy and sustainable by limiting the population to available management area forage allocations and water resources.

Alternative E proposes the same management decisions as discussed under Alternative C, so the impacts would be the same.

4.20.2.7.4.2. Winter Ridge

Alternatives C and E propose the same management decisions as Alternative A, so the impacts would be the same as discussed under that alternative.

4.20.2.7.4.3. Hill Creek

Under Alternatives C and E, the proposed management decisions for Hill Creek would be the same as proposed under Alternative A so the impacts would be the same.

4.20.2.7.5. ALTERNATIVE D (NO ACTION)

4.20.2.7.5.1. Bonanza

The impacts on wild horses would be the same as discussed under the Proposed RMP because wild horses would not be maintained within the Bonanza HA.

4.20.2.7.5.2. Winter Ridge

Under this alternative the Winter Ridge herd would not be maintained, and wild horses would be removed from the HA. The impacts would be adverse in the long term on wild horses within the VPA because the wild horse population would be reduced.

4.20.2.7.5.3. Hill Creek

The Hill Creek HMA would be managed for wild horses under this alternative, with an unspecified minimum herd size and a 195-horse maximum population size. Management decisions for this HMA are unspecified under the current RMP, which would have long term, adverse impacts on wild horses within the HMA. The impacts would be adverse because equine

disease concerns would not be addressed, no gathering plan would be developed to maintain the herd population within its forage allocations, no range improvements are specified, and Ute Tribe and private property boundary concerns would not be specifically addressed. Therefore, the long term health and sustainability of the herd would not be ensured.

4.20.2.8. SUMMARY

4.20.2.8.1. PROPOSED RMP AND ALTERNATIVE B

Under the Proposed RMP and Alternative B wild horses would be removed from the VPA. These alternatives would provide no protection to wild horse herds.

4.20.2.8.2. ALTERNATIVE A

Alternative A would have a high level of beneficial protection to wild horse herds because the herds would be maintained within the Winter Ridge HA and the Hill Creek HMA.

4.20.2.8.3. ALTERNATIVES C AND E

These alternatives would provide the highest degree of wild horse protection by re-establishing the Bonanza HMA, designating the Winter Ridge HA as a HMA, extending herd management boundaries, designating travel corridors, and providing the most range improvements.

4.20.2.8.4. ALTERNATIVE D (NO ACTION)

Alternative D (No Action) would provide some protection to wild horses, but less than Alternatives C and E by maintaining the Hill Creek HMA. This alternative would cause potentially less short-term disturbance to forage from fire treatment than the other alternatives and allocate more AUMs in the Hill Creek HMA than the other alternatives.

4.20.3. MITIGATION MEASURES

- Consider fencing major arterial roadways and major roads in the vicinity of oil and gas development areas to reduce the potential for vehicle-wild horse collisions.
- Use a staggered schedule for fire treatment within HMAs to reduce the short-term, adverse impacts to wild horses from treated areas that have been fenced off for vegetation regrowth.
- Coordinate equine disease testing with the State of Utah Veterinarian to ensure that wild horse herds remain healthy and do not impact Ute Tribe horses.
- Encourage Uintah County and the Ute Tribe to establish an equine disease-testing program.

4.20.4. UNAVOIDABLE ADVERSE IMPACTS

There are no unavoidable adverse impacts to wild horses if mitigation measures are implemented.

4.20.5. SHORT-TERM USE VERSUS LONG-TERM PRODUCTIVITY

The short-term resource uses associated with minerals development (such as seismic exploration and natural gas test well drilling, and the noise associated with these activities) in an area would have adverse impacts on the long-term productivity of wild horse herds if they impinge on wild horse foraging areas and water sources. These activities, though short term, would have cumulatively long-term adverse impacts on wild horse productivity if they continue sporadically throughout an area.

Short-term fire management activities, such as prescribed burning or other fire treatments would have beneficial impacts on the long-term productivity of the herds by increasing available forage. Dispersed recreational activities in an area, while individually short-term, would potentially have cumulative long-term impacts on wild horse herd productivity by preventing an area's use for shelter, forage, or as a water source.

4.20.6. IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE IMPACTS

Irretrievable impacts to the VPA wild horse herds would include the loss of forage in areas of minerals development. The construction and maintenance of access roads, drilling well pads, and support facilities would temporarily remove areas from vegetation production that would otherwise be available for wild horse forage or as shelter. Gap fencing to protect riparian areas would be an irretrievable loss of water resources for wild horses and would have an adverse impact on wild horses. Under Proposed RMP and Alternatives A and B, the complete removal of wild horses from the VPA would be an irretrievable loss of the wild horse resource. There are no irreversible impacts to the wild horse resource.