United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Green River District Office
Vernal Field Office
170 South 500 East
Vernal, UT 84078
http://www.blm.gov/ut/st/en/fo/vernal.html

April 7, 2010

In Reply Refer To:
4700 (UTG01000)

SCOPING NOTICE
For: Winter Ridge Herd Area Excess Wild Horse Gather and Removal Environmental Assessment

Description of Project

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Vernal Field Office (VFO) proposes to gather and remove excess wild horses from the Winter Ridge Herd Area (HA) located approximately 90 miles south of Vernal, Utah. This scoping notice is intended to solicit public comment on the proposed wild horse gather and removal. This scoping notice and map is posted on the BLM Utah website at: http://www.blm.gov/ut/st/en.html

The gather operations would include helicopter drive trapping. This capture method uses a helicopter to herd wild horses into a temporary corral (trap). Gathering is anticipated to start on or about September 15, 2010. The project may include holding horses on location for a minimum of 15 days for testing of Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA), an incurable contagious disease. Testing would be carried out by a licensed veterinarian and verified by an accredited laboratory. Should any horse test positive for EIA, the horse would be euthanized humanely and buried in the project area according to Utah State Law.

Relationship to Existing Plans and Documents

The Vernal Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP) Record of Decision ROD (2008) determined that the horses should be removed from the Winter Ridge HA. The proposed action is in conformance with, and is a direct implementation action of the VFO RMP ROD (2008), as per the management decision Wild Horses (WHB)-9 (page 140 of the ROD):

> *"All wild horses will be removed and, the Winter Ridge Herd Area will be declared unpopulated. The area will only be managed as an HA with no specific management*

plan for wild horses. Any horses present after the wild horses are removed are in trespass."

The Wild Horse and Burro Act (WHBA) established HAs. HAs are areas where wild horses may have historically existed at the time the WHBA was passed, but do not have designated populations for management. However, Wild Horse Herd Management Areas (HMAs) are designated for the management of a viable population of horses, and are established and confirmed through the RMP planning process. An HMA was not established for the Winter Ridge wild horses in the VFO RMP. Therefore, to conform with the ROD those horses must be removed.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

To comply with NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations, the BLM will prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) which serves several purposes. It discloses to the public the potential environmental consequences of the project and alternative(s); identifies all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the project and alternatives; and provides the responsible official with information upon which to make an informed decision regarding the project. The document will be prepared by an Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) of BLM resource specialists.

An essential element of the NEPA process is scoping. Scoping activities are initiated to identify reasonable alternatives to be evaluated in the environmental analysis that meet the purpose and need of the project. Through this process, environmental issues related to the proposed gather are identified; the depth of analysis for issues addressed in the environmental document determined, and potential mitigation identified.

This scoping notice has been prepared to describe the means by which governmental agencies, the public, and other interested parties may participate in and contribute to the analysis process. Public input is important in establishing the scope of analysis for any NEPA document and the BLM encourages public participation.

Timing Requirements

Please reference the Winter Ridge Herd Area Excess Wild Horse Gather and Removal EA when submitting your comments. Comments, including names, e-mail addresses, and street addresses of respondents will be available for public review at the BLM Vernal Field Office during regular business hours (7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday – Friday), except federal holidays. Comments and related personally-identifying information will be subject to disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and comments may be published as part of the EA and other related documents.

Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name, street address, or e-mail address from public review and disclosure under the FOIA, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your written comment. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or businesses will be made available for public inspection in their entirety. Anonymous comments will not be accepted.

Written comments will be accepted until the **close of business on May 10, 2010.** Please submit written comments to:

Mark Wimmer, NEPA Coordinator *or*
Dusty Carpenter, Natural Resource Specialist
BLM, Vernal Field Office
170 South 500 East
Vernal, Utah 84078
Phone: (435) 781- 4400
Fax: (435) 781- 4410
E-mail: UT_Vernal_Comments@blm.gov

Sincerely,

Michael G. Stiewig
Vernal Field Manager

Enclosure
Map of the Area of Interest