
WILD HORSE AND BURRO INITIATIVE

The 2011 budget request will begin implementing a new national management strategy for protecting America's iconic wild horses and the open lands on which they roam.

Since 1971, when Congress passed the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, the BLM has proudly managed the Nation's wild horses and burros. In four decades under BLM protection, wild horse populations that were once fast disappearing from the American scene have rapidly grown.

This success in reviving wild horse populations, however, has created a new set of challenges for BLM



and the landscapes they manage. The total wild horse and burro population is now approximately 69,000, including 37,000 roaming the public lands, and 32,000 held in expensive short-term corrals and long-term pastures. With no natural predators, wild horse populations on the range continue to grow. This population growth has been a contributing factor in steadily increasing program costs – from \$36.4 million in 2007, to \$51.6 million in 2009, to an estimated \$66.1 million in 2010. Additionally, arid western lands and watersheds cannot support a population this large without significant damage to the environment that threatens all wildlife species that depend on healthy rangelands, including wild horses. To prevent starvation of animals and to protect the lands from over-grazing, the BLM each

year moves thousands of wild horses to short-term corrals and long-term pastures.

The BLM's management strategy up to this point has primarily focused on removing animals from the range in an effort to reach appropriate management population levels, offering these gathered animals up for adoption, and placing any unadopted horses in holding facilities. However, declining adoption rates over the last several years and rising feed and fuels costs have led to skyrocketing holding costs. The current path of the wild horse and burro program is not sustainable for the animals, the environment, or the taxpayer.

To respond to these challenges, on October 7, 2009, Secretary Salazar announced a new comprehensive long-term plan to put the wild horse and burro program on a sustainable track. Full implementation of the plan requires increased funding in the short term and additional legislative authorities. The plan identifies three management strategies to improve the protection and management of wild horses: managing sustainable herds on western rangelands through the aggressive application of fertility control measures; establishing new wild horse preserves, primarily in the Midwest and East for horses that must be removed from western rangelands; and providing special designations for selected treasured herds in the West.

Wild horse population growth rates must be brought into balance with adoption demand to ensure that the herds on the western rangelands are kept at more sustainable levels. Only by reducing breeding populations will this program come into balance. The Secretary's plan will achieve sustainable populations on the range through far more aggressive use of fertility control than is currently practiced, active management of sex ratios on the range, and possibly the introduction of non-reproducing herds in some existing herd management areas. At the same time, the success of the plan depends on the placement of more animals into good homes by making adoptions more flexible where appropriate.

The BLM will establish a new set of wild horse preserves across the Nation, particularly on the productive grasslands of the Midwest and in the

East. Siting these preserves in areas outside the western States is necessary because water and forage are extremely limited in the West, and drought and catastrophic wildfire threaten both rangeland and animal health. These new preserves will be located on lands acquired by BLM or partners, and would be home to non-reproducing herds of wild horses. They will provide excellent opportunities to reduce the number of animals in short-term holding, celebrate the historic significance of wild horses, showcase these animals to the American public, and serve as natural assets that support local tourism and economic activity.

Lastly, the Secretary's plan will showcase certain unique herds on public lands in the West that deserve special recognition. These select herds

would be highlighted with Secretarial or possibly congressional designations. The special designations would highlight the unique qualities of America's wild horses, providing a focal point for publicity, environmental education, and increased eco-tourism that could boost economies and create jobs in nearby rural communities.

The 2011 BLM budget request includes \$75.7 million, an increase of \$12.0 million for the Wild Horse and Burro Management program to support implementation of the Secretary's plan. In addition, the BLM budget includes an increase of \$42.5 million in land acquisition funding to plan and purchase land for one wild horse preserve. The plan will enable BLM to achieve appropriate management population levels on the range by 2013.