



Excerpt from

The BLM's Proposed Fiscal Year 2011 Budget

Other Funding: The National Wild Horse and Burro Program

Putting the BLM's wild horse and burro program on a sustainable track is one of Secretary Salazar's top priorities. The Secretary's effort would, among other things, apply fertility-control measures to slow the population growth rates of wild horses and burros.

Under the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971, the BLM protects, manages, and controls wild horses and burros that roam across 31.8 million acres of western rangeland, including 26.6 million acres of BLM-managed land. As a result of rapid herd growth, the BLM must remove thousands of wild horses and burros from the range each year to protect public rangelands from the environmental effects of herd overpopulation. Currently, the free-roaming population of 37,000 wild horses and burros exceeds by more than 10,000 the number that the BLM has determined can exist in balance with other public rangeland resources and uses. The ecosystems of public rangelands are simply not able to withstand the impacts (such as soil erosion, reduced water quality, and damage to wildlife habitat) resulting from overpopulated herds, which have virtually no natural predators and grow at an average rate of 20 percent a year.

Today the BLM finds itself in the position of needing to gather overpopulated herds from western rangelands while public demand for adoptable horses has declined, leaving more than 34,000 wild horses and burros in

holding facilities. In the current fiscal year, the cost to operate these facilities is approximately \$35 million out of the BLM's wild horse and burro program budget of \$63.9 million. Taking note of the BLM's spiraling holding costs and recognizing the agency's limited options concerning unadoptable horses, the Government Accountability Office issued a report in October 2008 that found the Bureau to be at "critical crossroads." In response to this untenable situation, Secretary Salazar announced on October 7, 2009, a new initiative aimed at putting the BLM's wild horse and burro program on a sustainable track.

To advance the Secretary's efforts toward program sustainability, the President's FY 2011 BLM budget proposal requests \$75.9 million for the wild horse and burro program, a \$12 million increase over the FY 2010 level of \$63.9 million. The budget proposal makes a separate, but related, land-acquisition funding request of \$42.5 million for the purchase of land for one wild horse preserve.

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