



BLM and Border Patrol Expand Mustang Partnership - By Stephen A. Baker

The BLM was proud to see the recent addition of four more wild horses to the ranks of the United States Border Patrol. The adopted mustangs arrived on station at the Border Patrol's Laredo (Texas) Sector in late December, bringing to nearly 50 the number of wild horses drawn from public lands that are now on the front lines of homeland security.

Laredo Sector Chief Patrol Agent Robert L. Harris officially introduced the four mustangs at a press event in Laredo December 22. "These mustangs are American 'living legends' and will now be working to protect America's borders," Chief Harris said. When fully operational in January 2010, the Laredo mounted patrol will join other mustang units already patrolling sectors in New Mexico, California, and Washington state.

The mustangs were gathered from western public lands in the normal course of herd management. They were trained by inmates in a rehabilitation program at a Colorado correctional facility in Cañon City, then adopted by the Border Patrol in late 2009. The four adopted mustangs arrived in Laredo without names, so the Border Patrol will enlist the help of local schoolchildren to name their new mounted guardians.

"The relationship between the BLM and the Border Patrol is a great example of a government that works for the American people," said Paul McGuire, BLM regional spokesperson. "This is truly a win-win situation. The BLM finds good homes for these national treasures, and the Border Patrol gets horses that are uniquely suited to their critical mission."

The Laredo Sector operated a horse patrol many years ago, but leaders discontinued the program in 1991 when other resources became available. Although motorized vehicles have helped the sector gain greater control of the border, Chief Harris decided to re-establish a horse patrol to help improve coverage in some remote areas.

"There are some locations within the Laredo Sector area of responsibility where horses offer a tactical advantage over motorized vehicles," Chief Harris said. "Horses can often get to places that a truck or ATV cannot reach."

The horses are also cost effective, the chief noted. Border Patrol pays about \$1,000 for each horse (adoption plus training fee), which is much less than it costs to buy trained stock on the open market. As an added bonus, the horses are hauled in trailers seized from drug smugglers apprehended in the border region near Mexico.

"We will get 10 to 15 years of service from each of these horses. That is a great return on our investment," Chief Harris said.

In addition to helping secure our nation's borders, BLM mustangs adopted by the Border Patrol have also been showcased in such high-profile events as the Presidential Inaugural Parade, the St. Patrick's Day Parade in Chicago, and the Cheyenne Frontier Days Rodeo.

About Managing Wild Horses and Burros

The BLM protects, manages, and controls wild horses and burros under the authority of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971, to ensure that healthy herds thrive on healthy rangelands. The BLM is charged with determining "appropriate management levels" (AML) of wild horses and burros. This is the number of animals that can exist in balance with other public uses of the land. Wild horses and burros have virtually no natural predators, so their herd sizes can double about every

four years. Presently, about 37,000 wild horses and burros roam BLM-managed lands in the West, a population that exceeds AML by some 10,350.

About Adopting Wild Horses and Burros

To help bring herd populations into balance with rangeland conditions – which are often affected by drought and wildfire – the BLM gathers several thousand wild horses and burros from public rangelands each year and offers them for adoption or sale to individuals and groups willing and able to provide humane, long-term care. Adoption events are held in communities throughout the United States and at BLM facilities located mostly in the West and Plains. Internet adoptions are also held on a regular basis.

About the Colorado Wild Horse Inmate Program (WHIP)

Cañon City houses BLM's largest wild horse and burro holding facility, and is one of several correctional facilities in the nation with a Wild Horse Inmate Program (WHIP). The WHIP is a cooperative agreement between BLM and the Colorado Department of Corrections (www.coloradoci.com/serviceproviders/whip/index.html?intro), in which select wild horses and burros receive training by inmates in a rehabilitative program. Animals are then made available to the public for adoption. This unique program not only adds value to the horses, it also helps inmates develop important life skills – such as discipline and respect – that will aid in their eventual reintroduction into society.

