

In Reply Refer To:
4710 (WYD05)

February 17, 2012

Scoping Notice

For Gathering of Wild Horses in the North Lander Complex (Muskrat Basin, Rock Creek Mountain, Conant Creek and Dishpan Butte Herd Management Areas) “Population Management Action”

Description of Project

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Lander Field Office, proposes to gather wild horses from the North Lander Complex of herd management areas (HMAs) (see attached map), including wild horses outside the HMAs. The following table identifies each of the HMAs within the North Lander Complex and the appropriate management level (AML) range for each HMA:

Herd Management Area	Low AML	High AML
Muskrat Basin	160	250
Rock Creek Mountain	50	85
Conant Creek	60	100
Dishpan Butte	50	100
Total AML of Complex	320	535

The proposed operation would include gathering wild horses and conducting fertility control treatments on the population. Population surveys were conducted in August 2011 and the current estimated population is 750 individuals. The gather operation would include helicopter drive trapping. This capture method utilizes a helicopter to herd and trap wild horses.

Relationship to Existing Plans and Documents

The proposed action is in conformance with the Lander Herd Management Plan approved on August 30, 1983 and the Lander Resource Management Plan (RMP) approved on June 9, 1987. AML levels for wild horses within the North Lander Complex of HMAs were agreed upon with private land owners and wild horse advocacy groups and approved in EA# WY036-EA3-010 on February 25, 1993.

This action is needed to slow population growth, maintain population size within the AMLs, manage wild horses within the HMAs designated for management, and extend the time before another gather would be needed to remove excess wild horses. By maintaining population size within the AML, rangeland resources would be sustained and protected from the deterioration associated with wild horse overpopulation. This strategy ensures a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship on public lands in the area, and is consistent with the provisions of Section 3(b) (2) of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971.

The proposed management action is in conformance with the August 2003 Consent Decree upheld by the United States District Court of Wyoming. The Consent Decree is a settlement agreement between the State of Wyoming and the United States Department of the Interior, BLM.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

To comply with the NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations which implement the NEPA, the BLM is required to prepare an environmental analysis. The environmental document will serve several purposes. It will provide both the public and the governmental agencies with information about the potential environmental consequences of the project and alternatives; identify all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the project and alternatives; and provide the responsible official with information upon which to make an informed decision regarding the project. The document will be prepared by an interdisciplinary team made up of BLM resource specialists.

One essential element of the NEPA process is scoping. Scoping activities are initiated early in the process to: identify reasonable alternatives to be evaluated in the environmental analysis; identify environmental issues of concern related to the proposed gather; determine the depth of analysis for issues addressed in the environmental document; and identify potential mitigation.

Known resource issues or potential conflicts include: recreational activities such as hunting, wildlife and wild horse viewing; special status plant species; wildlife, and special status wildlife species; historic trails; oil and gas drilling and utility construction; fertility control vaccine; and livestock grazing.

This scoping statement has been prepared to describe means by which governmental agencies, the general 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

The public is encouraged to participate throughout the environmental analysis process and to help identify the level of analysis needed, alternatives, other issues or concerns that should be analyzed, mitigation opportunities, and any other comments or ideas, to help ensure the completeness of the document.

The BLM would appreciate receiving substantive comments on this scoping letter within 30 days from the date of this letter. Questions and written comments would be most helpful if received on or before March 19, 2012.

Please submit your comments to:

Scott Fluor, Wild Horse and Burro Specialist
BLM Lander Field Office
1335 Main Street
Lander, Wyoming 82520
Phone: (307) 332-8400
Fax: (307) 332-8444
Email: BLM_WY_North_Lander_Gather@blm.gov
(Please include "North Lander Complex Scoping Comments" in the subject line.)

This scoping notice and all other documents corresponding with this action will be posted on the BLM Wyoming website at:

<http://www.blm.gov/wy/st/en/info/NEPA/documents/lfo/N-Lander-gather.html>

The website can be accessed by the general public. The preliminary environmental assessment will be posted to this site, and there will be a 30-day comment period. You may obtain a paper copy of these documents by contacting the Lander Field Office at the addresses and/or phone numbers listed above.

Sincerely,



Rick Vander Voet
Lander Field Manager

Enclosure:

1 - Map