

# Adobe Town/Salt Wells Creek (ATSW) Complex Wild Horse Gather Questions & Answers

***Q. Why is this gather necessary?***

**A.** The projected wild horse population in the ATSW Complex is above the Appropriate Management Level (AML) and the BLM will gather excess wild horses to reduce the number back to low AML.

The BLM manages the nation's public lands for multiple uses (wild horses, wildlife habitat, livestock grazing, etc.), in accordance with the 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act. Under the authority of the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act (as amended by Congress in 1976, 1978, 1996, and 2004), the BLM manages, protects, and controls wild horses and burros. This law requires the BLM to remove excess wild horses and burros from the range to sustain the health and productivity of public lands. The gather and removal of excess wild horses is necessary to ensure healthy herds thrive on healthy rangelands.

The BLM has a mandate to manage for multiple uses (wild horses, wildlife habitat, livestock grazing, etc.) on public land in balance with each other.

The BLM must also comply with the Consent Decree with the State of Wyoming, and the Consent Decree with private land owners. The BLM respects private land owner rights while managing wild horse populations. The ATSW Complex includes approximately 510,308 acres which are privately controlled. This gather would reduce landowner conflicts where the wild horses stray onto private lands.

***Q. How many wild horses will be gathered and how many will be removed from the range?***

**A.** The projected population by summer 2013 is approximately 1,447 wild horses. The estimated wild horse population is based on the May 2012 census flights, adjusted for two years' foal crop. Of the estimated 1,447 wild horses, approximately 586 are above the low AML for the ATSW Complex.

<u>ATSW Complex</u>	<u>Number of Wild Horses</u>	<u>Appropriate Management Level (AML)</u>	<u>Number of Wild Horses Above Low AML</u>
Population Surveys May 2012	1,005		
2012/2013 Foaling Seasons	442		
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,447</b>	<b>861-1,165</b>	<b>586</b>



**Q. How many wild horses will be returned to the Complex?**

A. Approximately 643 wild horses would be returned to the Complex, roughly 321 studs and about 250 Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP) fertility control treated mares and 72 untreated studs, mares and/or foals. It is estimated the ungathered population in this Complex, approximately 10-20 percent or 144-289 wild horses, consist of an assumed sex ratio of 50 percent stallions and 50 percent mares.

<u>Wild Horses Returned to the ATSW Complex</u>	<u>Number of Wild Horses</u>
Studs	321
PZP Fertility Control Treated Mares	250
Untreated Studs, Mares and/or Foals	72
<b>Total</b>	<b>643</b>

**Q. How did you come up with the number to be returned to the Complex?**

A. The number of wild horses to be returned to the Complex was calculated using the following formula:

1,447 (projected population) x 85 percent (gather efficiency)\* = 1,229 (wild horses gathered)  
 1,447 (projected population) – 1,229 (wild horses gathered) = 218 (the estimated 15 percent not gathered)  
 861 (low AML) – 218 (the 15 percent wild horse population not gathered) = 643 (the number of wild horses to be returned to the Complex.)

**Wild Horses Returned to the ATSW Complex**

1,447	Projected Population	1,447	Projected Population	861	Low AML
x .85	Gather Efficiency	- 1,229	Wild Horses Gathered	- 218	Not Gathered
=====		=====		=====	
1,229	Wild Horses Gathered	218	Not Gathered	643	Returned

\*Gather efficiency: not all wild horses will be gathered during an operation. Some wild horses may be unobservable in draws, ravines, and wooded areas.

**Q. What is the Appropriate Management Level for the ATSW Complex?**

A. Appropriate Management Level: 861-1,165  
 Current Population Estimate: 1,447 (586 to be removed)

**Q. What will the remaining herd population of this Complex be?**

A. There will be approximately 861 wild horses in the ATSW Complex after the gather.

**Q. Why are the Adobe Town and Salt Wells Creek Herd Management Areas (HMAs) managed collectively as a Complex?**

A. In 2003, the Rock Springs and Rawlins field offices began administering the two HMAs under joint cooperative management because there are no physical or geographical boundaries to restrict movement of wild horses between the two HMAs.

***Q. What are the governing court cases?***

**A.** There are two court cases. The proposed action in this EA fulfills the following commitments in the 2013 Consent Decree:

- The BLM will report wild horse census results for the ATSW Complex to the Rock Springs Grazing Association by Nov. 30 of each year.
- If the BLM determines the wild horse population is likely to exceed AML in the ATSW Complex, the Bureau shall adjust its annual work plan to gather and remove excess wild horses so that the population is reduced to the low range of AML.
- If the numbers are likely to exceed 200 wild horses within the checkerboard portion of the ATSW Complex, the BLM shall prepare to remove the wild horses from the private lands.
- The BLM commits to gather and remove wild horses from the checkerboard portion of the ATSW Complex in 2013.
- The BLM retains discretion to implement all available fertility control methods in an attempt to achieve the low AML.
- Future population levels will be estimated by assuming a project reproduction rate of 20 percent annual increase.

The proposed action in the EA also complies with the August 2003 Consent Decree with the State of Wyoming regarding reducing wild horse populations in Wyoming to the AML. This out-of-court settlement was executed through the U.S. District Court for Wyoming (No. 03 CV 169D). Terms of the Agreement to be completed to maintain compliance with Wyoming Consent Decree include:

- If BLM determines through its inventory and projected reproduction rates that the wild horse population are likely to exceed AML in the following Fiscal Year, the BLM shall request funds to reduce the population to AML by December 15 of the next budget cycle year.

If the BLM fails to reduce the number of wild horses to AML by the required date, the State may petition the court to compel the BLM to do so.

***Q. Will BLM spay mares or geld stallions in the future?***

**A.** The BLM is trying to find alternative ways to keep horse populations within the AML and will continue to explore these options.

***Q. Is the BLM using any other population control method during this gather?***

**A.** Yes. Approximately 250 mares returned to the ATSW Complex will be treated with a Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP) vaccine during this gather.

***Q. Where do the removed wild horses go?***

**A.** Wild horses removed from the ATSW Complex will be initially shipped to short-term holding facilities located in Rock Springs, Wyoming and Cañon City, Colorado where they will be aged, dewormed, blood tested for Equine Infectious Anemia (known as EIA or Coggins Test), vaccinated, freeze marked and prepared for either the BLM's adoption program or long-term holding pastures in the Midwest.

After being prepared for adoption, horses will also be shipped to both of Wyoming's training facilities – the Mantle Ranch located in Wheatland, and the Wyoming Honor Farm located in Riverton, where they will be gentled in order to have a better chance of being adopted.

***Q. How will this gather affect wildlife?***

**A.** The removal of excess wild horses from the public rangelands is carried out to maintain rangeland health. Wildlife benefit from the management of wild horses by balancing forage and water sources so all species utilizing public rangelands will be healthier.

***Q. Is the BLM removing horses to make room for more cattle grazing?***

**A.** No. The removal of wild horses and burros from public rangelands is carried out to ensure rangeland health, in accordance with land-use plans that are developed in an open, public process. These land-use plans are the means by which BLM carries out its core mission, which is to manage the land for multiple uses while protecting the land's resources. Authorized livestock grazing on BLM-managed land has declined by nearly 50 percent since the 1940s; actual (as distinguished from authorized) livestock grazing on public rangelands has declined by 30 percent since 1971.

***Q. Why is the BLM removing wild horses when there are already more than 49,258 mustangs in holding facilities?***

**A.** The ecosystems of public rangelands are not able to withstand the impacts from overpopulated herds, which include soil erosion, sedimentation of streams and damage to wildlife habitat. As for the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, Section 1333 of that law mandates that once the Interior Secretary "determines...on the basis of all information currently available to him, that an overpopulation exists on a given area of the public lands and that action is necessary to remove excess animals, he shall immediately remove excess animals from the range so as to achieve appropriate management levels."

Currently, the western rangeland free-roaming population of more than 31,500 wild horses (as of February 2012) exceeds by nearly 11,000 animals the number BLM has determined can exist in balance with other public rangeland resources and uses. Although the BLM tries to place as many removed animals as possible into private care through adoption or sales, the public's demand for adoptable wild horses has declined sharply in recent years, primarily due to economic hard times.

***Q. Why is the BLM removing horses that appear to be or are in good condition?***

**A.** The BLM gathers horses with different body conditions, including some that appear to be or are in good condition. The agency pro-actively gathers excess animals from overpopulated herds on a three-to-five year cycle to prevent worst-case scenarios in which removed wild horses would be emaciated because of insufficient forage on the range.

***Q. What happens to wild horses that are not adopted?***

**A.** Unadopted horses are fed and cared for in either short-term corrals or long-term Midwestern pastures. Wild horses more than 10 years old and those passed over for adoption at least three times become eligible for sale, a transaction in which the title of ownership to the animal passes immediately from the Federal government to the buyer. (In the adoption process, the title of ownership passes from the Federal government to the adopter after the individual provides one year of humane care.) While a December 2004 law granting the BLM sale authority authorizes the agency to sell sale-eligible animals "without limitation," the Bureau has not been, and is not selling any wild horses to slaughterhouses or to "killer buyers." All horses in holding retain their status as "wild" animals and remain under the BLM's protection.

***Q. Will any of the wild horses be sent to slaughter?***

**A.** No. As noted above, while a December 2004 amendment to the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act authorizes the BLM to sell sale-eligible animals "without limitation," the BLM has not been, and is not selling any wild horses to slaughterhouses or to "killer buyers."

***Q. What veterinary treatment will the removed wild horses receive?***

**A.** The horses will be aged (based on the condition of their teeth), de-wormed, vaccinated, blood-tested, and freeze marked (marked with a cold brand).

***Q. Will there be any public viewing opportunities at the trap site?***

**A.** Yes, although the gather is located on the checkerboard pattern of mixed private, public, and state land ownership, every opportunity will be made available for public viewing of gather operations. To view the gather, you must contact public affairs 24 hours in advance to have your name listed on the daily anticipated visitor's log. The public affairs contact will inform those on the daily visitors log where and when to meet each morning to be escorted to the designated safety zone near the trap site. This will allow appropriate staffing for public viewing needs, and also allow visitors instant notification if a trap site needs to be moved, or gather operations suspended due to weather or logistics.

***Q. How far, in relation to the trap site, are the wild horses and foals being herded?***

**A.** The trap site locations have not been determined at this time, but BLM strives to minimize the distance wild horses must be herded.

***Q. Why does BLM use helicopters to gather wild horses?***

**A.** Agencies were granted the authority to use helicopters with the passage of FLPMA in 1976 with the assumption that gathers could be conducted more efficiently and effectively. But more importantly today, the use of helicopters has proven to be more humane than other types of gather methods when large numbers of animals need to be removed over wide areas or rugged terrain. Helicopters are able to move horses and burros at a proper pace; moreover, helicopter pilots can keep mares and foals together better than a horseback rider and can also better move the animals around such barriers as deep ravines, fences or roads.

***Q. Why is the BLM allowing a federally indicted and convicted contractor to gather the horses?***

**A.** Mr. Dave Cattoor, a contractor whose company has been gathering and removing wild horses on behalf of the BLM since 1975, pled guilty to a misdemeanor count of "Use of Aircraft to Capture Wild Horses" on May 22, 1992. The incident to which he pled guilty occurred while his company was performing work on non-BLM lands for the Duckwater Indian Tribe in Nevada. Tribal members who were involved in the same legal case were later found innocent of all charges stemming from the incident. Mr. Cattoor has met and continues to meet all pertinent Federal regulations, which include certifying that no company employees have been convicted of animal cruelty charges. Mr. Cattoor's company has consistently demonstrated its ability to safely, effectively, and humanely capture and handle wild horses and burros.

***Q. Does the BLM or the contractors use whips to move the horses through the pens and chute?***

**A.** No. The BLM or the gather contractors do not use whips. Flags or noise-making paddles are used to move horses through the pens and chutes. The flags are usually made by attaching a plastic grocery bag to the end of a sorting stick or buggy whip. The flag prevents the stick or whip from hitting the horse with any sort of impact or sting to it. Seeing and hearing the plastic flag motivates the animal to move away from the source of the stimulus. This technique is similar to those used for domestic and wild horses being trained using resistance-free methods.

***Q. How many wild horses are in Wyoming?***

**A.** Wyoming BLM has 16 HMAs statewide and an AML range of 2,490 to 3,725 wild horses. The FY 2013 Wild Horse and Burro Public Lands Statistics for Wyoming (February 2013), shows the current population estimated at approximately 3,459 wild horses.

***Q. Where may I learn more about the Wild Horse and Burro Program?***

**A.** Please visit the BLM's Website at [www.blm.gov](http://www.blm.gov).