

## II. ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED AND A DESCRIPTION OF EACH ALTERNATIVE

This Section describes the Proposed Action and alternatives including any that were considered but eliminated from detailed analysis. Alternatives analyzed in detail include the following:

1. Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) Removal of Excess Horses from the Adobe Town and Salt Wells Creek HMAs
2. Alternative 2 Removal of Excess Horses from the Adobe Town and Salt Wells Creek HMAs and administration of Fertility Control to selected released mares.
3. Alternative 3 (No Action) - No Gather/Removal of Horses

### Proposed Action and Alternatives

#### Alternative 1 (Proposed Action)

Under this alternative, BLM would implement a population management strategy for both the Adobe Town and Salt Wells Creek HMAs in which wild horses would be managed in a range from 600-800 adult horses in the Adobe Town HMA and 251-365 adult horses in the Salt Wells Creek HMA. Further details associated with the Proposed Action are contained in APPENDIX A.

This alternative would involve capturing approximately 1,100 wild horses from the Adobe Town HMA and I80 South, returning about 600 adult horses and their colts to the Adobe Town HMA, and removing the remainder of the horses. Approximately 480 adult wild horses and their colts would be captured in the Salt Wells Creek HMA and approximately 30 wild horses outside of the HMA, returning approximately 251 mature animals to the HMA, and removing the remainder of the horses. BLM would also record sex, age, color of the captured horses. Blood samples would be collected for genetic analysis. Individual animals would be sorted as to age, size, sex, and/or physical condition. Selected animals would then be returned to the range, while excess wild horses would be sent to Bureau facilities for adoption or long term holding.

Alternative 1 was developed based on the need to remove excess wild horses in order to manage the range for a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship and to prevent range deterioration. The removal of wild horses under this alternative would ensure that the wild horses remaining within the HMAs have adequate forage and water to survive and maintain satisfactory physical condition. Removal of excess wild horses would also help to sustain the long-term productivity of the rangeland resources on the public lands that wild horses depend.

The following actions are included in Alternative 1:

- Gather operations would be conducted in accordance with the Standard BLM Operating Procedures for Wild Horse Removal. The helicopter drive method would be used for this gather, and would include multiple gather sites. To the extent possible gather sites (traps) would be located in previously disturbed areas. Post-gather, every effort would be made to return released animals to the same general area from which they were gathered.
- An Animal and Plant Inspection Service (APHIS) veterinarian may be on-site, as needed, to examine animals and make recommendations to BLM for care and treatment of wild horses. On-site inspection by a APHIS veterinarian is required for any animals to be transported across State borders. A veterinarian would be consulted prior to euthanasia in accordance with Washington Office Instruction Memorandum (IM) 2001-165.
- Animals would be removed using a selective removal strategy. That strategy is subject to periodic adjustment and is currently guided by Washington Office IM 2002-095. Specific criteria to be employed for this gather are found in the respective Gather Plans.

The National selective removal criteria would be followed to the extent possible. Exceptional animals that represent historic colors, size and/or confirmation may be chosen for release outside of the selective removal priorities. Weak,

unhealthy and unthrifty animals would not be selected for release back onto the HMA.

- Blood samples may be acquired to determine whether or not BLMs management is maintaining acceptable genetic diversity. The blood samples would be collected from horses returned to the HMA, if possible. Other data including sex and age, reproduction, survival, condition, color, size and other information may also be recorded, along with the disposition of that animal (removed or released).

**Alternative 2 Removal of Excess Horses from the Adobe Town and Salt Wells Creek HMAs and administration of Fertility Control to selected released mares**

This alternative would be exactly the same as the proposed Action, except that, after capture and prior to release, selected mares would receive fertility control treatment in accordance with the protocols detailed in Appendix 2 of the Adobe Town Gather Plan. Horses will be captured and handled essentially the same whether fertility control is administered or not. The fertility control vaccine is, as yet, still experimental and its use is regulated by the provisions of the Investigational New Animal Drug exemption (INAD #8857) filed with the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA). This exemption is held by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). As a condition of using the PZP vaccine, the HSUS expects the BLM to follow the Draft Criteria for Immunocontraceptive Use in Wild Horse Herds recommended by the Wild Horse and Burro National Advisory Board in August 1999.

**Alternative 3 (No Action)**

Although Alternative 3 (No Action) does not comply with the 1971 Act, as amended, nor meet the purpose and need for this action, it is included as a basis for comparison with the action alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, no gathering would take place. The herd would be allowed to increase until it reached levels where predation and environmental factors, coupled with density-dependant adjustments in reproductive rates stabilized the populations. Considering the limited forage and water availability due to the continuing drought conditions in the Adobe Town and Salt Wells Creek HMAs, it is anticipated that selection of this alternative could result in a rapid decline in the physical condition of the wild horses in the near future from increasing competition for available forage and water.

## **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM FURTHER ANALYSIS**

### **Using Fertility Control Measures Only To Regulate Wild Horse Populations.**

Demographic analysis has determined that fertility control alone would not achieve AML within 30 years and therefore was not analyzed further. This principle has been documented amongst a variety of animal species with the variability well correlated to the longevity of the species. More simply put, it takes longer for fertility control alone to regulate a population of animals that has an average lifespan of twenty+ years than it does for an average lifespan of <5 years. That demographic analysis revealed that in the short term the wild horse population would continue to increase steadily for about seven years and then decline gradually for the next 23 years to reach its lowest level. Starting with the existing population and employing fertility control alone in the Adobe Town HMA would result in a population of approximately 914 adult wild horses after 30 years which would still exceed the AML by 214 wild horses. During the course of this 30-year period, approximately 28,000 horses would have to be gathered and 12,000 females treated in the Adobe Town HMA, alone.

### **Closure Of HMAs To Livestock Grazing**

This alternative was not analyzed in detail because the Act does not provide for arbitrary reduction in domestic livestock use unless areas are first established for the exclusive use of wild horses.

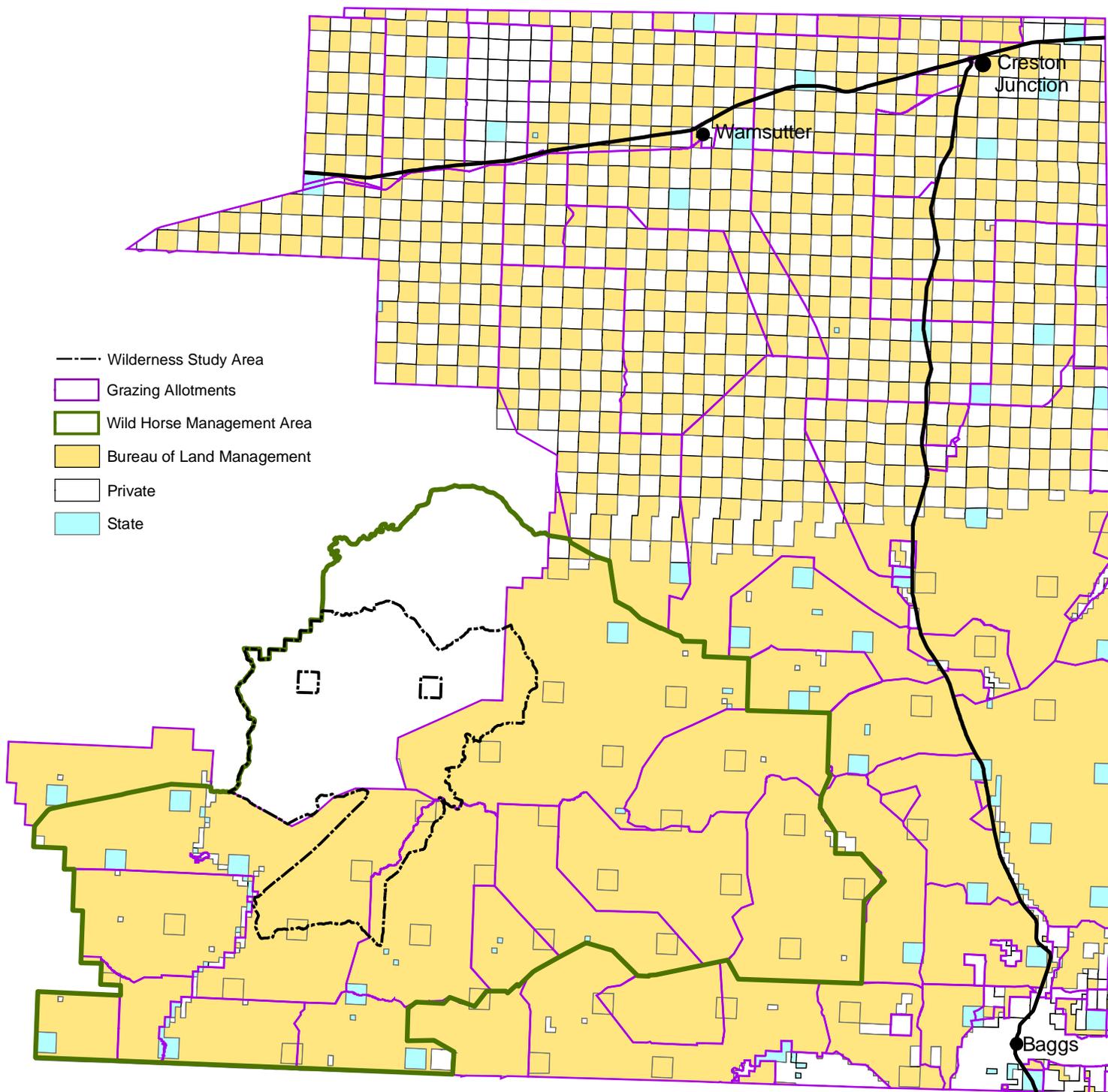
### **Elimination Of All Wild Horses From The HMAs**

This alternative was not analyzed in detail because the land use planning process has affirmed that the public, in general, wishes to see the Act complied with and wishes to have healthy horses on healthy habitats within the area.

### **Increase Or Decrease AMLs Within The HMAs**

This alternative was not analyzed in detail because the ongoing monitoring of the effects of all uses on the habitat within the HMAs incorporates regular, periodic review and indicated adjustment of the AML and other authorized uses. This was evidenced by the adjustments in AMLs and HMAs completed in 1994.

# Map1a-Adobe Town HMA and I-80 South



- Wilderness Study Area
- Grazing Allotments
- Wild Horse Management Area
- Bureau of Land Management
- Private
- State



0 4,050 8,100 16,200 24,300 Meters

0 1 2 4 6 8 10 Miles

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# Map1B-Salt Wells Creek HMA and I-80 South

