



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

High Desert District
Rock Springs Field Office
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Rock Springs, Wyoming 82901-3447
www.blm.gov/wy



In Reply Refer To:
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DEC 06 2013

Scoping Statement Great Divide Basin Wild Horse Herd Management Area (HMA) Population Management Action

Description of Project

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Rock Springs Field Office (RSFO) proposes to gather excess wild horses from the Great Divide Basin HMA. The RSFO proposes to adhere to the April 3, 2013 Court Ordered Consent Decree, to remove all wild horses that have strayed onto private lands (checker board) within the Great Divide Basin Herd Management Area (HMA). The Low Appropriate Management Level (AML) of 415 wild horses would be maintained north of the checker board lands. Excess wild horses would be removed and the remainder may be relocated in the northern part of the Great Divide Basin HMA as supported by the Green River Resource Management Plan (RMP). The project may also utilize a fertility control vaccine on wild horses in the HMA.

Background

Land owners have requested the removal of wild horses from private lands within the HMA boundaries. Wild horses that are on private lands or checkerboard lands within the HMA would be gathered and removed. Wild horses in the remainder of the Great Divide Basin HMA would be gathered and removed to the low AML. After the BLM and Rock Springs Grazing Association (RSGA) entered into a settlement, the United States District Court for the District of Wyoming issued a Consent Decree and Joint Stipulation for Dismissal on April 3, 2013. The Consent Decree provides a gather schedule to remove wild horses from private lands including the checkerboard area of unfenced private and public lands.

The most recent population survey revealed approximately 439 wild horses residing within the HMA. Census data for this HMA was collected May 22-23, 2012, and wild horse populations were currently within the AML established for this HMA. Wild horse populations will increase approximately 15% yearly based on previous fertility control. The population is currently estimated at 504 for 2013 and the wild horse population is predicted to be 579 the summer of 2014. The AML range for the Great Divide Basin HMA is 415-600 wild horses as identified in the Green River RMP. Approximately 164 excess wild horses would be removed. New data gathered prior to the gather may fluctuate the number of wild horses removed.

The gather operations would include helicopter drive trapping. This capture method utilizes a helicopter to herd wild horses into a temporary trap. Gathering is anticipated to start after July 1, 2014. The project may utilize a fertility control vaccine.

Relationship to Existing Plans and Documents

The proposed action is in conformance with the Green River RMP approved on August 8, 1997.

The Green River RMP objectives for management of wild horses are to: 1) protect, maintain, and control viable, healthy herds of wild horses while retaining their free-roaming nature; 2) provide adequate habitat for free-roaming wild horses through management consistent with principles of multiple use and environmental protection; and 3) provide opportunity for the public to view wild horses. Gathering and removal of excess wild horses from the Great Divide Basin HMA is in conformance with the Green River RMP. Wild horse numbers, agreed upon with private land owners and wild horse advocacy groups, were addressed in developing the Green River RMP. Wild horse HMAs were established or confirmed through the Green River RMP planning process.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

To comply with NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations, which implement NEPA, the BLM is required to prepare an environmental analysis. The environmental document will serve several purposes. It will provide both the public and governmental agencies with information about the potential environmental consequences of the project and alternatives; identify all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the project; 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 (IDT) 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; 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 to help in identifying the level of analysis needed, alternatives to the proposed action, other issues or concerns that should be analyzed, mitigation opportunities, and any other comments or ideas to help ensure the completeness of the analysis process.

Your comments are important and will be considered in the environmental analysis process. **Comments are due by January 10, 2014.** Please note that public comments submitted for this scoping review, including names, e-mail addresses, and street addresses of the respondents will be available for public review and disclosure at the address below during regular business hours (8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), Monday through Friday, except holidays. Please submit your comments to:

Jay D'Ewart, Wild Horse & Burro Specialist
BLM Rock Springs Field Office
280 Highway 191 North
Rock Springs, Wyoming 82901-3447

Fax: (307) 352-0329

Only electronic comments sent to the following email address will be considered:

DivideBasin_HMA_WY@blm.gov

(Please include **"Divide Basin Scoping Comments"** in the subject line.)

Public comments are most helpful if the comments are specific. The regulations (40 CFR 1503.36) state that "comments on a proposed action shall be as specific as possible and may address either the adequacy of the statement or the merits of the alternatives discussed or both." The most valuable comments are those that cite specific actions or impacts in the document and offer informed analysis of what is presented.

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

http://www.blm.gov/wy/st/en/info/NEPA/rsfodocs/divide_basin.html

The website can be accessed by the general public. The environmental analysis document will be posted to this site after comments from the public are incorporated. The estimated time of posting the document is March 1, 2014. You may also obtain a paper copy of this document by contacting the Rock Springs Field Office at the address or phone number above.

Sincerely,



Joanna Nara-Kloepper
Assistant Field Manager
Minerals and Lands

Enclosure

Figure 1. Map of the Affected Area

