



CARING FOR YOUR NEW

WILD HORSE OR BURRO



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Wild Horse and Burro Program

**Congratulations on adopting or
purchasing a wild horse and/or burro!**

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The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Wild Horse and Burro Program created this guide as a resource for adopters and purchasers who have taken home a wild horse and/or burro. Feel free to contact the BLM with any questions about your new animal.

For more information about the care and feeding of wild horses and burros, please check with your veterinarian, or libraries and bookstores for materials. In addition, your county's cooperative extension office, university extension web sites and the BLM are also excellent sources of information.

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**Applies to animals adopted through the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program*

*Cover photo: Courtney Ferguson with Taylor
Photo credit: Blue Fountain Photography*

ADOPTER

RESPONSIBILITIES

The following are the terms of adoption also stated in the paperwork received at the time of adoption:

- Adopters are financially responsible for providing proper care, including food and water, shelter, hoof and veterinary care.
- Adopters are responsible, as provided by State law, for any personal injury, property damage or death caused by animals in their care, for pursuing animals that escape or stray and for the costs of recapture.
- Adopters shall not transfer animals for more than 30 days to another location or to the care of another individual without the prior approval of an authorized officer.
- Adopters shall make animals available for physical inspection within 7 days of receipt of a written request by an authorized officer.
- Adopters shall notify the authorized officer within 7 days of discovery of an animal's death, theft or escape.
- Adopters shall notify the authorized officer within 30 days of any change in the adopter's address.
- Adopters shall dispose of remains in accordance with applicable sanitation laws.

Your (untitled) adopted animal remains the property of the federal government for at least one year after you sign the Private Maintenance and Care Agreement. The BLM will send you a Title Eligibility Letter in the mail. You are responsible for having the animal inspected, signing the Title Eligibility Letter and mailing it back to BLM so we can issue your official Certificate of Title. When the BLM issues the Certificate of Title to you, the animal becomes your private property.

Please refer to your adoption paperwork for more details on adopters' responsibilities and prohibited acts.

ANIMAL

TITLING REQUIREMENTS

- ★ Approximately 12 months after the adoption date, the BLM will send you a Title Eligibility Letter (Form 4710-18) for each animal that you adopted.
- ★ Contact your veterinarian, extension agent, local humane official, farrier or other BLM-approved individual to have your animal(s) inspected.
- ★ The individual performing the inspection must complete and sign a Title Eligibility Form for each animal.
- ★ Return each Title Eligibility Form to the address of the BLM office that sent you the letter. This is the BLM office that has jurisdiction over your state, not necessarily the office from which you adopted the animal.
 - The Certificate of Title(s) for your adopted animal(s) should reach you within 30 days after BLM receives your signed Title Eligibility Letter. If you have not received the Certificate of Title(s), please contact the BLM office of jurisdiction or the Wild Horse and Burro Program National Information Center at (866) 468-7826 or wildhorse@BLM.gov.
 - Only ONE Certificate of Title is issued for each animal. The Certificate of Title transfers ownership of the animal from BLM to you. The original Certificate of Title must travel with the animal. In the event you transfer the animal to someone else, the BLM does not re-issue Certificates of Title to subsequent owners of a Titled Animal. If the original Certificate of Title is lost or destroyed, the BLM can issue you a letter certifying the animal is titled.
 - Until you apply for and receive a Certificate of Title for the animal(s) you adopted, you may **NOT SELL** or otherwise transfer your adopted animal(s) to the care of another individual without written permission from the authorized officer.

NOTE

Untitled animals cannot be sold, traded or given away (43 CFR 4770.1(d)). Any violation of this prohibition may result in criminal penalties and fines up to \$2,000 and imprisonment up to one year, or both (43 CFR 4770.5).

LOADING ^{AND} UNLOADING YOUR ANIMAL

Before unloading your animal(s), double check that your corral is secure and enclosed. Be slow and patient while unloading your animal. Try to keep the noise to a minimum. Some animals may unload as soon as the door is open, while others may not want to come off the trailer immediately. Give them time to let them unload when they feel safe.

If the adopter has requested BLM to place a halter and/or lead rope on their animal(s) at the event, do not immediately attempt to remove the halter or the lead rope. It is suggested that the halter and lead rope stay on the animal to help teach the animal to give to pressure when the animal steps on the lead rope as it walks around the corral.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR ANIMAL

BLM works hard to provide only healthy animals for adoption and sale, but transportation, adoption and sale events can be stressful. Stress combined with exposure to large groups of horses means a higher chance for illness. For at least the first few days, you should keep activity around the corral and shelter area to a minimum. It will take a little time for your wild horses or burros to adjust to their new surroundings and routines, such as you bringing hay and water to the animals.

Horses and burros are social animals. They may find comfort or settle down more easily if they can see and communicate with other horses or burros nearby. However, it is probably best not to mix them into the same or adjacent pens right away.

The first three to four weeks your wild horse or burro is home, you should observe them closely for signs of illness including coughing, cloudy discharge from the nose or eyes, swollen lymph nodes under the jaw or throat latch, depression, diarrhea and not wanting to eat or drink. If you notice these signs, please contact your veterinarian immediately to examine the animal(s) and provide treatment if necessary. If you have concerns with the health of your animal, you should also notify the BLM to make them aware of the situation. After a few weeks, if all the animals look happy and healthy, they can be moved in with or closer to other animals on your property.

*There, now you have **safely** unloaded your new wild horse and/or burro and you are on the path to your new partnership and life together!*



EXERCISE, TURNOUT AND GENTLING

Exercise your wild horse or burro regularly for good overall health and condition. Once an animal becomes accustomed to the fences on your property and can be reliably caught and haltered, it will do much better turned out into a small pasture or dry lot rather than being kept in a small pen or stall.

Begin working with your animal in the gentling process as soon as you can. The sooner you begin the training process, the easier it becomes to provide routine care. Farriers and veterinarians will also appreciate your efforts in making their jobs easier, particularly if something unfortunate happens and your animal needs medical treatment. Do not expect your veterinarian or farrier to train your animal for you.

*Top right photo: Adopter Elisa Wallace and her wild horse, Fledge
Photo credit: Rhonda Hole*



*The key to beginning this process is to take your time, **stay safe**, do not put yourself or the animal in a dangerous situation, go slowly and remain patient.*

NUTRITION

The nutritional needs of wild horses and burros depend on their size, age, physical condition, the range conditions where they came from and the amount of exercise or training they get in captivity. Growing animals and pregnant or lactating mares and jennies can require special diets. While some animals may do well on a particular ration, others could become too thin or too fat on the same ration. Often, wild horses and burros in captivity are “easy keepers,” which means they may easily become obese.

Good quality hay or pasture should be the main component of any horse or burro diet. Quality hay should be dry, green, free of dust or mold and have few weeds in it. When animals are fed in groups, it is imperative that all animals have enough space to eat at the same time, plus extra room for more timid animals to access the feed without being chased away by more dominant animals.

For pregnant, growing or thin animals, you can add grain or pelleted concentrates to the ration, but hay should always be at least $\frac{1}{2}$ but preferably $\frac{3}{4}$ of the total amount fed by weight. Consult your veterinarian to develop a feeding program suitable for your particular animal.

Care must be taken when using bulk, mixed feeds prepared for livestock. Some additives for cattle (for example the ionophore monensin, Rumensin®) are deadly if fed to horses or burros. Feeding grains, pellets or supplements intended for cattle, pigs or other livestock to horses or burros is discouraged. Horses and burros should never be fed lawn clippings or silage because these feeds are too rich and prone to mold and spoilage.

Here are some general guidelines on an appropriate diet for a wild horse or burro. Adjust these amounts if weight gain or loss is desired.



FOR HORSES

Horses should receive about 2 – 2½ percent of their ideal body weight in feed per day, and most of that should be in the form of roughage (hay or pasture). This means a typical 1,000-pound horse would need about 20 – 25 pounds of hay each day. Adult horses need a ration containing 10 – 12 percent crude protein. Legume hay such as alfalfa contains high quality protein often 15 – 20 percent or more. Young, pregnant, lactating or thin horses can benefit from this higher protein, but adult horses in light work do not need that much. Grass hay, which is typically 6 – 12 percent protein, is often a good choice for adult horses in light work.

Feeding excess protein to a healthy adult horse in the form of alfalfa hay rarely causes any harm. It might make them drink more water, urinate more and could lead to obesity more easily than feeding grass hay, but it does no harm to otherwise healthy animals. Most of the BLM corrals feed alfalfa hay because it is

usually the best quality hay available at the most economical price, and it provides more consistency in the diet when horses move between facilities. Young, growing horses and lactating mares benefit the most from eating alfalfa hay because grass hay will rarely meet their nutritional requirements. The older a horse becomes, the more suitable grass hay is for consumption. Quality grass hay such as orchard, brome, timothy and bermuda may be used. Less common types of grass hay such as rye, barley or sudan can cause problems when fed to horses and should probably be avoided even if they are less expensive. Mixed hays, such as a combination of orchard or brome grass hay and alfalfa, are an excellent choice for most horses.

Oats, barley, corn or a commercial concentrate pellet or sweet feed can be offered as an energy supplement to very active, lactating or growing horses or during the winter months. It is easiest to use rolled oats or a prepared horse feed.





WATER

A fresh, clean supply of water must always be available for your horse or burro. Weather conditions will affect the amount of water an animal will drink, therefore you should increase the water supply in the summer. Mares that are nursing foals need much more water, so increase water accordingly. To ensure a full day supply of clean water, it is recommended to use a trough or other container larger than 5 gallons to supply water to your animal because many wild horses and burros prefer not to place their heads down into a bucket.

HORSES CAN EASILY CONSUME
12 TO 15 GALLONS
OF WATER PER DAY

BURROS CAN EASILY CONSUME
8 TO 10 GALLONS
OF WATER PER DAY

In winter, it is important to make sure your animal's water source does not freeze. **Remember that snow is NOT a substitute for water in the winter months.**



MINERAL BLOCKS

You should consider providing your animal with salt and trace minerals, in a loose form or in block, for proper nutrition. You can find these at your local feed or tack store.

FOR BURROS

Burros are not simply small horses with big ears and a different voice. Wild burros are adapted to living in a harsh desert environment. Their nutritional needs are lower in energy and protein compared with horses. The BLM recommends feeding grass hay at about 2 percent of their ideal body weight per day. Like horses, the best feed for your burro depends on its level of activity. The most appropriate food for burros is dry pasture or a low-protein grass hay. If possible, avoid feeding burros alfalfa as the high protein levels can cause obesity. Avoid the temptation of using cheaper, poor quality hay that is not clean and fresh. Burros are just as sensitive as horses to mold, dust and toxic weeds. Pregnant, lactating and growing burros may need a little more protein and energy but not as much as horses under similar conditions. If you decide to use grain as a treat, a handful of oats combined with a lower protein hay would be adequate.

Burros have a tendency to become obese and have related health problems if they get too fat. Typically, once they get fat, it is difficult to get the excess weight off. Obesity can contribute to laminitis (founder), colic and other metabolic problems so it is best to monitor their weight from the start. If possible, feed your burros separately from your horses.

Burros tend to be more angular in shape over the hips compared to horses. If it is difficult to feel their ribs with the flat of your hand and they start to develop a thick neck, they are becoming obese! As with horses, if your burro goes "off feed," please contact your veterinarian immediately to prevent more serious problems from developing.



BODY CONDITION AND FEEDING THIN ANIMALS

Healthy adult horses should be in what is best described as moderate body condition (Henneke score of 4 – 5) depending on their age and level of exercise. The ribs should be easily felt but not easily seen. The withers, shoulders and tailhead should have a slightly rounded not angular appearance. These areas should blend smoothly into the body, but there should not be obvious fat deposits in these areas. Burros tend to be more angular than horses and should be maintained at a similar body condition.

Some animals, especially those that are young and growing, nursing or have come off the range in poor condition may be too thin. If you can clearly see its ribs, it may be too thin. In this case, consult with your veterinarian. You should adjust the feed ration until it regains an acceptable body condition. The first change to feeding a thin horse or burro should be providing “free-choice” all you can eat, access to good quality hay. This often means separating thin animals from groups of other fleshier animals that might be pushing the thinner animals away from the feed. If the animal does not improve after a couple of weeks of free choice grass hay, it should be switched to free choice alfalfa grass mix or alfalfa hay. This is the simplest, cheapest, most effective and healthiest way to put weight on a thin horse or burro. If an animal is still thin after being offered free choice, access to good quality alfalfa hay, then grain or grain concentrate feeds can be slowly introduced to increase the energy intake.

You may wish to consult with your veterinarian to ensure your animal does not have other health issues. Your veterinarian will be happy to help you design and implement a program appropriate for your animal's specific needs and location. A properly fed wild horse or burro will show the signs of a healthy equine including a glossy coat, bright eyes and lots of energy.



Modified from Henneke et al. EVJ 1983; 15:371-372

HENNEKE BODY CONDITION TABLE

CONDITION	NECK	WITHERS	SHOULDER	RIBS	BACK	TAILHEAD AREA
1 POOR <i>(extremely emaciated)</i>	Bone structure easily noticeable	Bone structure easily noticeable	Bone structure easily noticeable	Ribs projecting prominently	Spinous processes projecting prominently	Tailhead, pin bones, and hook bones projecting prominently
2 VERY THIN <i>(emaciated)</i>	Bone structure faintly discernible	Bone structure faintly discernible	Bone structure faintly discernible	Ribs prominent	Slight fat covering over base of spinous processes Transverse processes of lumbar vertebrae feel rounded Spinous processes are prominent	Tailhead prominent Pin bones prominent Hook bones prominent
3 THIN	Neck accentuated	Withers accentuated	Shoulder accentuated	Slight fat cover over ribs Ribs easily discernible	Fat buildup halfway on spinous processes, but easily discernible Transverse processes cannot be felt	Tailhead prominent but individual vertebrae cannot be visually identified Hook bones appear rounded, but are still easily discernible Pin bones not distinguishable
4 MODERATELY THIN	Neck not obviously thin	Withers not obviously thin	Shoulder not obviously thin	Faint outline of ribs discernible	Negative crease (peaked appearance) along back	Prominence depends on conformation Fat can be felt Hook bones not discernible
5 MODERATE	Neck blends smoothly into body	Withers rounded over spinous processes	Shoulder blends smoothly into body	Ribs cannot be visually distinguished, but can be easily felt	Back is level	Fat around tailhead beginning to feel spongy
6 MODERATELY FLESHY	Fat beginning to be deposited	Fat beginning to be deposited	Fat beginning to be deposited behind shoulder	Fat over ribs feels spongy	May have a slight positive crease (a groove) down back	Fat around tailhead feels soft
7 FLESHY	Fat deposited along neck	Fat deposited along withers	Fat deposited behind shoulder	Individual ribs can be felt, but noticeable fat filling between ribs	May have a positive crease down the back	Fat around tailhead is soft
8 FAT	Noticeable thickening of neck	Area along withers filled with fat	Area behind shoulder filled with fat	Difficult to feel ribs	Positive crease down the back	Fat around tailhead very soft
9 EXTREMELY FAT	Bulging fat	Bulging fat	Bulging fat	Patchy fat appearing over ribs	Obvious crease down the back Flank filled with fat	Bulging fat around tailhead

ANIMAL CARE



HOOF CARE

Proper hoof care is required and is one of the most important things you can do to make sure your wild horse or burro stays sound and healthy. Training your animal to pick up and accept handling of its feet is critical to this process.

In captivity, your wild horse or burro's hooves will grow quickly and not wear as they did while on the range. You will need to periodically have the animal's feet trimmed. The frequency of hoof trimming and/or shoeing will depend upon the amount of hoof wear, the soil conditions in the corral or pasture and how often the animal exercises. The hoof walls should generally be upright at about a 50 – 55 degree angle not sloping at a low 45 degree angle. They should be straight, not flared, and they should not be split or broken off. If you do not provide good hoof care, your horses and burros become susceptible to hoof deformities, abscesses or thrush just like domestic horses and burros.

Improper hoof care is the most common cause of lameness in horses and burros. Consult a farrier (also a veterinarian if necessary) to establish a regular program of preventive hoof care and maintenance before your animal's feet are too long.



DENTAL CARE

Over time, your wild horse's or burro's teeth may also need preventive care. Equine teeth grow continuously throughout their lives and wear down as they eat. If they wear unevenly, sharp edges or points develop causing pain and preventing adequate chewing. Your veterinarian can file off these uneven spots (a procedure called "floating") to protect the animal's cheeks and tongue and promote good feed utilization.

Your animal's teeth should be checked about once a year. Noticeable signs of tooth problems include a change in chewing habits, holding their head to one side while eating, slobbering, dribbling grain while eating or packing balls of hay in their cheeks. A foul odor from the nose or mouth can also be a sign of a tooth problem.

PREVENTATIVE CARE

VACCINATIONS

The wild horse or burro you adopted or purchased was dewormed, vaccinated and examined by a veterinarian.

Your animals received the following vaccinations:

- Eastern and Western Equine Encephalomyelitis (EEE/WEE)
- Influenza (FLU)
- Equine herpes (also called rhinopneumonitis or RHINO for short)
- Tetanus
- West Nile Virus (WNV)
- Rabies
- Strangles (equine distemper, Strep. Equi, or STREP)

All the vaccinations and deworming medications are listed on their health records. They were also tested and found to be negative for equine infectious anemia (also called a Coggins test for EIA or swamp fever) to comply with interstate shipping requirements.

Keep the health record in a safe place and use it as a guide to schedule annual booster vaccinations and other treatments. Your veterinarian is an excellent source of information concerning vaccinations, deworming, dental care and hoof care. It is recommended that you contact your veterinarian concerning any questions, issues or problems you have with your animal as well as start your animal on a regular deworming and an appropriate booster vaccination schedule.

PARASITE CONTROL

Internal parasites can affect wild horses and burros. Your wild horse or burro will have been dewormed at a BLM preparation center at least once. Depending on how long the animal was in a BLM facility, it may have been done several times. Check your animal's health records for deworming dates and plan its next deworming date based on the health record.

It is easy for horses and burros to get re-infected with internal parasites; either from the environment or from dormant, encysted stages of parasites that survive in the animals. The ideal deworming frequency and schedule depends on the environment and level of infestation. You may need to deworm your animals ranging from once a month to every six months or only when indicated by fecal testing. Foals, young horses, pregnant mares and mares with nursing foals need special attention. Deworming medications are only part of the solution to controlling parasites. Talk to your veterinarian to identify the best products and procedures to control parasites and avoid related health problems that can range from mild to life threatening.

EQUINE DISEASES

The following are descriptions of the diseases wild horses and burros are vaccinated or tested for once removed from public lands.

EASTERN AND WESTERN ENCEPHALOMYELITIS (EEW/WEE)

EEE and WEE are viral diseases spread by mosquitoes that affect the brain and spinal cord. Infected animals will exhibit neurologic signs such as incoordination, stumbling and paralysis. They can be fatal. The vaccines for these diseases are very effective.

EQUINE INFECTIOUS ANEMIA (EIA)

EIA is a viral disease naturally spread by biting flies that affects all types of horses, burros and other equids. There is no vaccine or treatment for the disease and it is regulated by animal health authorities around the world. In the U.S., a negative test result is required prior to moving animals across state lines. All BLM animals are tested for EIA prior to adoption and at the time of adoption you received a negative EIA or Coggins test report.

STRANGLES (STREP)

STREP (Streptococcus equi or zooepidemicus), also called equine distemper, is a bacterial upper respiratory tract infection. It typically causes fever, coughing and a thick white or yellow nasal discharge. The lymph nodes under the jaw often become enlarged and abscess. Strangles is highly contagious to other horses. Vaccination does not guarantee that the animal will not become infected, but often a vaccinated animal will get a milder case if exposed. Generally, young animals, particularly weanlings and yearlings, are more likely to come down with strangles. Isolating an infected animal or group of animals and providing them with rest and good nutrition are called for as animals recover.

RABIES

Rabies is caused by a virus that is spread by the bite of an infected animal, usually a bat, raccoon, skunk or fox. Dogs, cats, livestock and people can also become infected and spread rabies. Clinical signs may include severe depression and paralysis but vary significantly from animal to animal. Most often horses show nonspecific signs such as colic or lameness. Rabies is almost always fatal but is easily prevented with a very effective vaccine.

EQUINE INFLUENZA AND HERPES (FLU AND RHINO)

FLU and RHINO are viruses that usually cause upper respiratory infections characterized by high fevers, a hacking cough and watery nasal discharge. Equine herpes virus can also cause abortions in pregnant mares and neurologic signs such as incoordination, stumbling and paralysis. Unfortunately, none of the vaccines for influenza and herpes are highly effective. Disease prevention is best accomplished by limiting contact with sick animals and preventing indirect contact with the virus such as from dirty hands, clothing or tack.

TETANUS

Tetanus (also called lockjaw) is caused by a bacteria that affects the nervous system. Tetanus usually enters through small cuts or puncture wounds. Tetanus causes stiffness and muscle paralysis that is usually fatal, but it can easily be prevented by vaccination.

WEST NILE VIRUS (WNV)

West Nile is a viral disease spread by mosquitoes that affect the brain and spinal cord. It causes neurologic signs such as incoordination, stumbling and paralysis. It can be fatal, but the vaccine is very effective at preventing the disease.





PREGNANCY

The BLM does not perform pregnancy checks on mares or jennies after they are removed from the range. Wild horses and burros can become pregnant as early as 12 months of age. The normal gestation for a horse is 11 months and 11 days. Most mares will give birth in the spring, but early and late births can also occur. Gestation for burros is typically about 12 months and they can foal any time throughout the year. If you adopted a mare or jenny, you should consider the possibility she may be in foal even if she does not look pregnant when you adopt or purchase her.

Check with the BLM to see when she was gathered to help determine if she may be pregnant. You should learn about the special needs of a mare/jenny and foal to plan ahead in the event your mare or jenny does turn out to be pregnant.

NOTE

Foals born to a wild horse or burro after approval of a Private Maintenance and Care Agreement or Bill of Sale are not wild horses or burros. Such foals are the property of the adopter of the parent mare or jenny. The foal will not need to be freeze marked and you will not need to fill out a new Private Maintenance and Care Agreement or Bill of Sale. However, in cases where prohibited acts have been violated, the Private Maintenance and Care Agreement is terminated and animals are being repossessed, unweaned foals would also be removed and become BLM property.



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

**Contact the Bureau of Land Management with any
questions regarding the Wild Horse and Burro Program.**

BLM.gov/WHB • wildhorse@BLM.gov • (866) 468-7826 •    