

NWHR Herd Management Area Plan and Water Developments Reconstruction

Questions and Answers

Q – What is a herd management area plan (HMAP)?

A – A HMAP establishes short and long-term management and monitoring objectives for the herd and their habitat – these objectives will guide management of the NWHR herd over the life of the plan. The HMAP has been prepared in accordance with the authority provided in 43 Code of Federal Regulations 4700.

Q – Why has BLM approved a Herd Management Area Plan (HMAP) for the NWHR herd?

A – BLM has approved a HMAP for the NWHR herd in order to address the herd's management over the long-term. As a result of the approved HMAP, the existing water developments will be reconstructed and maintained annually thereafter, or as needed. Reconstruction of the water developments should assure adequate water for 300-500 wild horses in the future without need for long-term water hauling. It should also allow the spring sources to retain water at the source and not overflow at the troughs leading to evaporation loss, while still providing water for wildlife and enhancing the associated spring and riparian area.

The HMAP would also implement a number of population control methods to assure the NWHR herd remains healthy, diverse, and self-sustaining over the long-term, and that management is at the minimum level necessary to attain the HMAP objectives.

Q -- What is the Appropriate Management Level for the Nevada Wild Horse Range?

A – The Appropriate Management Level (AML) was set as a population range of 300-500 wild horses in the July 2004 Record of Decision for the Approved Nevada Test and Training Range Resource Management Plan (NTTR RMP) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

Q – What is the current number of wild horses in the Nevada Wild Horse Range?

A – The wild horse population is estimated at 1,400 animals (which includes the addition of the 2008 foal crop). The current population of wild horses was estimated based on the aerial census conducted in July 2007.

An emergency removal of about 1,100 wild horses is planned beginning June 27, 2008. The gather is expected to last about 20 days and will be completed through water trapping. An emergency removal is needed because the current overpopulation of wild horses has limited food and water. (A planned gather of this HMA was postponed in December 2007 due to drought and fire emergencies in other parts of Nevada). Wild horses are traveling 5-10 miles every day between forage and water. This is an emergency gather; the excess animals will be captured and removed. No additional population control methods will be implemented at this time (i.e. fertility control, adjustment of sex ratios, or gelding). Competition for the limited available forage and water is expected to decrease following removal of the excess wild horses; there should be adequate food and water to support the remaining wild horse population in a healthy condition until the next regularly scheduled gather.

Once they are gathered, animals will be transported to BLM corral facilities in Ridgecrest, California and Palomino Valley, Nevada where they will be fed and watered and receive

inoculations against disease and a unique freeze-mark number. They will be available for adoption beginning approximately 45 days after they arrive at the two facilities.

Q – How will management differ from existing management under the approved HMAP?

A – Under current management, the NWHR HMA herd grows at an estimated 22-24% per year and is managed for a 36/64 male/female sex ratio following gathers. Even with fertility control, the population exceeds the upper limit of the AML in 3 years, resulting in the need for more frequent gathers and greater stress to individual horses and the herd. Under the approved HMAP, selected population control methods are expected to extend the gather cycle from 3 years to every 6-7 years. By extending the gather cycle, there would be less stress to individual wild horses and the NWHR HMA herd over the life of the plan. The selected management should also result in fewer animals gathered over the life of the plan and lead to a savings in management costs.

Q – Will existing water developments be reconstructed so they are functional? Will new waters be developed?

A – The existing water developments are approved for reconstruction. Once reconstructed, they will be maintained annually, or as needed. At this time, reconstruction of the existing water developments and achieving and maintaining AML are the highest priority.

Development of new water developments (wells) has not been approved at this time. Implementation of new water wells would require acquisition of the necessary water rights and the funding needed to develop additional water. It would also result in an intensive level of monitoring which is not feasible given current and expected future funding and the military's operations mission.

Q – Why does the approved HMAP include management of a non-breeding population of 60-100 geldings together with management of a breeding population of 240-400 animals?

A – Under current management, the population grows at 22-24% per year, even with application of fertility control. Managing a portion of the herd as a non-breeding population of geldings would help slow the herd's annual growth rate and extend the gather cycle from every 3 years to an estimated 6-7 years, resulting in less stress for individual horses and the herd, fewer horses being gathered/removed, and reduced costs.

Gelding would be implemented as a pilot study during future scheduled gathers. Initially, gelding would be limited to 30-35 stallions (during the next scheduled gather, or about 2012). If monitoring indicates gelding is successful, another 30-65 stallions could be gelded during subsequent gathers. Geldings are expected to lose their "stud-like" behavior within 30-60 days following surgery. They would be able to live out their lives on their home range rather than in long-term holding facilities.

Q - What is the relationship between the Air Force and BLM for the Nevada Wild Horse Range?

A – The Nevada Wild Horse Range was established in 1962 by a Cooperative Agreement with the Commander, Nellis Air Force Base and the State Director, Nevada Bureau of Land Management. The NWHR was the first wild horse range established in the U.S. While the primary purpose of the Nellis Range Complex (NRC) (a complex withdrawn from public use) is weapons development and flight training, the existence of wild horses on the NWHR is a secondary use of the lands.

In 1971 Congress passed the Wild Horse and Burro Act and promulgated 43 Code of Federal Regulations 4700 to implement the Wild Horse and Burro Act. In 1977 a five-party agreement was developed for protecting, developing, and managing the natural resources of fish and wildlife, vegetation, watershed, and wild horses with the U.S. Air Force (USAF), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Department of Energy (DOE), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the Nevada Division of Wildlife (NDOW).

Q – Will gathers to remove excess wild horses be conducted in the future under proposed management?

A – Yes. Under proposed management, gathers to remove excess wild horses would be scheduled approximately every 6-7 years. Prior to conducting future gathers, BLM will prepare a site-specific environmental analysis which will be provided to the public for review and comment.

Q –How can I adopt a horse from the NWHR HMA?

A - Anyone interested in adopting a wild horse from the NWHR HMA and who meets BLM's adoption and facilities requirements is invited to mail a completed adoption application to the BLM Las Vegas Field Office, 4701 North Torrey Pines Drive, Las Vegas, NV 89130, Attn: Jerrie Bertola. Adoption applications can be found at www.wildhorseandburro.blm.gov or through the Las Vegas Field Office at 702-515-5000.

Q – How can I get a copy of the Final Environmental Assessment for the Nevada Wild Horse Range Herd Management Area Plan?

A- The document is available at www.nv.blm.gov/vegas

Q – Is this BLM's final decision?

A – Yes. The two Findings of No Significant Impact/Decision Records represent BLM's final decision (FONSI/DR).

The first FONSI/DR approves the reconstruction of the six existing water developments beginning in about August 2008 and maintenance of the reconstructed developments annually, or as needed, thereafter. The second FONSI/DR establishes management and monitoring objectives and approves implementation of the Herd Management Area Plan (HMAP) for the Nevada Wild Horse Range Herd Management Area (NWHR HMA).

Implementation may begin 30 days following date of signature by the authorized officer. The decision of the authorized officer will be implemented under authority provided in 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 4. Administrative review of the authorized officer's decision by the Interior Board of Land Appeals may be requested by filing an appeal in accordance with authority provided in 43 CFR Part 4.