



APPENDIX M
PAINTED ROCK HERD AREA
MANAGEABILITY ANALYSIS

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APPENDIX M

PAINTED ROCK HERD AREA MANAGEABILITY

ANALYSIS

The Painted Rock Herd Area (PRHA) is located approximately 85 miles southwest of the metro Phoenix area and about 11 miles west of Gila Bend, Arizona, and surrounds the Painted Rock Reservoir area. The Herd Area (HA) encompasses approximately 38,737 acres, of which 31,106 acres are BLM-managed public lands, 4,834 acres are private lands, and 2,796 acres are Arizona state lands. The HA includes portions of three allotments: Artex, Painted Rock, and Dendora Valley. All three allotments are classified as ephemeral. The HA has been home to wild burros and a small band of horses. Management of the herd area applies only to the Lower Sonoran Decision Area. No Herd Management Areas (HMAs) have been allocated within either Decision Area. The PRHA is shown on Map 3-15.

The habitat of the PRHA consists of dry riverbed in the Gila River drainage between the Painted Rock Dam and Oatman Mountain. Approximately 28,000 acres of the HA are upland volcanic flow in a region known as the Sentinel Plain. This area consists of broad lower Sonoran Desert plains cut by sandy washes and low mountain ranges. Vegetation consists of palo verde, cacti, creosote bush, and sage. The Gila River bisects the northern portion of the HA and is characterized by salt cedar, mesquite, cottonwood, and willows. Wildlife species that also inhabit the area include desert mule deer, javelina, dove, quail, and a variety of small mammals, birds, amphibians, and reptiles.

In 1971, Congress passed The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act (WFRHBA, or "The Act," Public Law 92-195). The Act gave BLM the honor and the responsibility to manage wild horse and burro populations on BLM-administered lands in the west. The Act states, "It is the policy of Congress that wild, free-roaming horses and burros shall be protected from capture, branding, harassment, or death; and to accomplish this they are to be considered in the area where presently found, as an integral part of the natural system of the public lands." The WFRHBA goes on to define wild horse and burro "range" as, "the amount of land necessary to sustain an existing herd or herds of wild free-roaming horses and burros, which does not exceed their known territorial limits, and which is devoted principally, but not necessarily exclusively to their welfare in keeping with the multiple-use management concept for the public lands."

One of the first tasks involved in implementing the WFRHBA was to survey public lands and delineate where wild horses and burros found habitat and forage, and designate these areas as HAs. These HAs established boundaries of where wild horses and burros were located at the passage of The Act. Later, HMAs were established within those HAs to manage healthy, self-sustaining populations of wild horses and/or burros, in accordance with BLM land use plans (i.e. RMPs) and other decisions.

The Arizona statewide inventory of known or likely wild horse and burro use areas was conducted by the BLM in 1974. Data from this inventory identified seven burros and five horses in the Painted Rock area, which became the HA. However, it was later discovered that the only year-round waters available for the animals are on private farm lands in the northern third of the HA. The southern two thirds of

the HA is Sonoran Desert scrub and classified as ephemeral use for cattle (cattle are only permitted on the rangelands during years of above-average precipitation when ephemeral forage [e.g., annual grasses and forbs] are abundant and provide hundreds or thousands of pounds of high-protein forage for short periods of time, after which the cattle are removed from the range again).

All planning documents, including the Lower Gila South RMP, referred only to wild burros in the area. In 1993, farmers on the northern end of the HA complained about horses coming onto their farm land, and the BLM initiated removal of them as stray animals. The International Society for the Protection of Mustangs and Burros (ISPMB) intervened, stating that these were wild horses and subject to protection afforded by the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971. In 1999, based on information from the original 1974 survey and testimony gathered by ISPMB, it was determined by the Phoenix Field Manager that the animals were, in fact, present in the area in 1971 and subject to the protection by the WFRHBA. Nuisance complaints continued from the local farmers.

In 2007, sixteen horses and one burro were captured and removed from the PRHA. From these 16 horses, 11 blood samples were collected for genetics analysis (Cothran 2010). Results from this analysis stated:

"The Painted Rock herd shows genetics closely related to the Caspian [pony] within the Oriental horse cluster. . . . Genetic variation . . . is very low and well below the critical level (the testing indicator used is not related to sample size). . . . [This is] likely due to a low population size over a few generations. . . . Overall results suggest that this herd has been isolated and may have been founded from a small number of animals. . . . Inbreeding within the herd is likely and will probably continue and increase [which] could cause physical defects and low fertility."

M.I RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PAINTED ROCK HERD AREA

The overall goal of the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program is to preserve the health of the land and water resources by managing wild horse and burro populations so as to restore and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance (TNEB). Appropriate management levels (AML) for the herds, the habitat requirements of the animals, the relationships with other uses of the public and adjacent private lands, are analyzed to determine the health of both the animals and the rangeland resources (43 CFR 4710.3-1). Wild horses and burros are to be managed as self-sustaining populations of healthy animals in balance with other uses and the productive capacity of their habitat, while maintaining their free-roaming behavior (43 CFR 4700.0-6). However, wild horses and burros must be managed within the limits the animals' herd areas (43 CFR 4710.4). Excess animals are gathered and removed, and are offered to the public through the Bureau of Land Management's Adopt a Horse or Burro Program (BLM Handbook, H-4700-1, 2010).

In determining whether or not to change the status of the PR HA to a HMA, and thus manage populations of wild horses and/or burros, a herd area manageability analysis was conducted. This manageability analysis was required by an agreement which settled a legal challenge to Lower Gila South RMP Amendment. This analysis considers habitat requirements and availability, herd movement (including immigration and emigration), health of the herd and rangeland resources, and genetic diversity.

The BLM Wild Horses and Burros Handbook (2010) defines the four components required to manage wild horse and burro populations in a Herd Management Area: forage, water, cover, and space.

- **Forage:** Forage is one of the essential components of wild horse and burro habitat. The authorized officer should determine whether vegetation provides sustainable forage (and cover) for the animals. Vegetation should be managed within each HMA in a manner that achieves and maintains a thriving natural ecological balance (TNEB) and assures significant progress is made toward achieving the Standards for Land Health and other site-specific or landscape-level objectives (16 USC § 1333(a)).
- **Water:** An adequate year-round quantity and quality of water must be present in the HMA to sustain wild horse and burro numbers within AML. If this habitat requirement is inadequate, the authorized officer should amend or revise the land use plan to remove the area's designation as an HMA.
- **Cover (Vegetation) and Space:** The terrain and vegetation that are needed to provide wild horses and burros with escape (hiding) cover and shelter from the prevailing weather. (Vegetation also provides sustainable forage). Wild horses and burros require sufficient space to allow the herd to move freely between water and forage within seasonal habitats. Cover and space are interrelated.

On the basis of the above information, management opportunities for wild horses and burros within the PRHA are extremely limited without extensive intervention and mitigation on the part of the BLM. Therefore, it is recommended that the PRHA remain a HA. Wild horses and burros should be removed as funding is available, with a target population of zero animals. Wild horses and burros removed from the HA would be available through the BLM Adopt a Wild Horse or Burro Program.

M.2 RATIONALE AND AUTHORITY FOR THIS RECOMMENDATION

Essential habitat components are not available for healthy herds of wild horses and/or burros. The habitat produces very limited forage and the only available reliable water within the boundaries of the PRHA is on farm land not controlled or managed by the BLM. The southern two-thirds of the HA is Sonoran Desert scrub with sparse palatable forage that is not reliable on a year round basis. This causes the wild horses and burros to leave the boundaries of the HA and utilize private waters and agricultural fields and pastures.

Based on the fact that there is no water for the wild horses or burros within the HA public lands, and that the habitat does not regularly produce forage necessary to sustain a self-sufficient population of wild horses and burros, management would as a HMA would be impossible. Since 1992, seven burros and 65 horses have been removed, all as a result of nuisance animal complaints in accordance with 43 CFR 4720.2-1. With the exception of these removals, few animals have been observed on the HA.

Where appropriate, a land use plan may include decisions not to manage wild horses and/or burros in all or a part of an HA. An example would be where essential habitat components (forage, water, cover and space) are unavailable or insufficient to sustain healthy wild horses and burros and healthy rangelands over the long term (BLM Handbook, H-4700-1, 2010). Due to the other rationale herein

(lack of essential habitat components, and movement outside the HA boundaries), managing the PRHAA as an HMA with non-reproducing wild horses is not feasible.

Therefore, the herd area's designation should remain a HA, with a target population of zero wild horses and burros. When the authorized officer determines that excess wild horses and burros exist, gathers to capture and remove the animals immediately or as soon as possible are required. For additional information, refer to BLM Manual Section 4720 (Removal) and 43 CFR 4720.1, 4740.1 and 2.

M.3 REFERENCES

Cothran, Gus, 2010. Genetic Analysis of the Painted Rock HMA, AZ. Department of Veterinary Integrative Bioscience, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas.

Wild Horses and Burros Management Handbook: BLM Handbook H-4700-1. 2010. BLM Handbook-66-Rel-4-116. Wild Horse and Burro Program, Office of the Assistant Director, Renewable Resources and Planning, Washington, DC.