Working Toward Sustainable Management of America's Wild Horses and Burros

Draft Goals, Objectives and Possible Management Actions

June 2010

Bureau of Land Management
Department of the Interior

NATIONAL SYSTEM OF PUBLIC LANDS

Rarely does anything stir the imagination like the sight of horses and burros roaming free in the rugged American west. But to ensure they are there forever for us to enjoy, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) must protect and manage the land — and the animals — in a thriving natural ecological balance.

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The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971, As Amended (The Act)

Requires the BLM to:

- ❒ Protect wild horses and burros in the area where presently found (1971) as an integral component of the public lands.
- ❒ Manage in a manner designed to achieve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance.
- ❒ Determine appropriate management levels (AMLs).
- ❒ Maintain a current inventory.
- ❒ Determine if overpopulation exists, and whether AML should be achieved by the removal or destruction of excess animals, or other options such as sterilization or natural population controls.
- ❒ Immediately remove excess animals so as to achieve AML.
- ❒ Adopt excess animals to individuals who can provide a good home.
- ❒ Humanely euthanize or sell without limitation any remaining excess wild horses or burros.
- ❒ Consult with wildlife agencies and scientific experts.
- ❒ Appoint an Advisory Board.

For more information, refer to www.blm.gov

The BLM's top priority is to ensure the health of the public lands so that the species depending on them — including the nation's wild horses and burros — can thrive.

Dear Reader:

In 1971, with the passage of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) was given responsibility for managing these much loved symbols of the Western spirit. After nearly 40 years under the BLM's protection, wild horses and burros, once "fast disappearing from the American scene," are now protected, their place on the public lands secure. The BLM estimates over 38,000 wild horses and burros now roam on 26.6 million acres of the BLM-managed land in 180 Herd Management Areas across 10 western states.

Americans are passionate about wild horses and burros, and there are many different, often conflicting, perspectives about how they should be managed. The BLM is committed to bridging these differences by working closely with our partners, stakeholders, the public and our employees to develop a strategy and find solutions that are best for wild horses and burros, wildlife, and the many other uses of the public lands. Over the next 60 days, we invite our interested stakeholders to offer their opinions and suggestions about the draft goals and objectives, as well as the series of possible management actions in this document. The BLM will consider your input to develop a strategy which will be presented in the 2010 Report to Congress later this fall.

We value your input and look forward to any suggestions you may have to assist the BLM to improve the Wild Horse and Burro Program. Thank you for your interest and participation in this important effort.

Sincerely,

Bob Abbey

Bob Abbey
Director
Bureau of Land Management

Did You Know? There are more wild horses and burros on the BLM-managed lands today than there were in 1971 when Congress passed the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act.

Introduction

Wild horses and burros have been a part of America's history since the 16th century when they were brought to North America by early Spanish explorers. Dispersed by Native Americans, and released on the public domain by the U.S. Cavalry, farmers, ranchers, and others, free-roaming wild horses and burros have become a symbol of freedom and America's pioneer spirit.

By the mid-1900s, wild horses and burros were rapidly being displaced as farmlands and communities replaced native prairies in America's heartland. Some found sanctuary in the arid western rangelands and the deserts of the Southwest, but their numbers became perilously low. So low that Congress found these "living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West" were in danger of being lost forever. In 1971, Congress called on the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to protect and manage America's remaining wild horses and burros on the areas of public lands in the West where they then existed.

Records indicate only 17,000 wild horses and 8,000 burros remained in 10 western states when Congress unanimously passed the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act (the Act) in 1971. The result of this landmark conservation bill was dramatic. The population of free-roaming horses and burros rebounded, in some places exceeding the land's capacity to sustain them. In areas, water and year-round vegetation was too scarce, or the public land was too scattered. Conflicts with private landowners or other uses of public land resulted.

In 1976 (and again in 1978), amidst fears of overgrazing and damage to the rangelands by horses and burros if their populations could not be effectively controlled, Congress amended the Act to authorize the BLM to use helicopters to gather and remove excess wild horses and burros to keep their numbers in a "thriving natural ecological balance" on the public lands. While many of these animals are placed in private care through the BLM's Adopt a Horse (or Burro) Program, adoption rates have not kept pace with the number gathered. As a result, the BLM is currently holding more than 35,000 excess horses in short-term corrals or contracted long-term pastures.

There is increasing concern about the BLM's current management of the Wild Horse and Burro Program, which involves gathering excess animals, finding as many homes for the animals as possible through adoptions, and placing remaining unadopted horses in long-term pastures. In the past few years, the public has expressed growing opposition to gathers, limited support for fertility control, and escalating concern about the use of helicopters and the humane handling and treatment of animals. The BLM is being asked to consider alternative options for the long-term management of America's wild horses and burros. Most understand that continuing to spend more and more of the taxpayers' money to care for greater numbers of unadopted wild horses each year is not a sustainable solution.

In fiscal year (FY) 2009, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that the budget increases necessary to pay for caring for so many horses were not sustainable and threaten to overwhelm the program. During FY 2009, the BLM spent almost $30 million — about 70% of the agency's appropriated budget for the Wild Horse and Burro Program — to humanely care for unadopted wild horses. This left less money to properly manage wild horses and burros on the range in the 10 western states and has made the BLM's goal of preserving and maintaining healthy wild horses and burros on healthy rangelands increasingly difficult to attain.

Following the issuance of the GAO Report, Congress directed the BLM to prepare and publish a new comprehensive long-term plan and policy for management of wild horses and burros. In response, the BLM initiated a dialogue with Congress and the public about implementation of the Act, including its provisions that require certain categories of unadopted excess wild horses (or burros) to be euthanized or sold without limitation. The Secretary of the Interior and the BLM have stated that euthanasia of healthy excess animals or their sale without limitation will not be considered and are seeking the public's help to find other long-term solutions.

The BLM has successfully adopted 225,000 wild horses and burros since 1971. Sustainable solutions are needed for the 35,000 horses still in need of a good home.

The Government Accountability Office recommended the BLM find effective long-term solutions to manage unadoptable wild horses (GAO-99-77).

The Secretary's Initiative

In October 2009, the Secretary of the Interior announced a national initiative intended to create a cost-efficient and sustainable wild horse and burro management program by:

- ❒ Balancing annual herd growth rates with adoption demand.
- ❒ Establishing preserves in the productive grasslands of the Midwest and East.
- ❒ Showcasing treasured herds in the West with special designations.

Over time, the implementation of the Secretary's initiative is expected to reduce the number of unadopted wild horses in short-term corrals or long-term pastures; reduce the costs to the American taxpayer for their care; and conserve, protect and manage these iconic animals in the West for future generations to enjoy.

New legislative authority and appropriations from Congress would be needed to implement elements of the Secretary's initiative.

Did you know? The demand for burros exceeds the supply. The BLM is holding very few unadopted burros.

The BLM envisions healthy wild horses and burros on healthy rangelands in the West forever — but to achieve this goal, cost-effective, sustainable solutions are needed.

Bringing the Vision to Life

The BLM has been working with the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution (Institute) to engage the public in the development of a strategy. A key part of this effort is to identify and develop additional management options or choices for wild horse and burro management in the future.

As the GAO pointed out, continuing to manage wild horses and burros using current practices is not sustainable. By rigorously exploring a wide range of possible management options, the BLM hopes to define a more sustainable approach for the future management of America's wild horses and burros.

Seven key areas have been identified for the BLM's strategic planning effort. They are:

- Sustainable Herds
- Preserves
- Treasured Herds
- Place Excess Animals into Private Care
- Communications
- Animal Welfare
- Science and Research

The BLM is working to address each of these areas during strategy development.

Principles for Success

1. The population of wild horses and burros must be controlled to maintain land and animal health.

2. The number of horses and burros gathered must better align with the number that can be placed in private care in order to reduce the holding costs.

3. The number of excess animals is a function of the population and the effectiveness of fertility control and other population control measures.

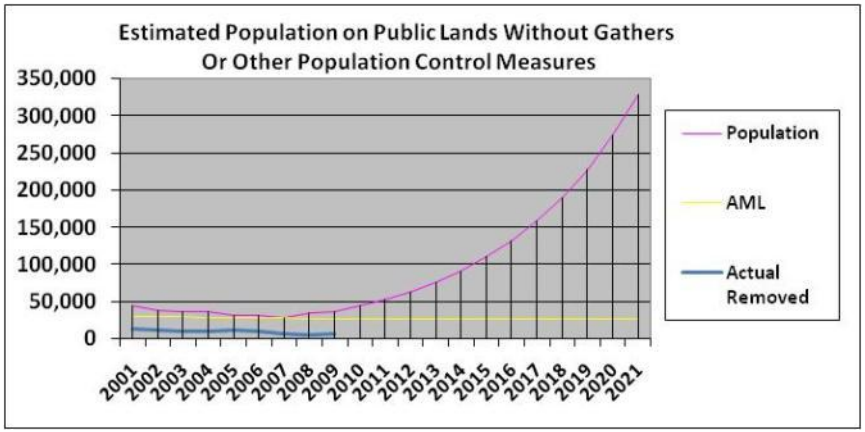
4. An increase in the number of excess horses placed in private care would reduce the number of animals in short and long term holding and decrease the costs for their care over time.

5. Sustainable solutions are possible only through partnerships.

Principles for Success

The Secretary's initiative is based on five underlying principles. Each serves to shape the nature of the challenge the BLM faces in trying to identify and implement a sustainable approach for the management of America's wild horses and burros. A successful strategy will depend on the BLM's ability to effectively integrate the five principles.

First, there is a need to control population size to keep the herds healthy and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance on the public lands. The current wild horse and burro population is estimated at over 38,000 animals on the range. Without natural controls such as predators or effective fertility control, populations can double every four to five years. Left unchecked, there could be close to 325,000 horses and burros on public lands by 2021 — a ten-fold increase — and more than 10 times the number the land can support (Graph 1).



Graph 1: Wild horse and burro populations on public lands could be close to 325,000 by 2021 without gathers to remove excess animals, fertility control, or natural controls such as disease or predation.

Second, the number of horses and burros gathered each year needs to more closely match the number that can be placed in private care in order to reduce the cost of caring for unadopted animals. Each year, the BLM removes 5,000 to 10,000 animals in areas where population goals are exceeded in order to protect the range from overgrazing, allow burned areas to re-vegetate after wildfires, or where emergency drought conditions threaten the health of the herd.

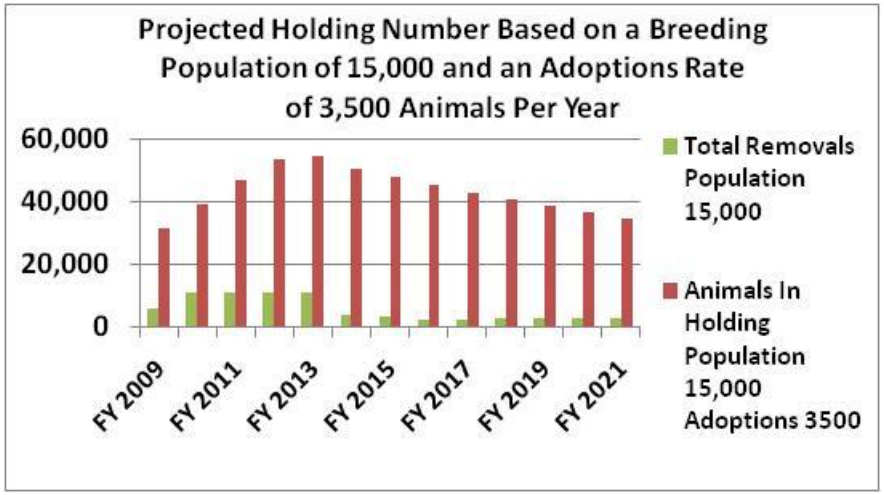
While many captured horses and burros are placed in private care through the BLM's adoption program, adoption rates have not kept pace with the number that need be removed to protect the environment. The costs to humanely care for these animals now make up a significant percentage of the program's total cost — and the budget increases necessary to support these costs are not sustainable. Without a fundamental shift in how the program is managed, the number of animals the BLM is holding could grow to more than 80,000 and costs for their care could exceed $100 million in FY2021 (Graph 2).

Graph 2: In less than a year at the current adoption rate, there will be more horses in holding than on the public rangelands.

If the BLM is able to reduce the number of horses that must be removed from the range — or to substantially increase the number of excess animals placed into private care — holding costs would be reduced and more funding would be available for application of fertility control or other population control measures, population inventory, monitoring, AML re-evaluation, and science and research.

The BLM expects to rely on long-term pastures or establish new preserves for surplus horses for the foreseeable future. In part, this is due to the average life expectancy of the 35,000 animals currently in holding (i.e., 30 years of age as compared to about 20 years on the range). A significant portion of the BLM's appropriated budget will continue to be needed for their care.

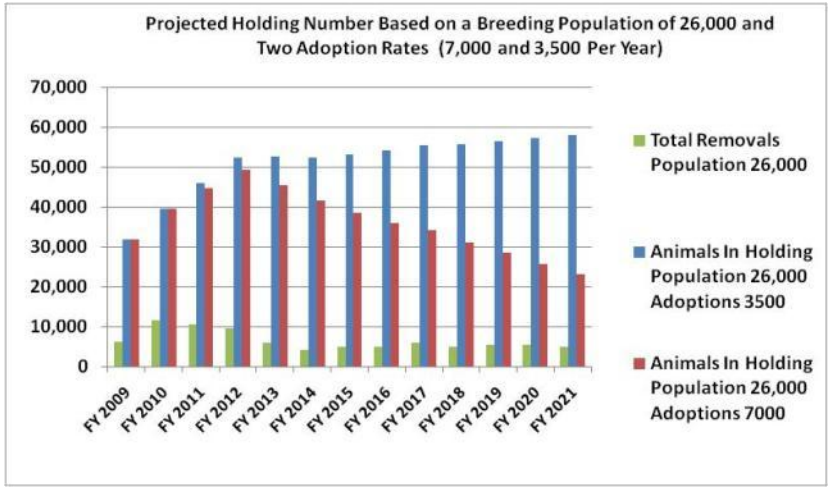
Third, the number of excess animals which must be removed from the range is a direct function of the population and the extent to which fertility control or other population control measures are applied and effective. For example, for a population of about 15,000 breeding animals, only about 3,000 animals per year would need to be removed to maintain population size. There would be no need for fertility control, and at the current adoption rate, all of the animals would be adopted with none placed in long-term pastures (Graph 3).



Graph 3: Over time, if the BLM is able to successfully control population growth, fewer horses and burros will need to be removed from the range. As a result, fewer animals will be placed in short- or long-term holding.

Application of fertility control or implementation of other population control measures could also reduce the number of excess animals that need to be removed each year. For example, effective application of fertility control to a population of 26,000 breeding animals (the current AML) could reduce removal numbers to approximately 3,800 per year. Assuming the current adoption rate of about 3,500 animals per year remains steady and the effectiveness of Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP) is as predicted, the number in holding could be stabilized. For this scenario to occur, thousands of mares would need to be gathered and treated with PZP every fourth year. Other methods of population control, such as adjusting the sex ratio of the herds to 60/40 males to females or establishing all male (sterilized) herds would also need to be implemented to begin to reduce the number of animals in holding.

Fourth, an increase in the number of excess horses placed in private care would reduce the number of horses in long-term pastures, and decrease the costs for their care over time. As an example, if the BLM were able to increase the number of excess animals placed in private care to about 7,000 animals per year, about 30,000 fewer horses would be in holding by 2021 (Graph 4).



Graph 4: If adoptions could be increased and then maintained at about 7,000 animals per year, there would be thousands fewer unadopted horses in holding by 2021, and reduced costs for their care.

Fifth, sustainable solutions to the challenges of the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program are possible only through partnerships. Wild horses and burros are America's national treasures and the BLM needs to nourish existing partnerships with horse and burro interest groups, conservationists, and ranchers and expand our capacity to care for these animals through creative new partnerships with communities, state and local governments, local businesses and others who share an interest in sustaining these American icons.

Implications for Strategy Development

Numerous options could potentially be developed to address the five principles for success.

Ultimately, the success of any strategy the BLM develops will be dependent on the ability to maintain a healthy, sustainable breeding population at a level that grows at a rate reasonably equivalent to the number of animals that can be placed in private care. Over time, if the BLM is able to successfully control population growth, fewer horses and burros will need to be gathered and removed from the range. Similarly, if the BLM is able to place more excess horses or burros in private care, fewer animals will need to be placed in long-term pastures over time.

Did You Know? The U.S. Border Patrol and the U.S. Marine Corps Mounted Color Guard are among those who ride adopted wild horses.

What Do You Think?

- ❒ Would you support increased use of fertility control and sex ratio adjustments to slow population growth?
- ❒ Would you support male-only herds in some HMAs? If so, how should the areas be identified?
- ❒ Under what conditions would you support placement of animals in good homes overseas?
- ❒ What suggestions do you have to increase the number of excess animals placed in private care?
- ❒ Would you support revising adoption requirements (such as lower fence heights, reduced shelter requirements, or reduced or waived title waiting period)?

Draft Goals, Objectives and Possible Management Actions

The overall goals for the strategy the BLM will develop are to ensure high-quality habitat for wild horses and burros on Western rangelands, good care and treatment of unadopted wild horses and burros, and a well-run and cost-effective Wild Horse and Burro Program for American taxpayers. By implementing effective strategies to control population growth and reduce the number of unadopted wild horses in short-term corrals or long-term pastures, the BLM expects to decrease the costs to the American taxpayer for the animals care, and conserve, protect, and manage these iconic animals in the West for future generations to enjoy.

As a first step in the strategic planning process, the BLM has identified draft goals, objectives, and possible management actions for each of the strategic themes. No decisions have been made. Rather, we would like to invite all interested stakeholders to offer opinions and suggestions about the draft goals, objectives and possible management actions which follow. The BLM will consider your input as we work to develop a strategy to be presented in the BLM's 2010 Report to Congress later this fall.

The draft objectives and the possible actions identified below outline a set of tools which could potentially be deployed to assist the agency in meeting the draft goals. These tools may not be appropriate for every area or may require further analysis. In some cases, multiple tools may be needed to achieve desired results.

As you review the information provided below, please let us know how we did by responding to the following questions:

- ❒ How satisfied are you that this element will lead to a successful strategy?
- ❒ What suggestions do you have to improve this element of the strategy?
- ❒ Are you or your organization willing to become a partner with the BLM to assist with implementing some or all of these actions? If so, please provide your contact information and indicate how you are willing to assist.

Click on the link provided at **www.blm.gov** to learn more, or to provide the BLM with comments on this document.

If you are interested in adopting or purchasing a wild horse or burro, please call 1-866-468-7826, or email wildhorses@blm.gov. Please note: comments regarding this document will **not** be accepted at this email address.

Sustainable Herds

A key element of the BLM's vision is the need to balance annual herd growth rates with the number of horses or burros that can be successfully adopted each year. Over time, slowing population growth would lead to fewer animals requiring removal from the range, fewer animals in short-term corrals or long-term pastures, and decreased costs for their humane care. The BLM has the ability to manage for two key wild horse and burro population factors which influence the total number of wild horses and burros. The BLM can manage the size of the breeding population and the reproductive (growth) rate of the population.

Fewer gathers to remove excess horses or burros would be needed if population growth rates can be reduced.

Goal: Manage wild horse and burro populations on public lands so that healthy rangelands and animals are maintained in a thriving natural ecological balance with other multiple uses.

Objective 1: Implement fertility control and other population control measures to balance annual herd growth rates with the adoption demand.

Actions:

1. Increase the use of PZP fertility control, implement sex ratio adjustments which favor males over females, or introduce or retain biologically sterile male mules to reduce the number of females foaling on the range.
2. Implement fertility control for stallions (castration and vasectomy).
3. Spay mares (ovariectomy), once techniques are proven to be safe.
4. Research use of chemical sterilization or other chemical control methods for mares and stallions.
5. Establish non-reproducing populations in Herd Areas (HAs)/HMAs, or incorporate a non-reproducing component in a number of HMAs, while maintaining the remainder of the herd as a self-sustaining (reproductive) population.

Objective 2: Make additional forage available for wild horse and burro use.

Actions:

1. Enter into agreements with livestock operators to trade livestock use areas for wild horse and burro use.
2. Voluntary relinquishment of livestock grazing permits.
3. Third party purchase of grazing permits for use by wild horses and burros.

Objective 3: Improve gather efficiency and expand the use of various gather techniques.

Actions:

1. Implement passive capture techniques (i.e., water or bait trapping) where feasible.
2. Increase the number and type of local and national gather contracts, including consideration of stewardship contracts, assistance agreements, volunteer agreements, or other types of partnership agreements.
3. Develop in-house gather capabilities.

Preserves

The BLM envisions the establishment of both federal and partner-owned preserves — places where the forage is rich — where unadopted wild horses can roam as freely as possible. The preserves could possibly be located in the productive grasslands and plains of America's Midwest, where wild horses once flourished. Preserves are an important element in attaining a sustainable Wild Horse and Burro Program. The BLM's long-term goal is to eventually limit gathers to the number of horses (or burros) that can be adopted or sold. By matching the number of animals removed with the number that can be adopted in a given year, the need for preserves to humanely care for unadopted animals will be reduced over time.

Partnerships, including partner-owned preserves, are one way the BLM hopes to engage Americans in the protection and management of these iconic animals and reduce costs.

Goal: Provide for sustainable long-term care of wild horses and burros in a free-roaming environment working collaboratively with our existing partners; develop new partnerships; and create educational and research opportunities and public access, while reducing costs of care within the next 10 years through an incentive-based approach that will provide local economic development opportunities.

Objective 1: Manage every preserve in a manner that maintains non-reproducing wild horses and burros in pastures large enough to allow free-roaming behavior while providing the food, water, and shelter necessary to sustain them in good condition.

Actions:

1. Utilize animal welfare and care requirements in existing long-term pasture contracts to assure the health and well being of the animals located in preserves.
2. Minimize the handling of wild horses and burros by humans to the greatest extent possible.
3. Utilize standard protocols and criteria for long-term pasture contracts to provide regular, on-the-ground monitoring of the wild horses and burros in preserves in order to ascertain their well being and safety.
4. Manage preserves with individuals who are knowledgeable and experienced about the behavior and nutritional requirements of equines and the management of land for the sustained production of grass and other desirable forage plants.

Objective 2: Increase the stability of long-term holding contracts.

Action:

Seek authority to extend the contract period from a maximum of 5 years to 10 years to provide greater stability/assurance of pasture availability, and continue to solicit (contract) for long-term grassland pastures for a minimum of 200 and a maximum of 5,000 wild horses.

Objective 3: Acquire preserves through acquisition of non-federal land.

Actions:

1. Acquire non-federal land ("fee-title" or full ownership) preserves through purchase, exchange, or donation. Consider less-than-fee title acquisition, if necessary.
2. Develop a communications and outreach strategy to identify potential properties.

Objective 4: Work with partners to establish preserve(s) on existing private land.

Actions:

1. Seek authority to extend assistance agreements with Tribes or non-profit organizations, from a maximum of 5 years to 10 years.
2. Seek partnerships with existing animal sanctuaries/preserves for the placement of wild horses.
3. Open a dialogue with potential partners: land trust and open space organizations, conservation and sportsman groups, private forestry corporations, state or local open space areas, Native American tribes, and others.
4. Explore transfer of animal title to the partner.

Objective 5: Create preserves on other federal agency lands.

Actions:

1. Identify existing non-BLM federal lands which could be suitable for preserve establishment.
2. Develop an Interagency Agreement for preserve creation and joint management of the land and animals.
3. Consider modeling the partnership after the U.S. Department's of Agriculture (USDA) and the Interior Service First program.

Objective 6: Create a program for management of wild horses and burros by private citizens who would be reimbursed for their care through the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA).

Actions:

1. Explore existing USDA private land conservation programs (i.e., Grassland Reserve Program) as a possible mechanism to provide incentives to farmers and ranchers who care for a minimum of 200 up to a maximum of 5,000 wild horses and burros on their private lands.
2. If necessary, seek new authorities to create a new private land conservation program; facilitate and manage the program consistent with the authority provided.

Objective 7: Create preserves on HAs or HMAs which currently have no animals on them.

Actions:

1. Identify any HMAs which currently have no animals; re-evaluate the landscape to determine if wild horses or burros could be reintroduced; if so, identify a proposed AML.
2. Re-evaluate areas of HAs not currently designated as HMAs, to determine if on-the-ground conditions would support an HMA designation; if so, determine a proposed AML.
3. As part of the evaluation process, determine if the HMA or HA is best suited to the management of reproducing or non-reproducing wild horses, or conversion to burros.

4. Amend land use plans and conduct additional site-specific environmental analysis, as appropriate.
5. Evaluate resource monitoring data to adjust AML as needed.

Objective 8: Develop collaborative partnerships; establish and manage at a least one preserve with the primary focus of education and scientific research and development; assure opportunities for public access and learning.

Actions:
1. Develop a needs assessment to identify potential areas for partnering.
2. Develop a strategy to expand partnership opportunities that includes training, grants, tax incentives, emphasizing opportunities for tourism and developing some privately owned, economically self-sustaining preserves.
3. On at least one acquired preserve, develop public viewing areas, visitor center, kiosks, and other venues to manage, communicate, and share the new preserve and the animals with the local community and tourists.
4. Partner with wildlife and parks departments and others throughout the United States to provide educational viewing and tourism opportunities.

Treasured Herds

The Pryor Mountain, Little Bookcliffs and Kiger Mountain wild horses are just a few of the herds that already hold a special place in our hearts. By highlighting treasured herds with special designations, the BLM envisions opportunities for ecotourism and partnerships and volunteers dedicated to protecting and managing all of the wild horses and burros that call these areas home.

The Marietta Burro Range near Hawthorne, Nevada is the nation's first burro range. It was designated in 1991.

Goal 1: Designate selected wild horses and burros as treasured herds through the BLM land use planning process.

Objective 1: Develop planning criteria through an open and transparent public process; update the BLM's Land Use Planning Handbook to address administrative designations of "treasured herds."

Actions:
1. Update the Land Use Planning Handbook within one year.
2. Define what a treasured herd is and is not.
3. Ensure planning direction is specific enough to minimize the need for subsequent management plans.
4. Invite the public to nominate potential treasured herds.
5. Consider local conditions and/or opportunities.
6. Define what ecotourism will and won't be within a designated area.

Objective 2: Identify herds where there is community support for administrative designations.

Action:
Utilize an open and transparent process to administratively designate treasured herds.

Objective 3: Gain support for the BLM-administered designations through early and close coordination with Tribes, other Federal agencies, state and local governments, stakeholders and the general public.

Actions:
1. Conduct government-to-government consultation with Tribes; seek support and enter into agreements to actively manage and support the treasured herd.
2. Coordinate with other federal agencies, state and local agencies; seek support and enter into agreements to actively manage and support the treasured herd.

Objective 4: For each treasured herd proposed, determine the initial and estimated herd size that will maintain a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship for the area.

Actions:
1. Determine the actual herd size and makeup of the treasured herd.
2. Develop guidelines and criteria for adjusting herd size.
3. Develop guidelines and criteria for adjusting herd makeup including sex ratios, color, characteristics, breeding or non-breeding.
4. Determine compatible uses. If other uses are not compatible, identify mitigation for both permitted and non-permitted activities.

Goal 2: Manage for healthy animals and healthy public lands.

Objective 1: Through management of treasured herds, showcase healthy animals and healthy public lands.

Actions:
1. Implement management strategies for treasured herds that will ensure the health of the animals and the land, over the long-term.
2. Engage stakeholders and the general public through an open and transparent process to develop and implement a long-term management strategy.

Objective 2: Co-manage treasured herds with Tribes and/or other agencies or partners through long-term agreements.

Actions:
1. The first designations would be entirely on public lands while BLM explores opportunities to develop agreements with Tribes or other agencies.
2. Subsequent designations could potentially incorporate non-public lands if agreements with Tribes or other agencies can be developed.

Goal 3: Provide opportunities for ecotourism and value-added opportunities for local economies while maintaining the health of all wild horses and burros and the public lands.

Objective: Develop public recognition of each treasured herd and increase the adoption demand for all animals, through communication, visibility, marketing, education, interpretation, and outreach. Encourage involvement by friends groups and the public by seeking volunteer assistance in activities such as monitoring, building projects and maintenance of facilities and infrastructure. Establish public-private partnerships dedicated to adoption and improved management of the treasured herd and their habitat.

Actions:
1. Develop external partners or "Friends of the Treasured Herd."
2. Develop support through increased communication, visibility, marketing, education, interpretation, and outreach.
3. Develop and maintain regional or national support groups to provide more stability for the overall Wild Horse and Burro Program.
4. Develop and maintain local support groups to focus their volunteering efforts on specific designated areas.
5. Develop ecotourism opportunities with local communities and counties, while ensuring added-value to their economies.
6. Develop consistent branding, message, etc.

7. Develop data bases with appropriate designations like Monuments or National Conservation Areas that can be used as good examples of success in ecotourism and value added opportunities to local economies.
8. When an opportunity arises, co-manage with state agencies and local governments.
9. Develop agreements with state agencies and local governments in management of treasured herds. Examples may be working with state or county parks and recreation departments to gain their participation in management of facilities.

Goal 4: Provide a fee generation system to offset growing costs to the overall program.

Objectives: Seek the authority necessary to dedicate any revenue generated to the specific treasured herd. Marketing strategy should allow for "virtual" adoption of treasured herd animals, either specifically or generally. Animals in treasured herds could be virtually adopted through annual donated funds. The funding generated could be used to offset expenses for herd management, and assist in keeping the animals on the range as compared to off the range in private property preserves.

Actions:

1. Develop external partners or "Friends of the Treasured Herd" to include fund raising mechanisms and ensure generated funds remain within the area.
2. Promote filming opportunities (e.g., motion picture settings, PBS) to document or use as a setting and ensure generated funds stay within the area.
3. Develop fee generation capabilities (i.e., campground, entry fee, trail head parking, and kiosks).
4. Utilize fee and/or donation boxes. Donation boxes would allow the general public to participate after their personal experience.

Place Excess Animals into Private Care

More excess wild horses are in need of a good home than ever before — but changing demographics and a number of other factors have made many Americans less willing to accept the challenge of taming and caring for a wild horse. Despite these barriers, the BLM remains dedicated to finding as many good homes for the wild horses and burros that must be removed from the range as we possibly can. To do that, expanding the use of the tools which have been successful and adding a wider range of tools to keep pace with a rapidly changing adoption market will be needed. Through the successful placement of excess horses or burros into private care, the number of animals which must be humanely cared for in short-term corrals or long-term pastures will decrease and the costs for their care will be reduced.

Prison training programs and partnerships with organizations like the Mustang Heritage Foundation and the National Wild Horse Association demonstrate there is a demand for horses with some training. Expanding these types of partnerships is one way the BLM can offer more trained animals for adoption.

Goal: Place more animals into private care.

Objective 1: Expand the adoption/sale customer base.

Actions:

1. Increase the use of Internet-based placement.
2. Increase the use of incentives to help defray some of the costs of horse ownership; seek new authorities if needed.
3. Increase the use of wild horses in public service.
4. Target specific equine disciplines (dressage, trail riding, therapy, and roping horses) and offer trained animals and sponsorships to their members.
5. Establish store fronts (privatized adoption facilities).

Objective 2: Offer more trained animals.

Actions:

1. Expand partnerships to train animals.
2. Expand university training/partnership programs.

3. Expand the number of prisons training wild horses in partnership with the BLM.

Objective 3: Implement an environmental education program to tell the story of America's wild horses and burros.

Actions:
1. Work closely with the BLM's environmental education program staff to create programs for youth.
2. Tailor the curriculum to species biology, history, and ecological interactions and impacts within larger biological communities and landscapes.
3. Increase interaction with youth groups (e.g., 4-H, FFA, Boys and Girls Clubs).
4. Increase education opportunities at BLM-managed facilities through interpretation.
5. Implement a "Take Mustang to School" classroom project for elementary schools throughout the world.
6. Work with volunteers, partners, stakeholders and others to host "Kids and Mustangs Days" throughout the U.S. in partnership with National Wild Horse and Burro Adoption Awareness.
7. Implement a virtual adoption program to allow individuals unable to physically adopt or care for an animal to make a financial contribution (virtually adopt) an unadopted animal in a preserve or long-term holding pasture.

Communications

American society has undergone substantial changes in the last 100 years. Instant messaging, Twitter, YouTube, cable news networks — social media and the World Wide Web are here to stay. The days of typewriters and carbon paper (or pen and ink) have come and gone. With these changes has come the need for the BLM's communications capability to grow and expand, change and adapt.

Goal 1: Partner with stakeholders and others to protect and manage wild horses and burros and tell the story of America's wild horses and burros.

Objective 1: Emphasize partnerships to protect and manage wild horses and burros.

Actions:
1. Increase support to existing partners.
2. Expand the partnership base to increase the BLM's capacity to manage wild horses and burros.

Objective 2: Emphasize partnerships to tell the story of America's wild horses and burros.

Actions:

1. Engage willing partners through various forums and utilize a wide range of media tools/venue to tell the story of America's wild horses and burros.
2. Host range tours in HMAs throughout the West in partnership with National Wild Horse and Burro Adoption Awareness.
3. Partner with celebrity spokesperson(s).

Objective 3: Enhance Congress' understanding of America's wild horses and burros.

Action:

Invite members of Congress and/or key staff to visit long-term holding pastures, tour HMAs in the West, attend gathers or adoption events, or other events, such as Extreme Mustang Makeover events, etc.

Goal 2: Increase the Wild Horse and Burro Program's transparency; improve communications and visibility.

Objective 1: Improve the Wild Horse and Burro Program's website.

Actions:

1. Organize the website in a manner that makes information easily accessible.
2. Keep the website current and up to date.

Objective 2: Increase the availability of Wild Horse and Burro Program information.

Actions:

1. Keep the Wild Horse and Burro Program System (WHBPS) data current to facilitate timely and accurate generation of standardized reports for gathers, adoptions, sales, and facilities.
2. Post standardized reports on the website.
3. Update information on a regular basis.

Animal Welfare

For nearly 40 years, the BLM has protected the health and welfare of wild horses and burros to ensure their humane treatment under the federal legislation that established the Wild Horse and Burro Program. Balancing herd numbers with the land's capacity, handling procedures, facilities, and post-adoption compliance checks were all designed toward this end.

The BLM uses the best, most humane methods for capturing and handling wild horses and burros. These methods are based on decades of experience and consultation with animal behavior and veterinary experts. The BLM will continue to look for improvements in safety, efficiency and humane treatment.

Goal: Use a progressive approach to implement a Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program (CAWP). Develop and implement a CAWP to ensure the well-being of wild horses and burros at gathers and in facilities; ensure compliance with animal care requirements following adoption. The CAWP will bring together existing elements like adoption compliance, with a progression of new components, such as education for employees and contractors; an ongoing, internal animal welfare assessment program; and periodic external reviews of our animal care and handling. Coordinate all components of the CAWP through a new position, the National Animal Welfare Coordinator. Conduct the CAWP with complete transparency.

Objective 1: Develop and implement a Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program (CAWP).

Action:

1. Use the structured approach successfully implemented by other industries to create a program to assess, monitor, and document the BLM's humane treatment of animals to the public on an ongoing basis.
2. Hire a full time Animal Welfare Coordinator.

Objective 2: Outreach the CAWP within the Wild Horse and Burro Program, to the public and to Congress to demonstrate how it will benefit the animals under our care and the program as a whole.

Actions:

1. Develop an animal welfare mission statement.

2. Prepare a flyer and brochure describing the CAWP.
3. Hold interactive educational sessions for employees.
4. Develop web page with information about the CAWP.
5. Create a display or other information for use at adoptions or other wild horse or burro events.

Objective 3: Provide a continuing education program on animal care and handling for employees and contractors.

Action:
Develop learning and training module.

Objective 4: Implement an internal animal welfare assessment program on an ongoing basis.

Actions:
1. Review the results of the ongoing project to develop a "Wild Horse and Burro Care and Welfare Assessment Tool" (University of California, Davis).
2. Create a template for assessing the program at all levels.
3. Develop a rotating schedule and conduct periodic assessments in all BLM states.

Objective 5: Solicit periodic, focused external reviews of animal care and handling at each level of the Wild Horse and Burro Program; gathers, short term holding, long term pastures, adoption and compliance.

Action:
Solicit review from the American Association of Equine Practitioners for gathers and short term holding facilities.

Objective 6: Increase level of veterinary support through the current Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)/BLM wild horse and burro partnership for all helicopter gathers.

Actions:
1. Establish a training module and Standard Operating Procedures for APHIS veterinarians supporting the wild horse and burro partnership.
2. Investigate partnerships with other veterinarian organizations to provide additional support to the program.

Objective 7: Report to the public and Congress regarding the welfare of all the animals under our care.

Actions:

1. Incorporate reporting of the BLM's internal welfare assessments on the website and in Reports to Congress.
2. Create animal welfare informational material for distribution at gathers, adoptions, other events and the BLM's public rooms.

Science and Research

The BLM's 2003 Strategic Research Plan identifies research priorities for the Wild Horse and Burro Program. Included are: health and handling, fertility control, population estimation and modeling, genetic conservation, habitat assessment and setting population goals. The components of fertility control and population estimation have been implemented and research is being conducted. Genetic diversity of wild horse and burro herds is also being evaluated. Other research programs are being implemented as needed.

How many horses are there? Counting horses from a moving aircraft several hundred feet above the ground isn't easy. Add tree cover, rugged terrain, and poor weather, and the job becomes even more difficult. To address this challenge, the BLM is working with the United States Geological Survey (USGS) to research and implement population estimation techniques based on the best available science.

Goal: Use the best science available to manage wild horses and burros.

Objective 1: Apply the best available methods and techniques to estimate wild horse and burro population size and genetic diversity; reduce wild horse and burro population growth rates; assess habitat conditions; establish AML; and assess wild horse and burro health and welfare. Pursue research that will improve these methods and techniques.

Actions:

1. Continue existing research and explore new research opportunities for:
   a. Fertility control and sterilization of both male and female wild horses and burros.
   b. Wild horse and burro population estimation techniques.
2. Continue monitoring and explore new research opportunities related to wild horses and burros:
   a. Health and welfare.

   b. Genetic diversity.
   c. Habitat conditions.
3. Given a reasonable expectation of safety, implement promising management techniques as soon as they are practically, economically, and legally feasible even though research may not be absolutely conclusive.

Objective 2: Review and evaluate current science applicable to wild horse and burro management.

Actions:
1. Commission the National Academy of Science, National Research Council (NRC) to review the three earlier reports (1980, 1982, and 1991) and make recommendations on the best science for wild horse and burro management and for needed new research.
2. Review and update the cooperative research strategy between the BLM and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) regarding wild horse and burro research priorities.
3. Review historic recommendations of the National Wild Horses and Burros Advisory Board regarding research, determine whether these recommendations were implemented, are no longer relevant, or need to be pursued.

Objective 3: Utilize current rangeland health information to support decisions that affect the management of wild horse and burro herds and their habitat.

Actions:
1. Use the best available science when conducting rangeland health assessments, evaluations, and habitat monitoring (utilization, trend, actual use, and climate data) in order to verify AML ranges and determine progress toward attainment of Land Health Standards and HMA-specific management objectives.
2. Incorporate adaptive management approaches to effectively manage wild horse and burro herds and their habitat.
3. Closely coordinate wild horse and burro habitat monitoring with other resource program's monitoring activities.
4. Determine the need for habitat improvements to assist with animal distribution and forage availability.

Wild Horse and Burro Program History

- ***The Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971 (the Act)*** calls for the protection and management of wild horses and burros to assure a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship on the range. The BLM estimates only 17,000 wild horses and 8,000 burros remained in 10 western states when the Act passed in 1971.

- The Act limits wild horses and burros to areas of the public lands where they were found in 1971. HAs comprise approximately 51 million acres of public, private, or other non-BLM managed land.

- By 1976, wild horse and burro populations had grown to an estimated 49,000 animals. Congress amended the Act to authorize the BLM to use helicopters in the removal of excess animals. The BLM also initiated a national Adopt-A-Horse (or Burro) Program to encourage animal enthusiasts to adopt animals — but there was still no provision to pass "title" of the animal to the adopter. Only a few were willing to adopt the animals without eventually becoming their legal owner.

- The 1976 amendment also required the BLM to complete land use plans and to manage wild horses and burros as one of the many uses of the public lands under the principles of multiple use and sustained yield.

- By 1978, populations on the range had grown to nearly 54,000 animals. Congress amended the Act a second time — to define "excess" wild horses and burros, and require their immediate removal. The BLM was also given authority to transfer title of adopted animals to the adopter after a one-year period.

- In the late 1970s, the BLM began to prepare land use plans as directed by Congress. Through land use planning, the BLM evaluated each HA to determine if the goal of managing healthy wild horses and burros on healthy rangelands over the long-term could be met.

- Today, the BLM manages horses and burros in 180 subsets of the original HAs — HMAs — that comprise about 32 million acres of public, private and other landownership.

- The BLM also determined the AML of wild horses and burros within each HMA. The AML is the maximum number of wild horses and burros which avoids a deterioration of the range and results in a thriving ecological balance.

- To establish the AML, teams of BLM interdisciplinary resource specialists completed in-depth evaluations of resource monitoring and population inventory data collected over several years. The results of the BLM's analyses were then documented and decisions issued. AML is set in consideration of the land's ability to sustain and produce forage and habitat for wild horses and burros, wildlife and domestic livestock over the long term.

- Currently, AML is estimated at about 26,600 animals in the ten western states. This compares with the current estimated population of wild horses and burros on the range of 38,365.

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