

**Finding of No Significant Impact
for the Humboldt River Field Office
Humboldt Herd Area Gather
Final Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-NV-W010-2013-0024-EA**

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based on the interdisciplinary analysis conducted in the Humboldt Herd Area Gather Final Environmental Assessment (EA), DOI-BLM-NV-W010-2013-0024-EA, dated April 11, 2014 and my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's criteria for significance (40 CFR § 1508.27), both with regard to the context and the intensity, I have determined that the impacts associated with implementation of any of the Action Alternatives are not significant. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required as per Section 102 (2) (C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

CONTEXT

This Final EA has been prepared to analyze the proposal to conduct a wild horse gather in the Humboldt Herd Area (HA). The proposed gather would include removing excess wild horses from the Humboldt HA. The Humboldt HA is administered by the Winnemucca District, Humboldt River Field Office (HRFO).

The Humboldt HA was not designated for the long term management of the wild horses in the Sonoma-Gerlach Management Framework Plan (SG-MFP WHB 1.3) due to the checkerboard land ownership pattern found within the HA and therefore is not managed for wild horses and burros.

The Humboldt HA consists of approximately 431,544 total acres of public and private lands and the gather area consists of approximately 431,544 acres. In 1993, the BLM removed 173 wild horses that were residing on these lands. Since the last gather, it has been documented that wild horses have remained within and others have moved back into the Humboldt HA. Wild horses have moved into the Humboldt HA in search of forage, water, and space due to the current over-population of wild horses in the North Stillwater HMA as well as the current drought conditions.

Portions of the western United States, including Nevada and the WD have been in a state of drought for the past three years and the pattern is continuing into 2014. The Humboldt HA in particular, has been experiencing exceptional drought conditions since July 2, 2013 which covered the majority of the HA and more recently the entire HA is experiencing exceptional drought conditions.

The estimated population of wild horses within the entire gather area, on public and private lands, is approximately 185 wild horses plus the 2014 foal crop based on prior surveys and ground observations. The private landowners have requested in writing that BLM remove the excess wild horses from their private lands during a gather.

The Proposed Action as identified and described in full, in the EA, would be to implement a long term removal strategy in case wild horses are missed or they move over from the neighboring

North Stillwater Herd Management Area (HMA). Bait/water trapping would be the primary gather mechanism for the gather; however, the use of helicopter gathering may be used in this phased management strategy as a supplementary gather technique to assist in bring the herd population to zero. Due to funding, holding space limitations, and gather efficiency constraints, it may take multiple gathers over a 10 year period after the initial gather to achieve the desired population of zero. The proposed initial gather is expected to take approximately 30 days to complete.

INTENSITY

1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The EA considered both beneficial and adverse impacts of the gather and removal of wild horses from the gather area once it is placed on the national gather schedule. Follow up gathers over the next 10 years to maintain the HA at a zero population of wild horses may be necessary. The analysis included impacts associated with gather activities on pregnant mares and young foals. Removal of the wild horses from the Humboldt HA would lessen the risk of collisions involving vehicles and wild horses. The Lovelock-Oreana Well Head Protection Zone would be further protected by the removal of wild horses. Removing excess wild horses from the gather area would reduce the level of utilization of rangeland and riparian vegetation, and alleviate competition for resources between wildlife and livestock. Private land would see a reduction of impacts due to the removal of wild horses. A removal of wild horses would allow for the recovery of natural resources, such as soils, vegetation, watersheds, wildlife, fisheries, and wildlife habitat. Removal of excess wild horses would also lessen impacts to cultural resources in riparian areas as fewer animals would be trampling areas that may contain prehistoric archaeological sites while utilizing water sources.

Every attempt would be made to place gather and holding sites in previously disturbed areas and in areas that have had an inventory for cultural resources. If a new site were to be used, a cultural inventory would be completed prior to use of the site. All gather sites and holding sites would be constructed in accordance with the design criteria for implementing any of the Action Alternatives. (Refer to EA Chapter 2.1 Description of the Proposed Action).

2) The degree to which the Action Alternatives affects public health or safety.

The Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and observation protocols would be followed to conduct the gather and are designed to protect human health and safety, as well as the health and safety of the wild horses. The SOPs and protocols can be found in the EA Appendix A. Standard Operating Procedures for Wild Horse Gathers. The Proposed Action would have minimal effects on public health or safety.

Gathering of the wild horses in the Humboldt HA would lessen the chance for wild horse/vehicle collisions on the county roads, therefore improving public safety. The gather would also lessen the impacts from wild horses pushing on the enclosure and potentially entering the fence that surrounds the Lovelock-Oreana Well Head Protection Zone.

3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

There are no park lands within or in close proximity to the Humboldt HA.

Prime farmlands would not be affected by the implementation of the Action Alternatives.

There are no wild and scenic rivers within or in close proximity to the Humboldt HA.

There are no Wilderness or Wilderness Study Areas within the Humboldt HA.

Direct impacts to cultural resources are not anticipated because gather sites and temporary holding facilities would be placed in previously disturbed areas or inventoried for cultural resources prior to construction. If cultural resources are found in an area, a new location would be identified in which to set up temporary gather sites and holding corrals.

The Proposed Action would not impact resources and/or special designations identified above.

4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The effects that would occur from the implementation of the gather are well known and understood. Some members of the public have advocated for no removals of wild horses from any public lands and urge removals of livestock or letting the wild horse population grow until it collapses due to lack of water and forage. Since the Humboldt HA was not designated for the long term management of the wild horses in the Sonoma-Gerlach Management Framework Plan (SG-MFP WHB 1.3) due to the checkerboard land ownership pattern found within the HA, it is not managed for wild horses and burros. Wild horses are impacting both public and private lands and therefore the excess wild horses must be removed. The BLM is mandated to maintain a zero population on areas not managed for wild horses or burros.

No unresolved issues were raised following public notification of the proposed gather. The effects of wild horse gathers on the quality of the human environment are well documented through the forty years of management of wild horses and burros, through gathers and other population controls, and are not highly controversial.

5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The Proposed Action has no known effects on the human environment which are considered highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

Future projects occurring within the gather area would be evaluated through the NEPA process and evaluated with the appropriate level of NEPA documentation. The Proposed Action does not set a precedent for future actions.

7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

The Proposed Action is not related to other actions within the cumulative assessment area that would result in cumulatively significant impacts.

8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic

Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

The Proposed Action would not affect districts, sites, highways, structures or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic places nor would it cause destruction or significant loss of scientific, cultural, or historical resources. A cultural resource inventory would be completed prior to gather site and corral construction. Temporary gather sites and holding facility sites would be inventoried prior to any ground disturbing activities to determine the presence of sites that are unclassified, eligible, or potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Archaeological site inventories and avoidance measures would ensure that loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources would not occur. Native American consultation and coordination activities were conducted and concerns relative to implementation of the Proposed Action have been addressed.

9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical in the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Since no threatened or endangered species have been identified in the project area, this resource was dismissed from further analysis. The Proposed Action would not adversely affect any threatened or candidate species or critical habitat.

The Humboldt Population Management Unit (PMU) for Greater Sage-Grouse is located within the Humboldt HA. Within the PMU there are approximately 36,164 acres of preliminary general habitat (PGH) for the Greater Sage-grouse. The Greater Sage-grouse was determined to be a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act in 2010, but it's listing has been precluded by other species. Although not currently listed as a Threatened or Endangered Species by the US. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Greater Sage Grouse is considered a BLM sensitive species and policy has been issued affording it extra protection.

10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The Proposed Action would not violate or threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. The Proposed Action is in conformance with all applicable regulations. The Proposed Action would not violate the Migratory Bird Treaty Act or Endangered Species Act.

All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm and unnecessary or undue degradation of the public land are incorporated in the Proposed Action.

/s/ Victor Lozano

Victor Lozano
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Humboldt River Field Office

5/28/2014

Date