



Bureau of Land Management
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Owyhee Field Office
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Determination of Land Use Plan Conformance and NEPA Adequacy (DNA)
U.S. Department of the Interior - Bureau of Land Management

A. BLM Office: Owyhee Field Office

NEPA Log Number: DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2015-0015-DNA

Proposed Action Title/Type: Soda Fire Emergency Wild Horse Gather

Location/Legal of Proposed Action: Sands Basin, HardTrigger, and Black Mountain Herd Management Areas

Description of the Proposed Action and any applicable mitigation measures:

The Soda Fire started August 10, 2015. This fire has consumed 283,686 acres of ground. The fire perimeter encompasses the Sands Basin, Hardtrigger and Black Mountain Herd Management Areas (HMA). To date, 100% of Sands Basin and Hardtrigger HMAs and 34% of Black Mountain HMA has burned. A 2014 census for the Sands Basin, Hardtrigger, and Black Mountain HMAs and the additional foal crop supports the estimated herd numbers of 70, 150, and 80, respectively, for a total estimated horse count of 300 horses.

The Owyhee Field Office plans to capture approximately 285 horses using both the helicopter and bait/water trapping methods. All horses would be removed from the Sands Basin and Hardtrigger HMAs. All, or as many as possible, horses would be gathered from the Black Mountain HMA. However, 30 Wild Horses (Low AML) would be returned to the HMA. These Wild Horses will be returned to the Black Mountain HMA. As only 33% of the HMA burned, there is still sufficient forage and habitat to sustain this number of Wild Horses. All mares over 2-years old that would be returned to the Black Mountain HMA would first be treated with the fertility control vaccine PZP-22 (a 22 month, pelleted form of the immunocontraceptive porcine zona pellucida). These mares would be returned within 1 month of capture. Completion of this project would prevent death loss from lack of forage due to fire.

The BLM would hold and care for the wild horses captured from the Sands Basin and Hardtrigger HMAs in the Boise District Wild Horse Corrals. After range condition have been sufficiently rehabilitated, and the areas have recovered from the Soda Fire, horses would be returned to both HMAs to the low end of the Appropriate Management Level (AML), which is 33 horses for Sands Basin HMA and 66 for Hardtrigger HMA. All mares over 2-years old that would be returned to the Sands Basin and Hardtrigger HMAs would first be treated with the

fertility control vaccine PZP-22 (a 22 month, pelleted form of the immunocontraceptive porcine zona pellucida). Between 50 and 100 of the horses removed from the three HMAs would be held in the Boise Corrals to be offered for adoption. The balance of wild horses removed from these HMAs would likely be held in the Palomino Valley Corrals or the Fallon Corrals (both BLM facilities) in Nevada.

Because the entire area of the Sands Basin and Hardtrigger HMAs has burned, 100% removal of Wild Horses is necessary. It is practical to gather 80-90% of the wild horses by helicopter methods. However, 10-20% of the wild horses could be difficult to capture due to inaccessibility and/or their lack of responsiveness to helicopter gather methods. If helicopter operations are not successful in capturing 100% of the wild horses in Sands Basin and Hardtrigger HMAs, the BLM may conduct a bait/water capture gather to remove the remaining horses. When this method is used, feed, water, and/or mineral licks would be placed in a temporary trap area to lure wild horses into the trap. Initially, the temporary trap would be erected and left without bait prior to the gather to allow horses to become gradually accustomed to the trap, thereby reducing the stress level when captured. After bait is placed, horses enter the trap to eat or drink and are captured by closing a one-way gate behind them. Methods used for a bait/water capture are described in Appendix B of Black Mountain and Hardtrigger HMA Wild Horse Capture, Treat, Release and Removal Plan Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2012-0010-EA.

The gather may take place between August 25 and September 15, 2015. Bait/water capture of those animals the initial gather does not capture could occur over several months after the gather.

B. Conformance with the Land Use Plan (LUP) and Consistency with Related Subordinate Implementation Plans

LUP/Document¹	Sections/Pages	Date Approved
Owyhee Resource Management Plan	Objective WHRS 1, pages 21 & 22; Objective FIRE2, Management Action 4, page 26	December 30, 1999
Normal Fire Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan	Section II.C.h, Page 19	May 6, 2005

¹List applicable LUPs (e.g., Resource Management Plans, Management Framework Plans, or applicable amendments) and activity, project, management, water quality restoration, or program plans.

The proposed action is in conformance with the LUP, even though it is not specifically provided for, because it is clearly consistent with the following LUP decisions (objectives, terms, and conditions):

To manage Wild Horses in a thriving natural ecological balance, as required by the ORMP and the Wild and Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971, it is necessary to allow forage and rangeland conditions to improve without pressure from grazing. Thus, it is necessary to remove wild horses from these burned areas as is described in the 2005 Normal Fire ESR Plan.

C. Identify applicable NEPA documents and other related documents that cover the Proposed Action. List by name and date other documentation relevant to the proposed action (e.g., biological assessment, biological opinion, watershed assessment, allotment evaluation, and monitoring report).

NEPA/Other Related Documents	Sections/Pages	Date Approved
Black Mountain and Hardtrigger HMA Wild Horse Capture, Treat, Release and Removal Plan Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2012-0010-EA	Entire Document Section 2.2.2 and 3.1.2.2 specifically.	September 26, 2012

D. NEPA Adequacy Criteria

- 1. Is the new proposed action a feature of, or essentially similar to, an alternative analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s)? Is the project within the same analysis area, or if the project location is different, are the geographic and resource conditions sufficiently similar to those analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s)? If there are differences, can you explain why they are not substantial?**

Documentation of answer and explanation:

Yes. This proposed action would be essentially the same as Alternative A in the 2012 EA. That alternative analyzed gathering all the horses from the HMAs, treating mares over 2 years old with PZP-22, and reducing the population to low Appropriate Management Level (AML). This analysis included the Hardtrigger and Black Mountain HMAs. Though the document and decision had been finalized in 2012, the gather was not implemented due to a lack of funding and lack of holding space for the excess horses. The effects of the current proposal would be substantially the same as those discussed in the Black Mountain/Hardtrigger EA, the only difference being the number of horses removed as the population has continued to increase.

In 2013 BLM initiated, but did not finalize, a gather EA for the Sands Basin HMA. It also proposed removal of Wild Horses and reduction in population to the Low AML. The EA and associated analyses were completed, but a decision to implement was never completed due also to the lack of funding and holding space. Though a decision was never completed for this EA, the effects of the current proposed action would be the same as those disclosed in the Black Mountain/Hardtrigger EA. The HMAs are less than 20 miles apart and effects to horses, regardless of location, are universal.

2. Is the range of alternatives analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s) appropriate with respect to the new proposed action, given current environmental concerns, interests, resource values, and circumstances?

Documentation of answer and explanation:

Yes. The 2012 Black Mountain and Hardtrigger EA analyzed a range of alternatives that included continuing current management; Capture, Treat, and Release to include contraceptive treatment; Removal to Low AML; and Capture, Treat, Release and Removal. The preliminary Sands Basin EA analyzed No Action and Removal to Low AML.

The current proposal would include the capture of all Wild Horses within the HMAs, temporary holding of the Sands Basin and Hardtrigger Herds until range conditions are sufficiently rehabilitated, and the removal of Black Mountain herd populations to Low AML.

3. Is the existing analysis adequate and are the conclusions adequate in light of any new information or circumstances (e.g., riparian proper functioning condition reports; rangeland health standards assessments; inventory and monitoring data; most recent USFWS lists of threatened, endangered, proposed, and candidate species; most recent BLM lists of sensitive species)? Can you reasonably conclude that all new information and all new circumstances would not substantially change the analysis of the new proposed action?

Documentation of answer and explanation:

Yes. The conditions and affected environment discussed in the 2012 EA are substantially the same except that range conditions have continued to decline as the herd populations have increased over the past three years. Additionally, the vegetation in the HMAs has burned off as a result of the Soda Fire that started on August 10, 2015.

4. Are the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects that would result from implementation of the new proposed action similar (both quantitatively and qualitatively) to those analyzed in the existing NEPA document?

Documentation of answer and explanation:

Yes. The only difference in effects as analyzed in the 2012 EA would be the temporal scope. With the exception the Black Mountain herd, horses would be held in temporary holding facilities for an extended period until the rehabilitation/restoration treatments within those HMAs and associated resource and treatment objectives.

5. Are the public involvement and interagency review associated with existing NEPA document(s) adequate for the current Proposed Action?

Documentation of answer and explanation:

Yes. The internal scoping and public involvement that occurred prior to completing the analysis for the 2012 EA included receiving numerous form letters initiated by various interest groups and less than 10 individual letters from interested parties including adjacent land owners.

E. Persons/Agencies /BLM Staff Consulted

Name	Title	Resource/Agency Represented
Steve Leonard	Wild Horse and Burro Specialist	BLM – Boise District
Seth Flanigan	NEPA Specialist	BLM – Boise District
Chris Robbins	Rangeland Management Specialist	BLM Idaho State Office
Eric Mayes	NEPA Specialist	BLM Idaho State Office

Note: Refer to the EA (available on the BLM NEPA Register at https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa_register.do) for a complete list of the team members participating in the preparation of the original environmental analysis or planning documents.

F. Mitigation Measures: The gather would be completed according to Appendix B in the 2012 EA (Standard Operating Procedures for Wild Horse (or)Burro Gathers).

G. Conclusion

Based on the review documented above, I conclude that this proposal conforms to the applicable land use plan and that the NEPA documentation fully covers the proposed action and constitutes BLM's compliance with the requirements of NEPA.

/s/ Chris Robbins
Preparer

8/25/2015
Date

/s/ Seth Flanigan
NEPA Specialist

8/25/2015
Date

/s/ Michelle G. Ryerson
Owyhee Field Manager

8/25/2015
Date