

Black Mountain Herd Management Area Wild Burro Gather and Population Control Plan

Finding of No Significant Impacts

DOI-BLM-AZ-C010-2019-0030-EA

August 2020



BACKGROUND:

The Bureau of Land Management, Kingman Field Office (BLM) has analyzed the potential impacts of several wild burro management alternatives for the Black Mountain Herd Management Area (HMA) in Mohave County, Arizona. Management of wild burros in the Black Mountain HMA is guided by the Kingman Resource Management Plan (RMP), 1995; the Black Mountain Ecosystem Management Plan (BMEMP), 1996; and the Lake Mead National Recreation Area (NRA) Burro Management Final Environmental Impact Statement, 1995 (referred to throughout the document as the Lake Mead NRA Burro Management Plan).

The BMEMP set the appropriate management level (AML) for the Black Mountain HMA at 478 wild burros. The AML is defined as the number of adult wild burros that can be sustained within a designated HMA to achieve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance (TNEB) in keeping with the multiple-use and sustained yield management of the area. The Black Mountain HMA AML was established at a level that would maintain healthy wild burros and meet vegetation objectives over the long-term (BLM 1996).

Based on current information, the BLM has determined that there are approximately 1,727 wild burros above AML within the Black Mountain HMA. These excess wild burros need to be removed in order to achieve a TNEB and prevent further degradation of rangeland resources.

The environmental assessment (EA) analyzed the potential direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts of five alternatives. The alternatives included: Alternatives A (Proposed Action), B, C and D. Seven other alternatives were considered, but not analyzed in detail (refer to Chapter 2 of the EA).

CONTEXT:

The Black Mountain HMA is located in northwestern Arizona and occupies the western third of Mohave County. The area parallels the eastern shoreline of the Colorado River for approximately 80 miles, from Hoover Dam on the north end to Interstate 40 on the south end. The Black Mountain HMA is the largest HMA in Arizona, with about one million acres of Mojave Desert scrub and Grand Canyon Desert scrub. The HMA spans just over 1 million acres (including 567,063 acres of BLM-administered lands and 165,005 acres of National Park Service administered lands) within Mohave County, Arizona.

The climate throughout the HMA is warm, windy and dry, with summer temperatures exceeding 120 degrees Fahrenheit in the lower elevations and winter temperatures reaching as low as 25 degrees Fahrenheit or less. Along the Colorado River, the area receives approximately three inches of rainfall per year and at the higher points of elevation (peaks) as much as 12 inches of rain annually.

Three wilderness areas (Mt. Wilson, Mt. Nutt, and Warm Springs) and two Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) exist within the HMA, the Black Mountains Ecosystem Management ACEC and the Bullhead Bajada Natural and Cultural ACEC.

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations state that the significance of impacts must be determined in terms of both context and intensity (40 CFR 1508.27). The context of the

action alternatives is the geographic extent of the Black Mountain HMA. For this reason, the analysis of impacts in the attached EA is focused at this scale.

INTENSITY:

The CEQ regulations include the following ten considerations for evaluating intensity:

1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

None of the environmental effects for the Proposed Action (Alternative A), as discussed in detail in the EA (refer to Chapter 3 Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences) are considered significant, nor do the effects exceed any known threshold of significance, either beneficial or adverse. Alternative A was developed to restore and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple use relationship consistent with other resource needs as required under the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burros Act of 1971 (WFRHBA). Although the gather and removal of excess wild burros is expected to have short-term impacts on individual animals, over the long-term, it is expected to benefit wild burro health by improving forage and habitat conditions in the HMA and would be beneficial for rangeland resources such as vegetative communities, riparian resources, and wildlife habitat.

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

Alternative A would not have significant, adverse impacts on public health or safety. Activities associated with gather operations and fertility control treatments would be conducted away from heavily populated areas. Additionally, standard operating procedures and established public observation protocols would reduce the potential for any impacts to public health or safety.

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.

A number of known cultural resources exist within the Black Mountain HMA, however as described in Chapter 3 of the EA and as part of the standard operating procedures, these resources would be avoided during the gather. Trap sites and holding facilities would be surveyed before the gather begins to prevent adverse effects to cultural resources. If unanticipated cultural resources are discovered during the trapping process at the capture sites, trapping would cease immediately, and the Authorized Officer would be notified.

Wild burros on park lands within the HMA are managed jointly by the BLM and the National Park Service under the Lake Mead NRA Burro Management Plan. There are no anticipated significant effects from Alternative A to the integrity or any values on the Lake Mead NRA.

There are two ACECs within the HMA, the Black Mountains Ecosystem Management ACEC and the Bullhead Bajada Natural and Cultural ACEC. As described in Chapter 3 of the EA, management objectives for ACEC values pertaining to wildlife species (including desert bighorn sheep) would be maintained and implementation of Alternative A would conform to and support the management goals for these areas.

There are no prime or unique farmlands, wetlands, or wild and scenic rivers within the HMA.

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

The potential impacts to wild burros, vegetation, soil resources, invasive, non-native and noxious species, water resources, wildlife resources (including sensitive status species), livestock grazing and human health and safety anticipated by implementation of Alternative A have been analyzed in detail within the EA and found not to be significant (see Chapter 3 of EA). These impacts are not highly controversial, nor is there substantial dispute within the scientific community regarding the nature or intensity of these effects. The burro management activities proposed in the EA have been studied and the anticipated effects are well documented in the literature; there is little to no scientific controversy over the potential impacts.

Comment letters were reviewed to determine if they provided evidence of potential highly controversial effects, as defined under 40 CFR 1508.27(b)(4). While it was clear that the comments demonstrated public interest in wild burro management activities, as well as expressed disagreement over the best option for wild burro management, none of the comments demonstrated that there was a high degree of scientific controversy over the nature of the potential effects of the management actions proposed under Alternative A (see EA, Appendix L).

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

The burro management activities proposed in the EA and as part of Alternative A have been studied and the anticipated effects are well documented in the literature; the possible effects on the human environment are not highly uncertain and would not involve unique or unknown risks. The BLM reviewed the comments to determine if they provided evidence of uncertain effects or unique or unknown risks as defined under 40 CFR 1508.27(b)(5). Some of the comments suggested these types of effects were likely to occur but failed to provide factual evidence to support such claims (see EA, Appendix L). For this reason, the BLM finds that the potential impacts are adequately analyzed for Alternative A in the EA and the nature of these impacts is not highly uncertain, nor would they involve either 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.

Most of the alternative actions simply step-down or implement management decisions previously made in broader-scale land use or herd management plans. None of the management techniques analyzed in the EA represent new or untested methodologies.

The actions proposed and analyzed in the EA under Alternative A would not set a precedent for any future BLM actions. While these management approaches could be applied to other HMAs through later proposals, use of these methods would not bind the BLM to apply these approaches elsewhere.

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

As described in Chapter 4 of the EA, none of the impacts associated with Alternative A would have significant cumulative effects nor contribute incrementally to significant cumulative 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 (NRHP) or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

The HMA is located within a larger landscape that has been occupied for centuries. There are no officially designated Traditional Cultural Properties in the HMA. Cultural resources are known to exist within the Black Mountain HMA, however as described in Chapter 3 and as part of the standard operating procedures, these resources would be avoided during the gather activities and operations. Twelve Native American tribes were notified of the project and have been provided the opportunity to review and comment on the analysis of potential effects to these values as well as enter into consultation if desired. No specific concerns with the proposed activities under Alternative A have been identified to date.

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 under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.*

There are no listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat that would be impacted by the proposed activities described within the EA under Alternative A.

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

As described in the EA, Alternative A would comply with applicable Federal, State, and local laws and requirements imposed for protection of the environment.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT DETERMINATION

This finding and conclusion is based on the consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA, and all other information available to me.

Based on the analysis of the Proposed Action and other alternatives in the *Black Mountain Herd Management Area Wild Burro Gather and Population Control Plan*, EA# DOI-BLM-AZ-C010-2019-0030-EA, and following issuance of the EA for public review and, I have determined that implementing Alternative A, the Proposed Action Alternative, as described in Chapter 2 of the EA, with incorporated standard operating procedures (found in the numerous EA appendices) will not have a significant impact to the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described above.

/s/Amanda M. Dodson, authenticated by A. Rose
Amanda M. Dodson
Field Manager
Kingman Field Office

August 4, 2020
Date