



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Owyhee Field Office
20 First Avenue West
Marsing, Idaho 83639



SCOPING INFORMATION PACKAGE

**Owyhee Field Office Herd Management Areas Management Plan
DOI-BLM-ID-B030-2022-0008-EA**

This information package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to conduct a gather and remove excess wild horses from within the Sands Basin, Hardtrigger and Black Mountain Herd Management Areas (HMAs) in accordance with the 1999 Owyhee Resource Management Plan (RMP) that set the Appropriate Management Level (AML) for each HMA. Federal actions must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences.

The purpose of this report is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposal and to solicit comments to assist with the NEPA review of the proposal. Analysis of the proposal is ongoing and will be documented in an environmental assessment with an estimated completion date of June 2022. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed action and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose of and need for the project. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received by June 10, 2022. Information on the proposal can be found at: <https://go.usa.gov/xuPqg> (URL is case-sensitive).

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to: (1) remove excess wild horses from within the Sands Basin, Hardtrigger, and Black Mountain HMAs to achieve the established AML, (2) reduce the wild horse population growth rate to minimize the need for repeated gathers, and (3) restore a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple use relationship on the public lands. These actions are consistent with the provisions of Section 1333 (a) of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act (WFRHBA) of 1971 (as amended).

The need for the Proposed Action is to provide for the health and safety of the Wild Horse herds, protect rangeland resources and to prevent unnecessary or undue degradation of the public lands associated with an excess population of wild horses within the HMA, and through adoption, provide the best opportunities for excess horses to be placed into private care, rather than removed to off-range pastures (ORP).

Existing Condition

The Owyhee Front in the Owyhee Field Office includes the Sands Basin, Hardtrigger, and Black Mountain HMAs. The Sands Basin HMA is located approximately ten miles southwest of Marsing, Idaho in the Sands Basin Allotment (#00521). The Sands Basin HMA encompasses approximately 9,448 acres of public land, 886 acres of state land, and 1,381 acres of private land, for a total of 11,715 acres. Elevation in the Sands Basin HMA varies from approximately 4,000 ft. near Jump Creek to 5,500 ft. at the top of the ridges.

The Hardtrigger and Black Mountain HMAs are adjacent to each other. The Hardtrigger HMA is located approximately five miles south of Marsing, Idaho in the Elephant Butte (#0513), Rats Nest (#0522), Reynolds Creek (#0508), Shares Basin (#0556) and Hardtrigger (#0516) allotments. The Hardtrigger HMA encompasses approximately 60,061 acres of public land, 4,418 acres of state land, and 1,548 acres of private land, for a total of 66,063 acres. The Black Mountain HMA is located approximately two miles southwest of Murphy, Idaho in the Hardtrigger (#0516), Rabbit Creek Peters Gulch (#0517), and East Reynolds Creek (#0651) allotments. The Black Mountain HMA encompasses approximately 46,881 acres of public land, 2,550 acres of state land, and 1,180 acres of private land, for a total of 50,611 acres. Elevations in the Hardtrigger and Black Mountain HMAs vary from approximately 2,200 feet in the northern portion to 6,700 feet at Black Mountain.

The Appropriate Management Levels (AML) for the Sands Basin, Hardtrigger and Black Mountain HMAs range from 33 to 64, 66-130 and 30-60 respectively. The AML for Sands Basin, Hardtrigger and Black Mountain HMAs was established through the 1999 Owyhee RMP (USDI 1999). AMLs were established based on monitoring data and following a thorough public review. There is a similar dietary overlap between wild horses and livestock. Therefore, AUMs (Animal Unit Months) were allocated to wild horses on a proportional basis with other uses of the allotments (wildlife, livestock) using the best available utilization data collected within the allotments (Table 3).

Table 3. Wild Horse Forage Allocations

Herd Management Area	Allocation (AUM)	AML Range
Sands Basin	588	33-64
Hardtrigger	1,176	66-130
Black Mountain	540	30-60

An AML range was established for all HMAs for several reasons. Resource degradation would likely occur when wild horse population levels exceed the upper range of AML. Periodic gathers would be required to maintain the wild horse population at the maximum AML if a range were not established. This would require either removing the annual increase in population each year or gathering less frequently and removing larger numbers. An AML range allows flexibility to gather to a lower number and be able to allow the herd to build over time to the higher number. Horses would be within the AML range for a longer period of time and would not need to be disturbed any more than necessary.

Description of Project

The BLM Owyhee Field Office (OFO) is proposing to manage wild horse populations in the Sands Basin, Hardtrigger, and Black Mountain HMAs by implementing gathers and other herd management actions to achieve AML. A variety of methods would be evaluated for use to achieve AML including aerial, ground gather and bait trap removal operations of wild horses from the HMA's. Fertility control treatment to mares using either Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP) or GonaCon may occur. The action would be designed to help maintain the appropriate management level (AML) through capture, removal, and use of fertility control of wild horses while maintaining a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple use relationships. It is anticipated that the management actions/alternatives planned for in this EA would continue until policy changes occur, or the affected environment changes enough that additional analysis is required.

Under the Proposed Action, BLM would gather the number of horses needed to conduct adequate fertility treatments and remove excess horses down to the low end of AML. A percentage of gathered horses would be released back into the HMA. A gather would be conducted from each of the Owyhee Field Office HMA's on a three-year cycle (see chart A for draft schedule). All excess wild horses that are removed would be prepared for the adoption program. An initial gather could be completed as early as the summer of 2022 on the Black Mountain HMA, using the bait and trap method.

HMA	2022	2023	2024
Black Mountain HMA	X		
Sands Basin HMA		X	
Hardtrigger HMA			X

The schedule would be repeated every three years as needed based on keeping AML at the low end of the scale. This would be monitored annually based on herd size and fertility treatment success rates.

Preliminary Issues

Wild Horses:

- What would be direct effects of the alternatives on wild horses?
- What would be the effects of the population suppression methods being considered in the alternatives have on wild horse behavior?

Vegetation:

- What would be the effects of the alternatives on upland and riparian vegetation?

Soils:

- What would be the effects of the alternatives on soil erosion potential within the HMAs?

Livestock Grazing Management:

- What would be the effects of the alternatives on livestock grazing management and associated ranch operations?

Wildlife:

- What would be the effects of the alternatives on big game species (Elk, Mule Deer, and Pronghorn Antelope)?
- What would be the effects of the alternatives on habitat for greater sage-grouse?

Decision to be Made

The Owyhee Field Manager is the Authorized Officer (AO) responsible for the decision regarding management of wild horses in the three HMA's. Based on the results of the NEPA analysis, the authorized officer will determine whether to move forward with herd management actions or whether additional analysis would be required. If the AO determines that additional analysis is not necessary, the EA will provide information for the AO to make an informed decision on specific herd management actions to implement to achieve and maintain the established AML.

The BLM's AO will determine if excess wild horses exist in the HMA's and decide whether or not to gather and remove excess wild horses, whether to implement population control measures, and what method(s) to use for each. The decision would affect wild horses within the HMA. The BLM's AO's decision would not set or adjust AML, nor would it adjust livestock use, as these were set through previous decisions.

Public Input Needed

Comments are specifically requested for preliminary issues, to better formulate action alternatives. For consideration in developing the EA, comments must be directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will not reject public feedback outside established public involvement timeframes; however, these comments may be considered secondarily to comments received in a timely manner and may only be assessed to determine if they identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions, proposal, design, or analysis presented in the EA.

Please send your comments with the title of this project (Owyhee Field Office Herd Management Areas Management Plan) in the subject line. Address written comments to:

Bureau of Land Management
Donn Christiansen - Field Manager
Owyhee Field Office
20 First Avenue West
Marsing, Idaho 83639

Comments sent electronically should be emailed to: **tbowen@blm.gov** or faxed to: **208-896-5940**

Please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an agency or organization. Issues that are outside the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this planning level.

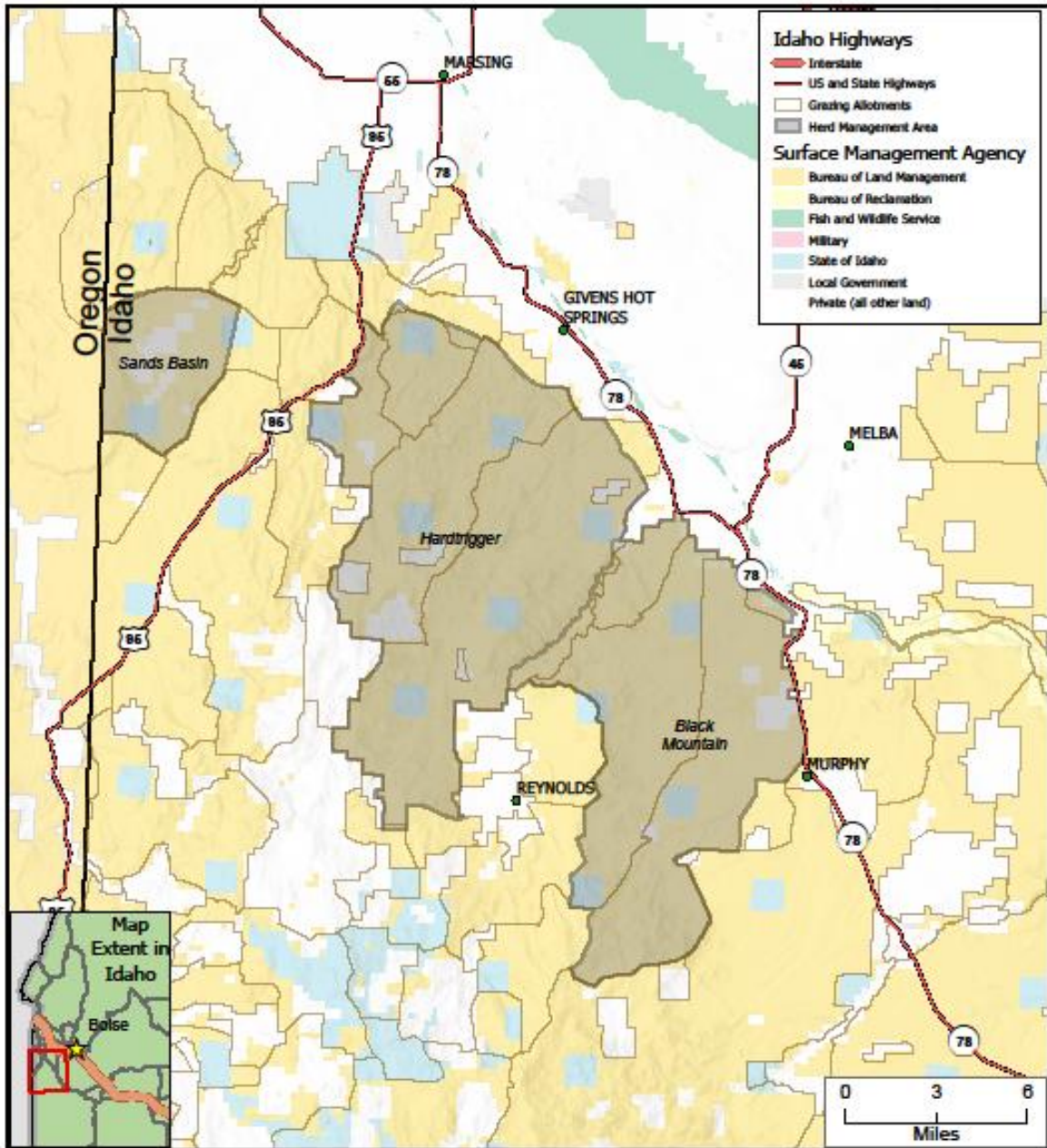
The primary contact for questions and comments for this analysis is Raul Trevino, Wild Horse Specialist, Boise District Office, phone (208) 896-5915 or rtrevino@blm.gov.

Those who provide comments are advised that before including their personal identifying information (address, email, phone number) they should be aware that the entire comment – including their personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While those commenting can ask in their comments to withhold this information from public review, the BLM cannot guarantee that they will be able to do so.

Enclosure: Map 1. Owyhee Field Office HMAs

Map 1. Owyhee Field Office HMAAs

Sands Basin, Hardtrigger and Black Mountain HMAAs Owyhee Field Office - Boise District - Idaho BLM



 U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management, Idaho
Boise District Office
Map date: March 24, 2022
Map Projection: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 11N



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