



United States Department of the Interior



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Scoping Statement Blue Wing Complex Wild Horse and Burro (WHB) Herd Management Area Plan

Description of Project

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Humboldt River Field Office (HRFO) proposes to create the Blue Wing Complex Wild Horse and Burro Herd Management Area Plan (HMAP), which encompasses 5 Herd Management Areas (HMA) and 5 Herd Areas (HA) see enclosed map. The HMAP will guide future management of the Complex and the wild horses and burros within it for the next several years.

Relationship to Existing Plans and Documents

The proposed action is in conformance with the Winnemucca Resource Management Plan (RMP) approved DATE. The Winnemucca RMP established the following objectives for management of wild horses and burros within the Blue Wing Complex:

- GOAL: Protect, manage, and control healthy wild horse and burro (WHB) populations within established Herd Management Areas (HMAs) at Appropriate Management Levels (AMLs) in a manner designed to achieve and maintain a Thriving Natural Ecological Balance (TNEB) and multiple-use relationship on public lands.
- Objective WHB 1: Administer HMAs to support healthy populations and achieve land health standards for WHB where a TNEB and multiple-use relationship can be achieved and maintained.
 - Action WHB 1.1: Maintain original HA boundaries to accurately and consistently display where WHB existed in 1971, as supported by evidence.
 - Action WHB 1.2: Adjust HMA boundaries (Figure 2-5, Appendix A) to existing fences or topological barriers where these features act as a physical boundary. Not to expand beyond original HA (Figure 2-4, Appendix A) boundaries and where little loss of HMA acreage would occur, including HMAs within the NCA.
 - Kamma Mountains—fence
 - Lava Beds—fence

- Nightingale—fence
 - Seven Troughs—fence
- Action WHB 1.3: Adjust HMA boundaries to eliminate checkerboard areas and revert checkerboard portions to HA status and remove all existing WHB from outside the HA and HMA:
 - Shawave-Nightingale HMA—boundary will be changed on the south end to reflect the removal of the checkerboard lands, and
 - Seven Troughs HMA—boundary will be changed on the east side to reflect removal of the checkerboard lands.
- Action WHB 1.4: Consolidate HMAs where inter-movement of animals occurs and there are biological, administrative, and long-term benefits:
 - Combine the Shawave and Nightingale HMA, creating the Shawave HMA.
- Action WHB 1.5: Contiguous HMAs with documented reproductive interaction will be managed as complexes to enable better management of genetic traits for the population and to improve coordination of monitoring and gathering.
- Action WHB 1.6: In HMAs with both wild horse and burro AMLs, conversion from wild horses to burros and from burros to wild horses may occur to ensure healthy populations and a thriving natural ecological balance is maintained while managing for species most appropriate for available habitat.
- Objective WHB 2: Maintain the free-roaming nature of WHB within HMAs.
 - Action WHB 2.1: Allow fence construction if it doesn't impair the free-roaming nature of WHB within HMAs.
 - Action WHB 2.2: Maintain, modify, or reconstruct fences so they don't impair the free-roaming nature of WHB. Remove, on a case-by-case basis, fences that are not meeting resource objectives or that impair the free-roaming nature of WHB within HMAs.
- Objective WHB 3: Ensure WHB have safe, unencumbered access to water within HMAs.
 - Action WHB 3.1: In accordance with State of Nevada water law, develop alternate waters within HMAs when existing water sources that are used by WHBs have been impacted by either natural or man- caused events that render water unavailable. Development of artificial water sources will not be used to increase WHB populations, but will make water available to support AML or distribute WHB use on available habitat.
 - Action WHB 3.2: In accordance with Nevada water law, acquire water rights for WHB within HMAs.
 - Action WHB 3.3: When private water sources used by WHB are no longer available or water is a limiting habitat component in the HMA, re-evaluate the AML for the HMA and/or consider returning the HMA to HA status and remove the WHB.
- Objective WHB 4: Protect WHB from harm, harassment, disease, and illegal capture.
 - Action WHB 4.1: On a case by case basis, provide for multiple use by implementing permit stipulations and mitigation measures (e.g., seasonal closures, signage, rerouted courses) to reduce adverse impacts to WHB habitat or populations.
- Objective WHB 5: Maintain Appropriate Management Levels within HMAs.
 - Action WHB 5.1: Maintain established AMLs as a population range.

- Action WHB 5.2: Gather excess WHB to low or mid AML level when populations meet or exceed the upper AML level and monitoring data supports that excess animals are present and need to be removed. All WHB residing within HAs and outside of HMAs will be removed during any population management action.
- Action WHB 5.3: Use fertility control (e.g., PZP, SpayVac, GonaCon, or other approved agents) to slow population growth rates to maintain a four-year gather cycle at minimum (longer cycles preferred).
- Action WHB 5.4: (1) Allow for the use of non-reproductive animals, in part or whole, for population management of HMAs within the WD. Depending on the population growth suppression (PGS) method that is used per the specific HMA, the percentage of the non-reproductive animals within the managed herd may vary between HMAs.

Criteria for considering a HMA as a non-reproducing population:

- HMAs where the population that is targeted as being non-reproducing is separated from a neighboring HMA's reproductive population by topography, existing fences, or other features and there is no interaction between the non-reproducing and the reproducing populations. This may include HMAs that are geographically isolated from other HMAs.
- HMAs with high AML set at or below 150.
- HMA has limited potential for genetic exchange with surrounding populations.

Criteria for managing a portion of a HMA's or HMA complex's population as non-reproducing:

- HMAs where the population that is targeted as being non-reproducing does not interact with the reproducing population within a single HMA or HMA complex due to topography, existing fences, or other features causing separation and the non-reproducing population has limited potential for genetic exchange.
- Any HMA with low AML greater than 100 head.
- HMAs where gather efficiencies have been consistently below 80 percent. (Fertility control requires 80 percent gather efficiency to be effective).
- Action WHB 5.5: In HMAs with a lower AML limit of 150 animals or more, allow for the adjusting of sex ratios of WHB in favor of males to reduce the number of breeding females to slow population growth rates to maintain a four-year gather cycle at minimum (longer cycles preferred).
- Action WHB 5.6: When evaluating AML, assess the suitability of existing HMAs to sustain healthy, genetically diverse populations of WHB in balance with their habitat and other multiple uses (TNEB), using the multi-tiered process outlined in BLM Handbook 4700-1 and adjust AML as applicable.
- Action WHB 5.6.1: Return HMAs to HA status on those areas that do not provide the critical habitat components or TNEB to support healthy, genetically diverse populations of WHB or where current WHB populations reside outside the HMA due to limited habitat. Remove all WHB from the area.
- Action WHB 5.7: If monitoring data indicate that adverse impacts on resources

are occurring as a result of livestock, wild horses, or burros, appropriate management actions (e.g., adjust AUMs or AMLs, fence, season of use) will be made to the specific class of use (i.e., livestock, wild horses, burros) causing the impacts. In absence of specie specific monitoring data, adjustments in available forage will be proportional to applicable livestock active AUMs and WHB AMLs. (See LG 1.3.1).

Creating the Blue Wing Complex HMAP, is in conformance with the Winnemucca RMP. The goals and objectives for the Complex were confirmed through the Winnemucca RMP planning process, with extensive public input.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

To comply with NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations, the BLM is planning preparation of an environmental document for the proposed HMAP. The document will serve several purposes. It will provide both the public and governmental agencies with information about the potential environmental consequences of the project and alternatives; identify measures to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the proposed action and alternatives; and provide the responsible official with information upon which to make an informed decision. The document will be prepared by an interdisciplinary team of BLM resource specialists.

Scoping is an essential element of the NEPA process.

Scoping activities are initiated early in the process to: identify reasonable alternatives to be evaluated in environmental documents, identify environmental issues of concern related to the proposed project, determine the depth of analysis for issues addressed in the environmental document, and identify potential mitigation.

Known resource issues or potential conflicts with the project include: recreational activities such as hunting, wildlife and wild horse viewing; cultural resources; wildlife, including special status wildlife species; and livestock grazing.

This scoping statement has been prepared to describe means by which governmental agencies, the general public, and other interested parties may participate in and contribute to the analysis process. Public input is important in establishing the scope of analysis for any NEPA document, and the BLM encourages public participation.

Timing Requirements

Public input is valuable early in the process and will enable the BLM to develop a well-informed environmental assessment. Comments should be submitted by 06/01/2024, and may either be emailed to: BLM_NV_WDO_WHB@blm.gov (please include “Blue Wing Complex” in the subject line), or mailed/hand delivered during regular business hours (7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) to:

Wild Horse and Burro Specialist
Winnemucca District Office
5100 E. Winnemucca Blvd.
Winnemucca, NV 89445

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you may ask us in your comment to withhold your identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Public comments are most helpful if they are specific. The regulations (40 CFR 1503.3) state that comments on a proposed action “shall be as specific as possible and may address either the adequacy of the statement or the merits of the alternatives discussed, or both.” The most valuable comments are those that cite specific actions or impacts in the document and offer informed analysis of what is presented.

This scoping statement and Management Evaluation Report will be posted on the BLM ePlanning website at:

<https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2032468/510>

Thank you for your participation in this matter.

Sincerely,

/S/ C. John Mitchell

C. John Mitchell
Field Manager

Attachment: Map of Blue Wing Complex