

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

Humboldt River Field Office

5100 East Winnemucca Boulevard

Winnemucca, NV 89445

DECISION RECORD

For the Blue Wing Complex Wild Horse and Burro

Gather & Herd Management Area Plan Final Environmental Assessment

DOI-BLM-NV-W010-2024-0027-EA

DECISION RECORD

INTRODUCTION

The BLM prepared the Blue Wing Complex Wild Horse and Burro Gather & Herd Management Area Plan Final Environmental Assessment (EA) DOI-BLM-NV-W010-2024-0027-EA to disclose and analyze the environmental effects of the Proposed Action and Alternatives, which consist of establishing a Herd Management Area Plan (HMAP) (Appendix XIII) and gathering and removing excess wild horses and burros from within and outside of the Blue Wing Complex (Complex). The Complex includes five HMAs and five HAs. The EA is consistent with the BLM's management responsibilities under the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and burros Act of 1971 (WFRHBA).

The BLM has determined that all wild horses and burros over low Appropriate Management Level (AML) are excess and are present on public lands within and outside the boundaries of the Blue Wing Complex. Removal of these excess wild horses and burros to the low Appropriate Management Level (AML) is necessary to achieve a thriving natural ecological balance. The AMLs were set through the Blue Wing – Seven Troughs Allotment Evaluation/Multiple Use Decision process in 1994 and established as a population range in the 2015 Winnemucca RMP.

DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

- **No Action Alternative.** Under the No Action Alternative, continue existing management, a gather to remove excess WH&Bs would not occur. There would be no active management to control population growth rates, the size of the WH&B population or to bring the WH&B population to AML. A HMAP would not be implemented for the Blue Wing Complex.
- **Proposed Action (Alternative A).**
 - Implement a HMAP as a management strategy to include several population growth suppression methods.
 - Immediately gather and remove excess animals in order to reach low AML as expeditiously as possible through an initial gather, and if necessary, a follow-up gather or gathers, in order to achieve low AML. Follow-up gathers to remove excess animals to achieve low AML shall be conducted as promptly as appropriate to allow

- sufficient time for the animals to settle after the previous gather and to provide for a safe, efficient, and effective follow-up gather operation.
 - Apply fertility control methods (vaccines or other approved method of fertility control) to gathered and released mares.
 - Manage no more than ¼ of the population at low AML as permanently non-reproducing (sterilized mares and geldings)⁴.
 - Maintain a sex ratio adjustment of 60% male and 40% female.
 - Subject to funding and time availability: develop and exclose a water source (named “Unnamed Spring 78-40”) to better disperse WH&B use and add available water within the Blue Wing Complex. See Appendix XIV for map of proposed water development.
- **Alternative B.** Alternative B is the same as Alternative A but would not include a permanently non-reproducing component (sterilized mares and geldings).
- **Alternative C.** Under Alternative C, Implement HMAP with management strategy, gather and remove excess animals to low AML without fertility control vaccine use, sex ratio adjustments, or any permanently non-reproducing portion of the population.

DECISION

It is the BLM’s decision to implement the Proposed Action (Alternative A) as described and analyzed in the EA. This decision is effective immediately pursuant to 43 CFR 4770.3(c). The Proposed Action is consistent with the land use plans and will allow for achievement of management objectives in the Blue Wing Complex.

Under this decision, and as analyzed as the Proposed Action, the HRFO will:

- Implement HMAP with a management strategy which would include several population growth suppression methods.
- Immediately gather and remove excess animals in order to reach low AML as expeditiously as possible through an initial gather, and if necessary, a follow-up gather or gathers in order to achieve and maintain the population within AML range. Follow-up gathers to remove excess animals to achieve low AML shall be conducted as promptly as appropriate to allow sufficient time for the animals to settle after a helicopter gather and to provide a safe, efficient, and effective follow-up gather operation.
- Apply fertility control vaccines to released mares.
- Maintain a sex ratio adjustment of 60% male and 40% female.
- This will allow BLM to achieve management goals and objectives of attaining a herd size that is at or within AML, to reduce wild horse and burro population growth rates, and to obtain a thriving natural ecological balance on the range as required under the WFRHBA.

COMPLIANCE AND CONFORMANCE

This decision is consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA); and the Wild Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 (WFRHBA) and all applicable regulations at 43 CFR Part 4700. It is also in conformance with the 2015 Winnemucca District RMP; the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area (NCA) and Associated Wilderness, and other Contiguous Lands in Nevada Resource

Management Plan (BRRMP); and the Nevada and Northeastern California Greater Sage-grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment (ARMPA) dated September 2015.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A Blue Wing Complex Management Evaluation Report was made available to interested individuals, agencies and groups for a 30-day public review and scoping period that opened on May 2, 2024, and closed on June 1, 2024. Scoping comments were received from approximately 73 individuals (primarily as form letters) or organizations, and agencies. Many of these comments contained overlapping issues/concerns which were consolidated into 98 distinct topics.

The Preliminary EA was made available to interested individuals, agencies and groups for a 30-day public review and scoping period that opened on May 5, 2025, and closed on June 4, 2025. Comments were received from approximately 3,800 individuals (primarily as form letters) or organizations, and agencies on the Blue Wing Complex Wild Horse and Burro Gather & Herd Management Area Plan Preliminary Environmental Assessment. Many of these comments contained overlapping issues/concerns which were consolidated into 122 substantive comments and categorized into 8 distinct topics. A detailed summary of the comments received and BLM's response and use of comments in preparing the final environmental assessment can be found in Appendix XVII. The EA is available on the National NEPA Registrar webpage at: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2032468/510> or by contacting the Winnemucca District Office.

RATIONALE FOR DECISION

Upon analyzing the impacts of the Proposed Action (Alternative A) following issuance of the EA for public review; I have determined that implementing the Proposed Action (Alternative A) will not have a significant impact to the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required as set forth in the attached Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). The Herd Management Area Plan and associated gather plan is necessary to immediately remove excess wild horses and burros. The BLM will then manage the wild horse and burro population within the established AML range in order to achieve a thriving natural ecological balance between wild horses and burros, wildlife, livestock, vegetation, available water and other multiple uses as required under Section 3(b)(2) of the WFRHBA and Section 302(b) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. The BLM is required to manage multiple uses to avoid continued degradation of the rangelands, and removal of excess wild horses and burros is necessary to protect rangeland resources from further deterioration or impacts associated with the current overpopulation of wild horses within the Blue Wing Complex.

Current monitoring results for the Complex do not indicate that increasing, evaluating, or revising the AML is warranted at this time. Monitoring data confirms the need to remove excess wild horses and burros above the low AML to reverse the downward trends, promote improvement of rangeland health and ensure safety and health of wild horses and burros. Leaving excess wild horses and burros on the range under the No Action Alternative would not comply with the WFRHBA or applicable regulations and BLM policy, nor would it comply with the Sierra Front-Northern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council (SFNGB-RAC) Standards and

Guidelines for Rangeland Health and Healthy Wild Horse and Burro Populations. The No Action Alternative would allow continued deterioration of rangeland resources, including vegetative, soil and riparian resources, as a result of the current overpopulation of wild horses and burros within and outside the Blue Wing Complex. Wild horses and burros would continue to relocate in increasing numbers to areas outside the Complex boundaries due to competition for limited water and forage in the Complex adversely impacting public land resources not designated for wild horse and burro management. The No Action Alternative also increases the likelihood of emergency conditions arising, requiring an emergency gather to prevent individual animals from suffering or death due to insufficient forage or water. Under the no action alternative wild horse and burro populations would be expected to increase. The increased herbivory and impacts of this increasing population could be expected to reduce fine fuels in the short term. However, it would result in a continued increase in the number of WH&Bs above AML, which would have compounding impacts upon upland vegetation composition and the potential for future fires. The continued overgrazing of the landscape could be expected to decrease the native grass component and increase the invasive non-native species across the landscape which would reduce the resistance and resiliency of the landscape to disturbance such as wildfires. The increase in invasive non-native species would promote a more frequent and intense fire cycle that would further reduce native species across the landscape.

APPEAL

This decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations contained in the 43 CFR Part 4 and the attached Form 1842-1. The notice of appeal must be filed no later than 30 days after the date of receiving notice of this decision. Any notice of appeal must be filed with the IBLA and must include a copy of the decision being appealed, a statement of standing, and a statement of timeliness.

APPROVAL

John Mitchell
Humboldt River Field Office Manager

Date

ATTACHMENTS: Form 1842-1