



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

High Desert District - Rock Springs Field Office

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(WYD03), (WYD04)

June 7, 2024

Scoping Statement

Gather Plan to Remove Excess Wild Horses from Herd Areas Previously Designated as Herd Management Areas

Description of Project

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Rock Springs Field Office (RSFO) is launching a 30-day public scoping period prior to preparing an environmental assessment (EA) regarding a gather plan to remove excess wild horses from Herd Areas that were previously designated as the Great Divide Basin, Salt Wells Creek and Adobe Town Herd Management Areas (HMAs). The EA will analyze the potential impacts associated with the gather and removal of all excess wild horses from these Herd Areas.

On May 9, 2023 the BLM issued a Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment (<https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2009946/510>) that reverted the entirety of the Great Divide Basin and Salt Wells Creek HMAs to Herd Areas, managed for zero wild horses. Additionally, the Record of Decision reverted a portion of the Adobe Town HMA to a Herd Area, to be managed for zero wild horses. The BLM has determined that all wild horses located within the portions of these historic HMAs that reverted to Herd Areas (see Map 1) are now excess and must be removed from the range in accordance with the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971.

The BLM estimates that a total of 4,876¹ wild horses will be removed over a 3-4 year period. The BLM plans to begin removal operations in sometime between October 1, 2024 and

¹ Based on a wild horse population survey conducted in 2022, and an estimated 20% annual population growth rate, the BLM estimates that there are currently 3,386 wild horses in the removal area in 2024. Since gather operations are anticipated to span multiple years, and not all wild horses would be removed from the entire removal area in any given year, the estimated total removal number includes an additional 2 years at a 20% annual population growth rate. Please note that the actual number of wild horses that would be removed from the area would differ from this number, as all wild horses in this area are excess and need to be removed.

September 30, 2025. It is likely that multiple removal operations would occur in each Herd Area over multiple years to fully remove all excess wild horses from the removal area.

The BLM has identified the following alternatives for conducting gather and removal operations within these Herd Areas. Each of these alternatives will be considered and analyzed in the EA.

- Gather and remove all excess wild horses from the removal area using a combination of helicopter drive trapping and bait trapping.
- No Action – Do not conduct any gather or removal activities.

Relationship to Existing Plans and Documents

The proposed action is in conformance with the Green River Resource Management Plan (RMP) approved on August 8, 1997 and the Rawlins RMP approved on December 24, 2008. Wild horse management under these plans was amended on May 9, 2023 through a Record of Decision. Through that Record of Decision the entirety of the Great Divide Basin and Salt Wells Creek HMAs reverted to Herd Areas, to be managed for zero wild horses. Additionally, a portion of the Adobe Town HMA reverted to a Herd Area, to be managed for zero wild horses. The current proposed action is in conformance with the May 9, 2023 RMP Amendments.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

To comply with NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations, the BLM is preparing an EA for the proposed gather plan. The EA 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 regarding the project and whether to prepare an environmental impact statement or finding of no significant impact. The EA 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 the EA, 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.

This scoping statement has been prepared to describe means by which the general public, governmental agencies, 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.

The following resource values have been identified within the project area:

- Recreational activities such as hunting
- Wildlife and wild horse viewing
- Special status plant and animal species
- Wildlife
- Cultural resources
- Historic trails

- Livestock grazing

Timing Requirements

Public input early in the process is valuable and will enable the BLM to develop a well-informed environmental assessment. Comments should be submitted through BLM's ePlanning website for this project: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2032715/580> (click on the green "Participate Now" button). If you cannot access this system comments may be submitted by mail to:

BLM Rock Springs Field Office
High Desert District
Herd Area Gather Plan
280 Highway 191 North
Rock Springs, WY 82901

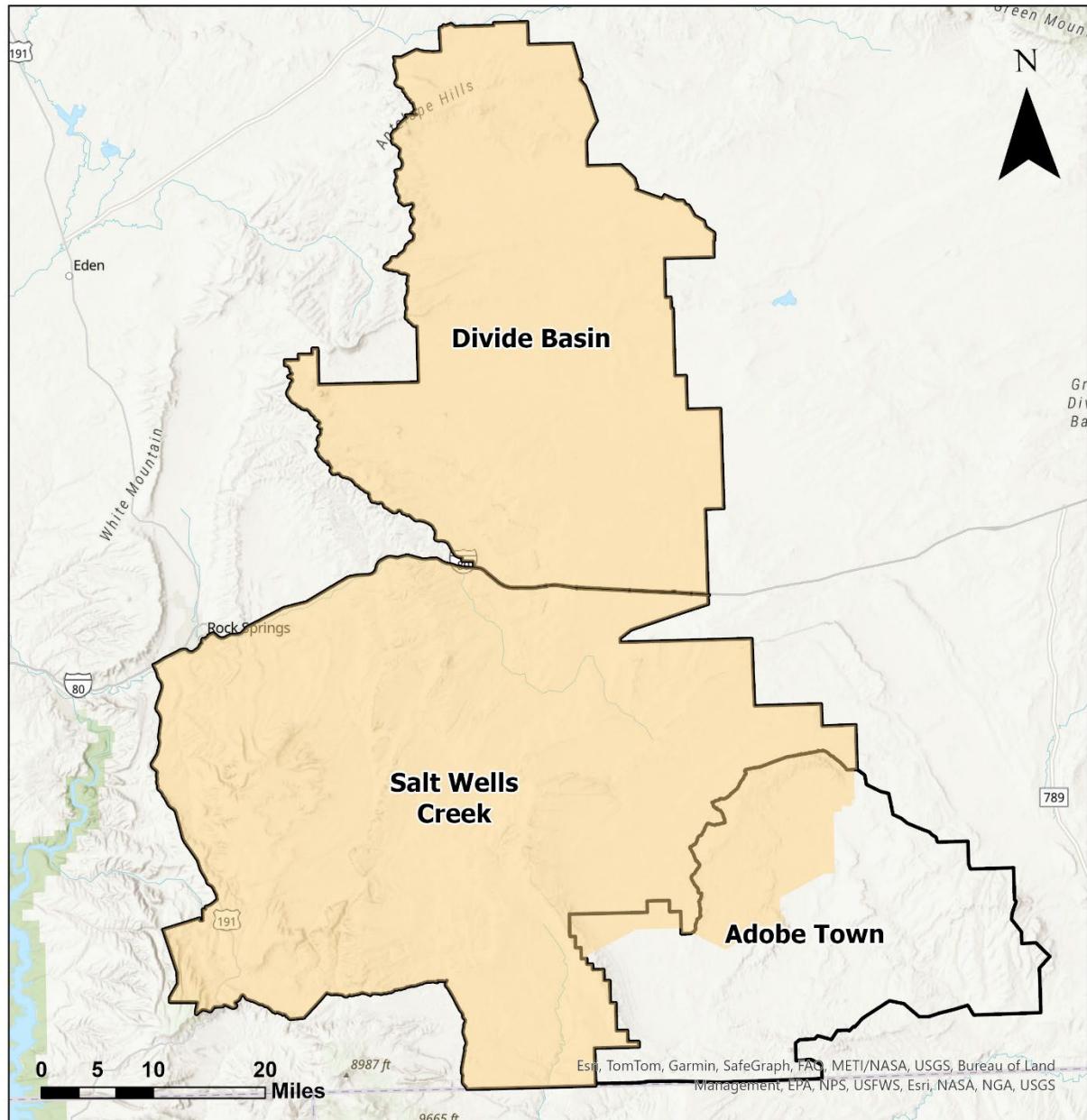
Comments should be submitted by July 8, 2024. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment - including your identifying information - may be made publicly available at any time. While you may 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 all other future documents corresponding with this action will be posted on the BLM ePlanning website at: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2032715/580>.

Kimberlee D. Foster
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Map 1 - Wild Horse Removal Area



Legend

- Wild Horse Removal Area
- HMA Boundary Prior to 2023 RMP Amendment



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