

**Determination of NEPA Adequacy U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

Office: BLM Burns District, Andrews/Steens Field Office

Tracking Number (DNA #): DOI-BLM-ORWA-B070-2024-0001-DNA

Proposed Action Title/Type: South Steens Herd Management Area Population Management Plan Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA)

Location/Legal Description: South Steens Herd Management Area, approximately 75 miles south of Burns, Oregon. T. 33 S., R. 32 E. See Map 1 - Vicinity Map and Map 2 – Project Location.

Background: On July 23, 2015, the Burns District Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issued a decision record (DR) for South Steens Herd Management Area (HMA) Population Plan Environmental Assessment (EA), DOI-BLM-ORWA-B060-2013-0027-EA, to implement the removal of excess wild horses and apply available and approved fertility treatment to maintain the wild horse population within appropriate management level (AML) over a 10-year period.

The Andrews Management Unit (AMU) Resource Management Plan/Record of Decision (RMP/ROD) established an AML of 159-304 wild horses. The 2015 South Steens HMA Population Plan EA determined that, at the time of the decision, there were approximately 503 excess horses needing to be removed, from the South Steens HMA, to stay within AML. However, the EA made it clear that for future gathers occurring under the 10-year plan, the number of horses gathered and animals removed would be adjusted based upon the estimated herd size and number of excess horses within the HMA determined just prior to the gather. In addition to analyzing the gathering of excess horses, the EA also analyzed, and the decision selected, fertility control treatment using 2-injection native porcine zona pellucide (PZP) treatment and PZP-22.

In 2016, the first gather under the South Steens HMA Population Plan EA occurred, and was done as a bait/water trap gather. The gather was split into two parts, the first part of the gather lasted from August 17 to August 29, 2016, and gathered 208 animals, with none returned to the range. The second part of the gather began on November 7, was suspended on November 16, and was resumed again on April 4, concluding on April 14, gathering 121 animals, and returning 5 animals to the range. This gather did not succeed in getting horses within AML as only 329 total animals were gathered, which was less than the estimated number of excess animals.

On January 7, 2018 another bait/water trap gather began, in a different area of the HMA than the 2016 gather; at this time the population was estimated at over 600 animals. This gather lasted through March 30, 2018, and captured a total of 102 animals, none were returned to the range. Muddy conditions and "green-up" made it difficult to access traps and caused fewer bait visits by horses, limiting the success of this effort.

In September of 2020, another gather was conducted using the helicopter drive method, the objective being to capture and remove approximately 200 wild horses which have strayed onto

private property within and outside the southern boundary of the herd management area. At this time, the population for the South Steens HMA was estimated at 979 adults and 200 foals, for 1,179 total wild horses. During this gather 218 animals were gathered, and no animals were returned to the range, resulting in an estimated population of 961 total wild horses within the HMA.

As a large number of excess horses remained within the HMA following the previous gathers, a helicopter drive gather was conducted in September of 2022, within the HMA. This gather was conducted to prevent undue or unnecessary degradation of the public lands associated with excess wild horses, to restore a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship on public lands, consistent with the provisions of Section 1333(b) of the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Horses Act. At the time of this gather, the population was estimated to be 1,148 adults and 222 foals, for a total of 1,370 animals. During this gather approximately 753 animals were gathered and none were returned to the range. The post gather population was estimated to be 617 wild horses, which was still over AML.

As AML was not reached in any of the gathers that have occurred since 2015, the BLM is planning a helicopter drive wild horse gather, with removal of excess animals, and fertility control treatment with PZP-22 in 2024.

A. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND PROJECT DESIGN ELEMENTS (OR ANY APPLICABLE MITIGATION MEASURES)

A May 2024 census flight documented 889 wild horses and foals within the South Steens HMA (see Map 3 - Double Observer Flight Survey). This confirms that the herd population remains above AML, as it has since the 2015 EA Decision. The proposed gather is intended to return the population to within AML and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance. The proposed action is to gather 90 percent of the total wild horse population and remove excess horses down to the low end of AML. Ninety percent of the herd would be gathered in order to (1) select horses to return to the HMA to re-establish the low end of AML, and (2) remove excess wild horses that would be prepared for the adoption program. For the proposed gather, 90 percent of the total wild horse population would be approximately 800 wild horses within the HMA. Of the gathered horses, approximately 70 horses containing trait characteristics of the HMA, and of appropriate age and sex, would be selected and returned to the HMA. The horses returned to the area would ensure the population within the HMA remains above the low AML of 159 wild horses. Females selected to return to the HMA would be treated with PZP or PZP-22, which would result in slower herd growth and allow for the population to remain within AML for a longer period of time, reducing the frequency of future gathers.

The remaining approximately 720 gathered wild horses would be permanently removed from the HMA, as excess, and placed into the adoption program. The wild horses removed would also include any and all wild horses that have strayed outside of the HMA boundary¹. Wild horses would be gathered using the helicopter-drive method. Operations would be conducted through a

¹ All wild horses gathered from outside of the HMA boundary would be considered excess, and not selected to return to the HMA, to eliminate the risk of the same wild horses leaving the HMA in the future.

contract, by BLM personnel, or a combination of both. The helicopter-drive gather would take approximately one week; however, depending on weather conditions, it could take longer. The gather would be initiated following public notice.

Site-specific removal criteria were never set for South Steens HMA; therefore, animals removed from the HMA would be chosen based on a selective removal strategy set forth in BLM Manual Section 4720.33 (consistent with BLM Instruction Memorandum (IM) 2022-044, Wild Horse and Burro Gather Planning, Scheduling and Approval). Wild horses would be removed in the following order:

- (1) first priority - age class 4 years and younger.
- (2) second priority - age class 11 to 19 years.
- (3) third priority - age class 5 to 10 years; and
- (4) fourth priority - age class 20 years and older (should not be permanently removed from the HMA unless specific exceptions prevent them from being turned back to the range).

In general, this fourth age group can survive in the HMA, but may have greater difficulty adapting to captivity and the stress of handling and shipping if removed. BLM Manual Section 4720.33 further specifies some animals that should be removed irrespective of their age class. These animals include, but are not limited to, nuisance animals and animals residing outside the HMA or in an area of an inactive herd area (HA).

Captured wild horses would be released back into the HMA under the following criteria:

- Released horses would be selected to maintain a diverse age structure of approximately 35 mares and 35 stallions (89 horses left on the range plus 70 horses returned = 159 total (low AML)), which is approximately a 50/50 sex ratio.
- Released horses would be selected to maintain the saddle horse conformation. The most common colors of pinto-variations, buckskins, duns, and red duns would have higher priority over the less common colors present.

Approximately 26 mares (75 percent), age two or older, would be selected to be returned to the HMA after receiving fertility control treatment. These mares would be transported to the Burns Corral Facility where they would receive the vaccine primer inoculations of PZP vaccine (EPA 2012). Mares that have not previously been treated with a fertility control vaccine would be held up to 60 days to receive their booster inoculation, then be returned to the HMA. Mares previously treated with a fertility control vaccine could be treated with a booster dose, then returned to the HMA after a shorter holding period. Post-gather, every effort will be made to return released horses to the same general area from which they were gathered.

The helicopter gather would be carried out under the standard operating procedures (SOP) as described in Permanent IM No. 2021-002, the Wild Horse and Burro Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program, policy (IM No. 2020-0022013-059) and the same selective removal criteria, population control measures, release criteria, and sex ratio adjustment strategies will be applied as described in the section above. Adaptive management will be employed to incorporate the use

of the most promising methods of fertility control (as long as they are approved for use and available).

Project Design Features

- Helicopter drive gather and removal operations are expected to take approximately 7 days to complete. Several factors such as animal condition, herd health, weather conditions, or other considerations could result in adjustments in the schedule.
- Helicopter gather operations will be scheduled any time from July 1 through February 28 in any year and will be conducted under contract.
- Trap sites would be approximately 0.5 acre.
- Trap sites would be selected in areas where horses are located to the greatest extent possible and would follow the appropriate wilderness and wilderness study area (WSA) guidance set forth in BLM Manual 6340 Section 1.6(C)20(d) (pp. 1–55) and BLM Manual 6330 Section 1.6(C)10(iii) (pp. 1–36).
- In WSAs, traps would be set up on primitive routes. No new routes would be created to access a trap site. Horses are not known to reside in the Steens Mountain Wilderness east of Donner und Blitzen River inside the HMA boundary at this time, but they have been there in the past (e.g., 20 horses were observed in this area during the July 2004 census and one horse was observed in this area during a 2009 Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) flight).
- Trap sites and temporary holding facilities would be located in previously used sites or other disturbed areas whenever possible. These areas would be seeded with a seed mix appropriate to the specific site if bare soil exceeds more than 10 square yards per location. The seed applied on sites within WSA and wilderness would be a mix of native species, while sites outside WSA would be seeded with a mix of desirable non-native species.
- Undisturbed areas identified as trap sites or holding facilities would be inventoried, prior to being used, for cultural and botanical resources. If cultural or botanical resources are encountered, these locations will not be utilized unless they can be modified to avoid effects to these resources.
- Trap sites and temporary holding facilities would be surveyed for noxious weeds prior to gather activities. Any weeds found would be treated using the most appropriate methods. All gather activity sites would be monitored for at least 2 years post-gather. Any weeds found would be treated using the most appropriate methods, as outlined in the 2015 Integrated Invasive Plant Management for the Burns District Environmental Assessment (EA) (DOI-BLM-OR-B000-2011-0041-EA).

- All vehicles and equipment used during gather operations would be cleaned before and following implementation to guard against spreading of noxious weeds.
- Efforts would be made to keep trap and holding locations away from areas with noxious weed infestations.
- Gather sites would be noted and reported to range and weed personnel for monitoring and/or treatment of new and existing infestations.
- No road maintenance would be planned under this DNA.
- Gather and trapping operations will be conducted in accordance with the SOPs described in the Wild Horse and Burro Comprehensive Animal Welfare Policy Program (PIM No. 2021-002) which established policy and procedures to enable safe, efficient, and successful wild horse gather operations while ensuring humane care and treatment of all animals gathered and handled.
- An Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) veterinarian would be onsite during helicopter gather, as needed, to examine animals and make recommendations to BLM for care and treatment of the wild horses.
- Decisions to humanely euthanize animals in field situations would be made in conformance with BLM policy (Washington Office (WO) permanent IM , 20201-007 Euthanasia of Wild Horses and Burros Related to Acts of Mercy Health or Safety. This IM was released after the public comment period for this EA and replaces IM 2009-041, which was cited in the EA.
- On all horses gathered (removed and returned), data including sex and age distribution would be recorded. Additional information such as color, condition class (using the Henneke 1983 rating system), size, disposition of the animal, etc. may also be recorded.
- Excess animals would be transported to Oregon's Wild Horse and Burro (WHB) Corral Facility in Burns via truck and trailer where they would be prepared (WO IM 2023-028, Animal Health, Vaccinations, Gelding, and Microchipping of Wild Horses and Burros) (freeze marked, microchipped, vaccinated, and dewormed) for adoption, sale (with limitations), or long-term pasture.
- Hair samples would be collected to monitor genetic diversity of the herd, as outlined in WO IM 2009-062: Wild Horse and Burro Genetic Baseline Sampling. Hair samples would be collected from a minimum of 25 percent of the post gather population. If levels of observed heterozygosity are so low as to warrant concern about risks due to inbreeding, one or more fertile wild horses from another BLM-managed herd could be released into this HMA to augment genetic diversity (consistent with BLM handbook H-4700-1 section 4.4.6).

- Public and media management during helicopter gather and bait trapping operations would be conducted in accordance with WO IM 2013-058, Wild Horse and Burro Gathers: Public and Media Management. This IM establishes policy and procedures for safe and transparent visitation by the public and media at WHB gather operations, while ensuring the humane treatment of wild horses and burros.

Monitoring

- The BLM Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) and Project Inspectors (PI) assigned to the gather would be responsible for ensuring contract personnel abide by the contract specifications and the gather SOPs described in the Wild Horse and Burro Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program (PIM No 2021-002.)
- Genetic monitoring would also continue following any initial gathers and/or trapping. If genetic monitoring indicates a loss of genetic diversity, the BLM would consider introduction of horses from HMAs in similar environments to maintain the projected genetic diversity.
- Fertility control monitoring would be conducted in accordance with the Population-level Fertility Control Treatments SOPs found in IM No. 2009-090, Population-Level Fertility Control Field Trials: Herd Management Area Selection, Vaccine Application, Monitoring and Reporting Requirements.

B. LAND USE PLAN (LUP) CONFORMANCE

The proposed action analyzed in this DNA is in conformance with the Andrews Management Unit (AMU) RMP/ROD, August 2005 and the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area (CMPA) RMP/ROD, August 2005, both as amended by the 2015 Oregon Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment (GRSG ARMPA) and ROD.

The proposed action is specifically in conformance with the 2005 AMU/Steens Mountain CMPA RMP Goals and Objectives, as amended by the 2015 Oregon GRSG ARMPA, listed below:

- Goal – Manage and maintain healthy wild horse herds in established HMAs at AMLs to maintain a thriving natural ecological balance between wild horse populations, wildlife, livestock, vegetation resources, and other resource values. Enhance and perpetuate the special or rare and unique characteristics that distinguish the respective herds.
 - Objective 4. Maintain a thriving natural ecological balance within HMAs.
 - Objective 5. Maintain/improve year-round water sources to sustain wild horse herds.
 - Objective 6. Maintain herd viability, genetic diversity, and the genetic and physical characteristics that distinguish individual herds. (AMU/CMPA RMP-50, P-49).
- Management Direction - Wild horse numbers are managed through gathering, removal, and other approved methods of population control. Initiation of gathering or other

methods of population control are based on census data, herd health, rangeland health, productivity (as determined by rangeland monitoring studies), climatic conditions, and occurrence of catastrophic events such as wildland fire and drought. Wild horse numbers are normally reduced to the low end of the AML range when gatherings are conducted (AMU/CPMA RMP-50, P-49).

- Management Direction – A diverse age structure and sex ratios ranging from 40 to 50 percent female and 50 to 60 percent male will be maintained. Wild horses returned to the HMA after a gather will possess representative characteristics of the herd's conformation, size, color, and unique markings. New animals from other HMAs will be introduced when needed to increase diversity of the genome or maintain herd characteristics (CPMA RMP-51).
- Appropriate herd management activities include periodic census inventories and gathering of excess wild horses, as well as potential herd management projects such as fencing or water developments... Though the BLM Manual states use of motorized and mechanized equipment, location of horse gathering facilities, and timing of gathers are to be stated in wilderness plans, this can be done in only the most general sense. Contract stipulations between BLM and horse gathering contractors do not allow for such specific details of gathering operations until the contract has been awarded and the contractor reviews the gathering area. Such details as time of gather, facilities to be used, and equipment needs are subject to change and variation on each horse gathering operation and cannot be pre-planned in wilderness plans or HMAPs. While final gathering trap sites, temporary corral locations, and use of motorized and mechanized equipment are the decision of the horse gathering contractor, per contract specifications, the BLM works with the contractor to help locate gathering operations areas which have been previously disturbed or have an existing use on that site, such as roads or grazing operation facilities. This is especially the case for wild horse gathers which take place in wilderness. The BLM will attempt to keep gather sites and facility placement out of wilderness areas when possible. If not possible and horse gathers need to take place in wilderness, disturbance and facility and equipment use will be kept to the minimum possible. Disturbances and damage which occur will be restored and rehabilitated in a timely manner (CPMA RMP P-48).
- Objective WHB 1: Manage wild horses and burros as components of BLM-administered lands in a manner that preserves and maintains a thriving natural ecological balance in a multiple use relationship (OR GRSG ARMPA 2-21).
- Objective WHB 2: Manage wild horse and burro population levels within established AML (OR GRSG ARMPA 2-21).
- MD WHB 1: Manage herd management areas (HMAs) in GRSG habitat within established AML ranges to achieve and maintain GRSG habitat objectives (Table 2-2; OR GRSG ARMPA 2-21).

- MD WHB 3: Prioritize gathers and population growth suppression techniques in HMAs in GRSG habitat, unless removals are necessary in other areas to address higher priority environmental issues, including herd health impacts. Place higher priority on Herd Areas not allocated as Herd Management Areas and occupied by wild horses and burros in SFA [sagebrush focal area] followed by PHMA [priority habitat management area] (OR GRSG ARMPA 2-21).

The proposed action is in conformance with the goals, objectives, and management directions from the CMPA Record of Decision (ROD)/RMP (2005, RMP-50), the AMU ROD/RMP (2005, RMP-50) and the Steens Mountain Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSR) Plan (2005, P-49), all as amended by the 2015 Oregon Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment, even where they are not specifically provided for, because they are clearly consistent with land use decisions.

C. IDENTIFY APPLICABLE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (NEPA) DOCUMENTS AND OTHER RELATED DOCUMENTS THAT COVER THE PROPOSED ACTION

List by name and date all applicable NEPA documents that cover the proposed action.

- South Steens Herd Management Area Population Management Plan EA (DOI-BLM-OR-B070-2013-0027-EA)
 - This NEPA analysis includes the proposed action, within the same location, and was written to be used for up to 10 years following the decision, which was signed on July 23, 2015. Despite that decision, since that time, the herd has remained above high AML.

List by name and date other documentation relevant to the proposed action (e.g., biological assessment, biological opinion, watershed assessment, allotment evaluation, and monitoring report).

- South Steens Allotment Management Plan (DOI-BLM-ORWA-B060-2013-0006-EA)
 - This document contains analysis related to grazing, as well as detailed descriptions of conditions within the allotment, which makes up the majority of the South Steens HMA.
- See the 2015 EA for a complete list of specific relevant information from the following documents:
 - Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 (Public Law (PL) 92-195), as amended.
 - Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Management (43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 4700). The following are excerpts from 43 CFR 4700.
 - 4720.1 - Removal of excess animals from public lands. “Upon examination of current information and a determination by the authorized officer that an excess of wild horses or burros exists, the authorized officer shall remove the excess animals immediately....”

- 4710.3-1 - Herd Management Areas. “Herd Management Areas shall be established for maintenance of wild horse and burro herds.”
- 4740.1 - Use of motor vehicles or aircraft. “(a) Motor vehicles and aircraft may be used by the authorized officer in all phases of the administration of the Act, except that no motor vehicle or aircraft, other than helicopters, shall be used for the purpose of herding or chasing wild horses or burros for capture or destruction. All such use shall be conducted in a humane manner. (b) Before using helicopters or motor vehicles in the management of wild horses or burros, the authorized officer shall conduct a public hearing in the area where such use is to be made.”
- BLM Wild Horses and Burros Management Handbook, H-4700-1 (June 2010).
- BLM Manual 6330 - Management of Wilderness Study Areas (WSA) (2012).
- BLM Manual 5340 - Management of Designated Wilderness Areas (2012).
- Wilderness Act, PL 88-577 (September 3, 1964).
- Steens Mountain WSRs Plan Appendix P - CMPA and AMU RMPs/RODs (August 2005).
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. 4321-4347, 1970).
- BLM NEPA Handbook, H-1790-1 (January 2008), Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) (43 U.S.C. 1701, 1976), Section 302(b) of FLPMA, states, “all public lands are to be managed so as to prevent unnecessary or undue degradation of the lands.”
- Public Rangelands Improvement Act (43 U.S.C. 1901, 1978).
- Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management for Public Lands Administered by the BLM in the State of Oregon and Washington (1997).
- Greater Sage-Grouse and Sagebrush-steppe Ecosystems Management Guidelines (BLM 2001),
- BLM National Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy (2004).
- Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon (Hagen 2011).
- Local Integrated Noxious Weed Control Plan (EA-OR-020-98-05, 1998).
- Vegetation Treatment Using Herbicides on Bureau of Land Management Lands in 17 Western States Programmatic Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) (2010) and ROD (2010).
- Steens Mountain Travel Management Plan (TMP) (EA OR-05-027-021, 2007).
- Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act of 2000 (PL 106399).
- Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) Laws and Regulations.
- State, local, and Tribal laws, regulations, and land use plans.
- All other Federal laws relevant to this document, even if not specifically identified.

D. NEPA ADEQUACY CRITERIA

1. Is the new proposed action a feature of, or essentially similar to, an alternative analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s)? Is the project within the same analysis area, or if the project location is different, are the geographic and resource conditions sufficiently similar to those analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s)? If there are differences, can you explain why they are not substantial?

The new proposed action is a feature of the proposed alternative (Alternative A) from the South Steens HMA Population Management EA from 2015. Description of the proposed action components can be found within the 2015 EA (pp. 9—16), and analysis of the proposed action can be found throughout Chapter III of the EA (pp. 20-95). The proposed action in this DNA has been modified from the EA in order to be more specific out the actions currently planned in order to move the South Steens HMA to AML. The proposed action is located within the same HMA (South Steens) and the location overlaps 100 percent with what was analyzed in the EA. There have been no large-scale disturbances, such as large fires, that resulted in changed conditions within the project area since the 2015 decision and the geographic and resource conditions are sufficiently similar to the conditions that were previously analyzed. There are no differences between the previously selected and analyzed proposed alternative and the current proposed action.

When the 2015 EA was written, the South Steens HMA estimated population was less than the current estimated population of 889 animals, per the 2024 census. However, the 10-year population management plan portion of the 2015 EA analyzed the effects of future gathers and removals through 2025 to reduce the population to the low AML of 159 horses, no matter what the population is. The EA explained that for “future helicopter gathers under this 10-year plan, the number of horses gathered and excess removed would be adjusted based upon the estimated herd size and the number of excess horses determined at the time of the gather” (p. 9) and “Future gather dates and target removal numbers for gathers within the next 10 years would be determined based on future population surveys and a determination that ‘excess’ horses exist within the HMA. A notice to the public would be sent out 30 days prior to any future gather” (EA p. 12). Therefore, the current proposed action is consistent with the EA and decision even though there is a difference in current population.

The proposed action alternative analyzed in the 2015 EA focused on the application of PZP fertility control vaccines, which is described on p. 11 of the 2015 EA and fully analyzed in Chapter III of the EA. Therefore, fertility control actions within the proposed action, including the use of PZP, is consistent with what was analyzed in the 2015 EA and selected in the associated decision.

Both the 2005 AMU/Steens CMPA RMP/ROD and the 2015 Oregon GRSG ARMPA state that wild horses should be managed to preserve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance and that wild horse population levels be managed within established AMLs. The proposed action is moving towards attaining these objectives by reducing fertility rates, maintaining AML for longer periods of time, and reducing the frequency of gathers.

2. Is the range of alternatives analyzed in the existing NEPA document(s) appropriate with respect to the new proposed action, given current environmental concerns, interests, and resource values?

Within the South Steens HMA Population Management Plan, five alternatives were considered (2015 EA, p. 9-17), including a no action alternative, which provides a wide range of alternatives. The proposed action analyzed in the 2015 EA included the permanent

removal of excess wild horses, reestablishing AML on the range, and the application of fertility control vaccine (PZP) to those mares returning to the range. In addition, five other alternatives were considered but not fully analyzed (2015 EA, pp. 17-20), following guidance from section 6.6.3 of BL's NEPA Handbook (2008). None of the factors under which BLM eliminated alternatives from detailed consideration before have changed since the final version of the 2015 EA. Of the five alternatives eliminated from further analysis, two remain in nonconformance with the existing land use plan (LUP), two remain technically infeasible, one remains remote or speculative due to no new data on the topic, and one would continue to not meet the purpose and need.

The actions proposed in this DNA are all features of the proposed action described in the 2015 EA range of alternatives described in Chapter II. Because the current environmental concerns, interests, and resource values have not changed since the 2015 EA (with the exception of effects caused directly by gathers under the 2015 EA), there are no additional reasonable alternatives the BLM would consider.

The 2015 EA analyzed alternatives including multiple alternatives where fertility control treatments using PZP were proposed as an action to maintain AML. The alternatives that did not include fertility control resulted in higher expected populations of horses and higher expected frequencies of gathers needed to maintain AML. By not maintaining AML, negative impacts increase to resources and habitat within the HMA.

3. Is the existing analysis valid in light of any new information or circumstances (such as, rangeland health standard assessment, recent endangered species listings, and updated lists of Bureau of Land Management [BLM] sensitive species)? Can you reasonably conclude that new information and new circumstances would not substantially change the analysis of the new proposed action?

The existing analysis regarding the removal of excess wild horses remains valid since environmental conditions are substantially the same as those disclosed and analyzed in the 2015 EA, Chapter III: Affected Environment (beginning on EA p. 20). The existing analysis is also valid for the actions of returning horses to the HMA and the treatment of mares returned to the HMA with PZP. Since 2015 (final 2015 EA), there are no new circumstances or information that would substantially change the analysis of these actions. The BLM has no new information regarding the conditions on the range that change the impacts analysis described in the 2015 EA related to the need to maintain AML. The 2015 EA proposed action included a 10-year plan (2015-2025) for management of horses within AML that included multiple events when horses would be permanently removed from the HMA with PZP applied to mares returned. There was no scenario analyzed where BLM would maintain the wild horse population below AML because this would not be in conformance with the AMU/Steens CMPA RMP/RODs. In addition, as sites will be surveyed for important cultural, special status, and noxious species prior to the gather occurring, any changes in updated lists will not result in new impacts to these resources. There are no actions in the DNA where the effects are not already analyzed, disclosed, and cited in the EA.

4. Are the effects that would result from implementation of the new proposed action similar (both quantitatively and qualitatively) to those analyzed in the existing NEPA document?

The specific actions proposed in this DNA (i.e., permanent removal of animals, return to low AML, and application of fertility control treatments using PZP) are essentially the same actions that were analyzed in the proposed action of the 2015 EA. The affected environment is similar to the one described and analyzed in the 2015 EA. The BLM is not aware of any meaningful changes to the environment that would suggest the actions proposed in this DNA would lead to different effects than those disclosed in the 2015 EA.

The direct, indirect, and cumulative effects from the actions proposed in this DNA are the same to those analyzed and disclosed in Chapter III of the 2015 EA (pp. 20-95). This DNA proposes to re-establish low AML on the range with a sex ratio of 50/50 as well as treatment of mares with fertility control. As described in Section 3 above, there is no “significant new information” that would indicate or be different from those previously analyzed in the 2015 EA. The impacts of using the fertility control vaccination to reduce reproduction rates within an HMA that leads to managing wild horse numbers within AML, have been adequately analyzed in existing NEPA documents.

5. Are the public involvement and interagency review associated with existing NEPA document(s) adequate for the current proposed action?

All of the actions being proposed in this DNA were analyzed in the 2015 EA, which was subject to public comment and review periods. On April 12, 2013, the BLM mailed a scoping letter for the 2015 EA to 65 interested individuals, groups, and agencies regarding the proposed removal of excess horses from the South Steens HMA. The scoping letter was also posted on the BLM Burns District planning webpage. Letters and e-mails were received from 9,902 individuals and groups during the 15-day comment period. Scoping comments voiced concerns about the authorized level of livestock and wild horse animal unit months (AUM), fences in the HMA, real-time cameras during gather operations, where excess horses will go if holding facilities are full, data on horses gathered during the 2009 gather, the cause for horses leaving the HMA, water usage from other multiple use resources, cattleguards, maintenance of social bands during gathers, the level of predator control in the area, the use of catch-treat-release fertility control methods for population management, and the effects of a gather on wilderness characteristics. The issues identified in those letters and e-mails, along with issues identified during IDT meetings and through contact with other agencies, were addressed by the BLM interdisciplinary team (IDT) in the 2015 EA and Decision.

Steens Mountain Advisory Council (SMAC) was presented with the proposed action and alternatives of this EA during a conference call meeting on September 11, 2014. The group gave a majority opinion for BLM to continue maintaining the wild horse population of South Steens HMA within AML.

A notice of availability of the EA and unsigned finding of no significant impact (FONSI) were mailed to 64 interested individuals, groups, and agencies on January 28, 2015, for a 30-day public comment period. In addition, a notice was posted in the Burns Times-Herald

newspaper on January 28, 2015. The BLM Burns District received 8,551 comments in the forms of letters and emails. BLM responses to comments can be found in the 2015 South Steens HMA Population Management Plan EA Decision Appendix A_-Response to Public Comments. The comments and issues identified in public letters and emails, along with the issues identified during the IDT meetings and through contact with other agencies, were addressed by the BLM IDT. Comments received during this period included comments on the urgency of maintaining AML, wild horse “removal”, livestock reduction and forage consumption, wild horse AML adjustments, principally but not necessarily exclusively, NEPA requirements, affected environment, gather operations, effects of capture, transport, and holding on wild horses, census, population growth, compensatory reproduction, SpayVac, GonaCon, PZP, chemical vasectomy, sterilization, predator management, genetic viability, selective removal, self-stabilizing population, fences, euthanasia of excess horses, adaptive management, wilderness, WSAs, and road maintenance.

Public hearings are held annually regarding the use of motorized vehicles in the management of wild horses (or burros) (inventory, gather operations, and transport). The most recent meeting was May 23, 2024 (www.blm.gov/announcement/blm-host-virtual-public-hearing-use-motorized-vehicles-manage-wild-horses-and-burros). During these meetings, the public is given the opportunity to present new information and to voice any concerns or opinions regarding the use of motorized vehicles in the management of wild horses and burros.

E. INTERDISCIPLINARY ANALYSIS

Identify those team members conducting or participating in the NEPA analysis and preparation of this worksheet as part of an Interdisciplinary Team.

NAME	TITLE	AGENCY & RESOURCE REPRESENTED
Autumn Toelle-Jackson	Planning & Environmental Coordinator	NEPA Review/Compliance
Rick Huber	Planning & Environmental Specialist	NEPA Review/Compliance
Rick Knox	Acting Supervisory Wild Horse & Burro Specialist	WHB, Rangeland Management
Kylie Caraher	Wild Horse and Burro Specialist	WHB
Holly Higgins	Wildlife Specialist	Wildlife
Matt Obradovich	District Biologist	Wildlife/Riparian
Don Rotell	Andrews/Steens Field Manager	Overall Review

Note: Refer to the EA for a complete list of the team members who participated in the preparation of the original EA and planning documents.

F. OTHERS CONSULTED

On April 12, 2013, the BLM mailed a scoping letter to interested individuals, groups, and agencies regarding the proposed removal of excess horses from the South Steens HMA. The scoping letter was also posted on the BLM Burns District planning webpage at <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/67816/510>. Letters and e-mails were received from 9,902 individuals and groups during the 15-day comment period. The issues identified in those letters and e-mails, along with issues identified during IDT meetings and through contact with other agencies, have been addressed by the BLM IDT.

G. CONCLUSION

Based on the review documented above, I conclude that this proposal conforms to the applicable land use plans and that the NEPA documentation fully covers the proposed action and constitutes BLM's compliance with the requirements of the NEPA.

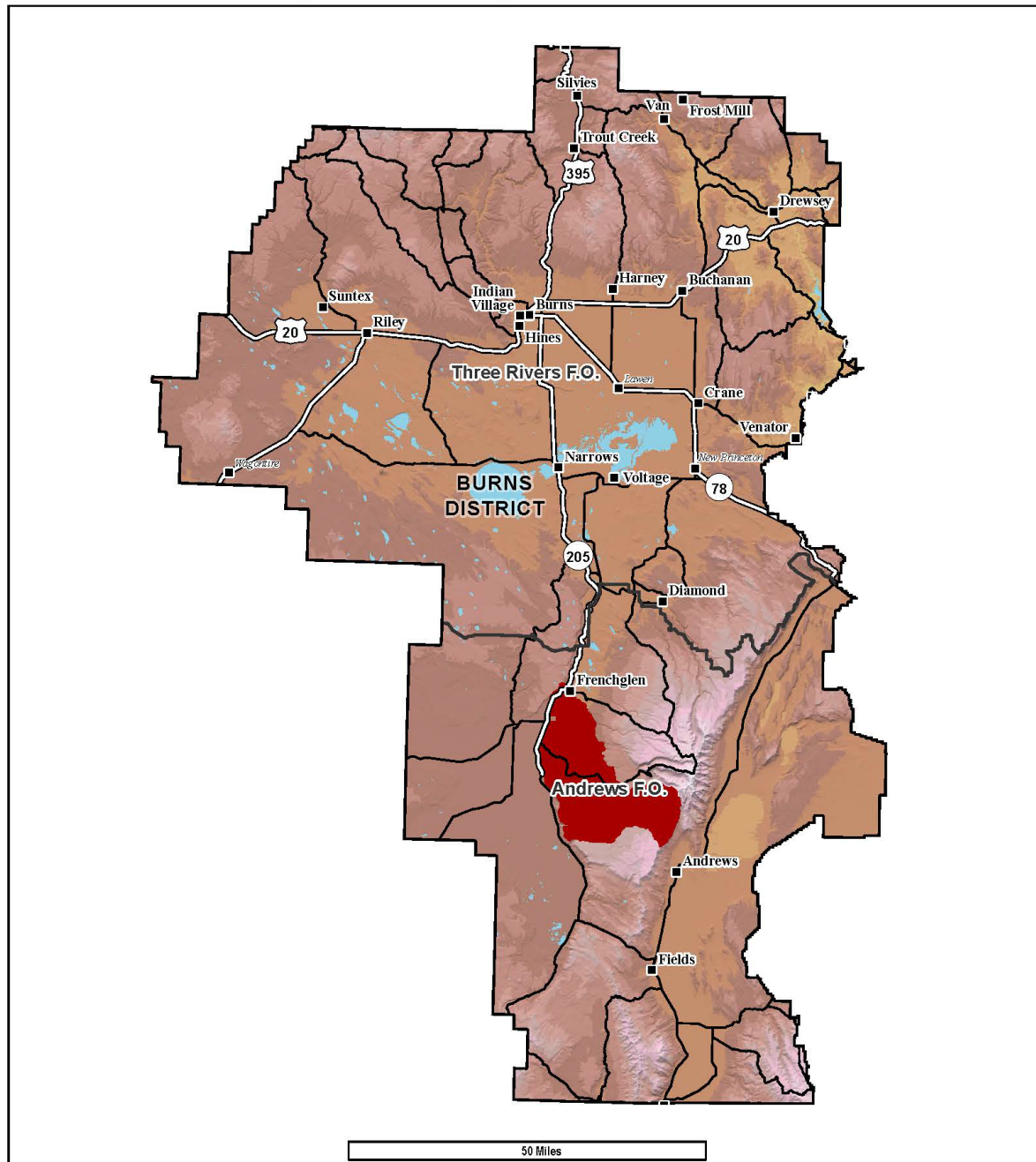
Authorized Officer: Don Rotell, Andrews/Steens Field Manager

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Note: The signed conclusion on this worksheet is part of an interim step in the BLM's internal decision process and does not constitute an appealable decision. However, the lease, permit, or other authorization based on this determination of NEPA adequacy (DNA) is subject to protest or appeal under 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 4 and the program-specific regulations.

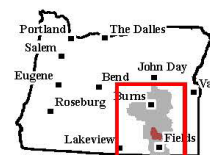
South Steens HMA Population Management DNA

Vicinity Map



South Steens Herd Management Area
 Highway

Road (not all are displayed)
 Burns District Boundary
 Field Office Boundary



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 Burns District, Oregon

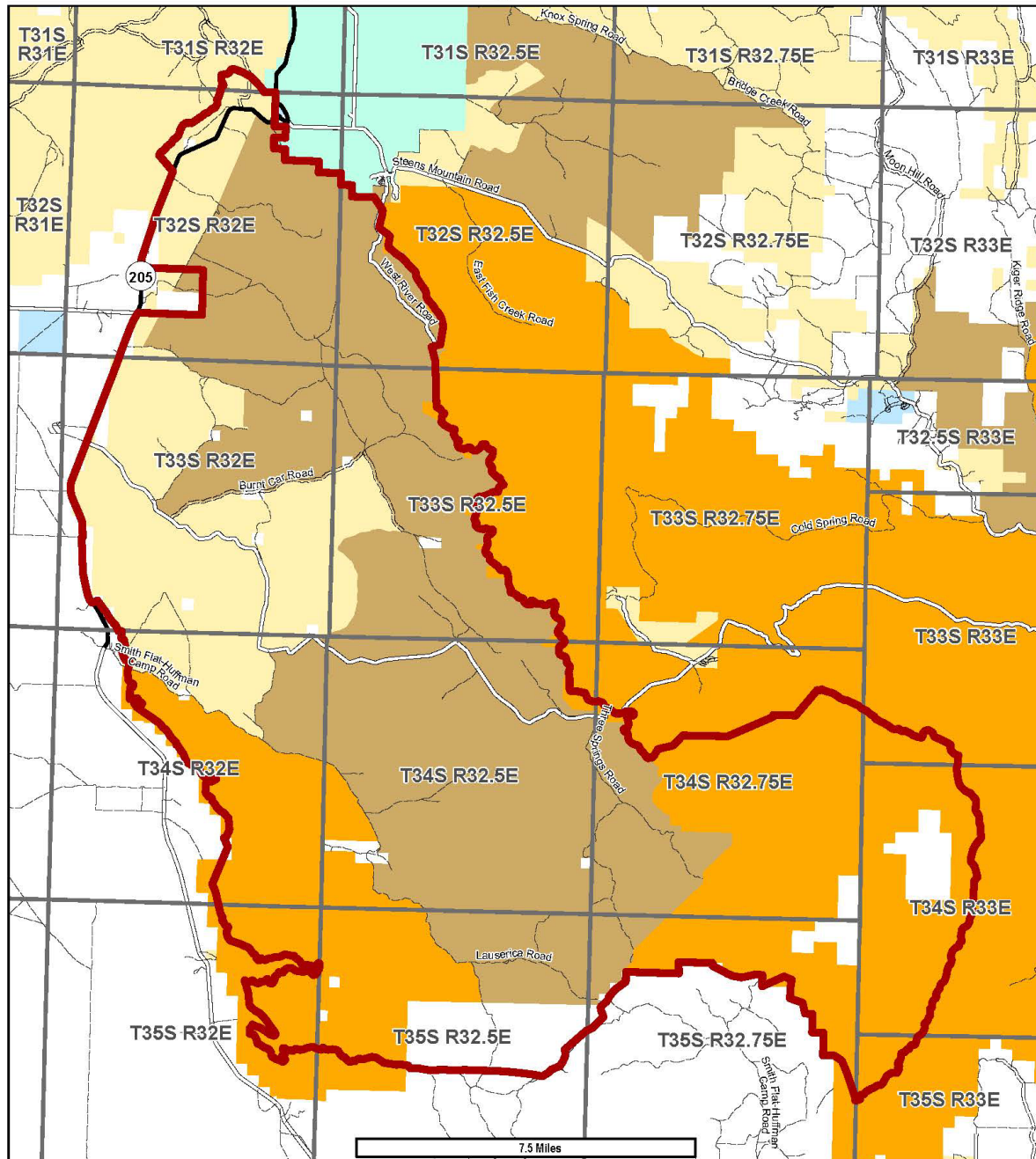
Note: No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability or completeness of these data for individual or aggregate use with other data. Original data was compiled from various sources and may be updated without notification.

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South Steens HMA Population Management Plan DNA

Project Location Map



- Highway
- Paved or Gravel Road
- Natural Improved Surface Road
- Natural/Unk Surface Road
- Township and Range
- BLM Wilderness Study Area
- Steens Mtn Wilderness
- Bureau of Land Management
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- State
- Privately Owned
- South Steens Herd Management Area



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Burns District, Oregon

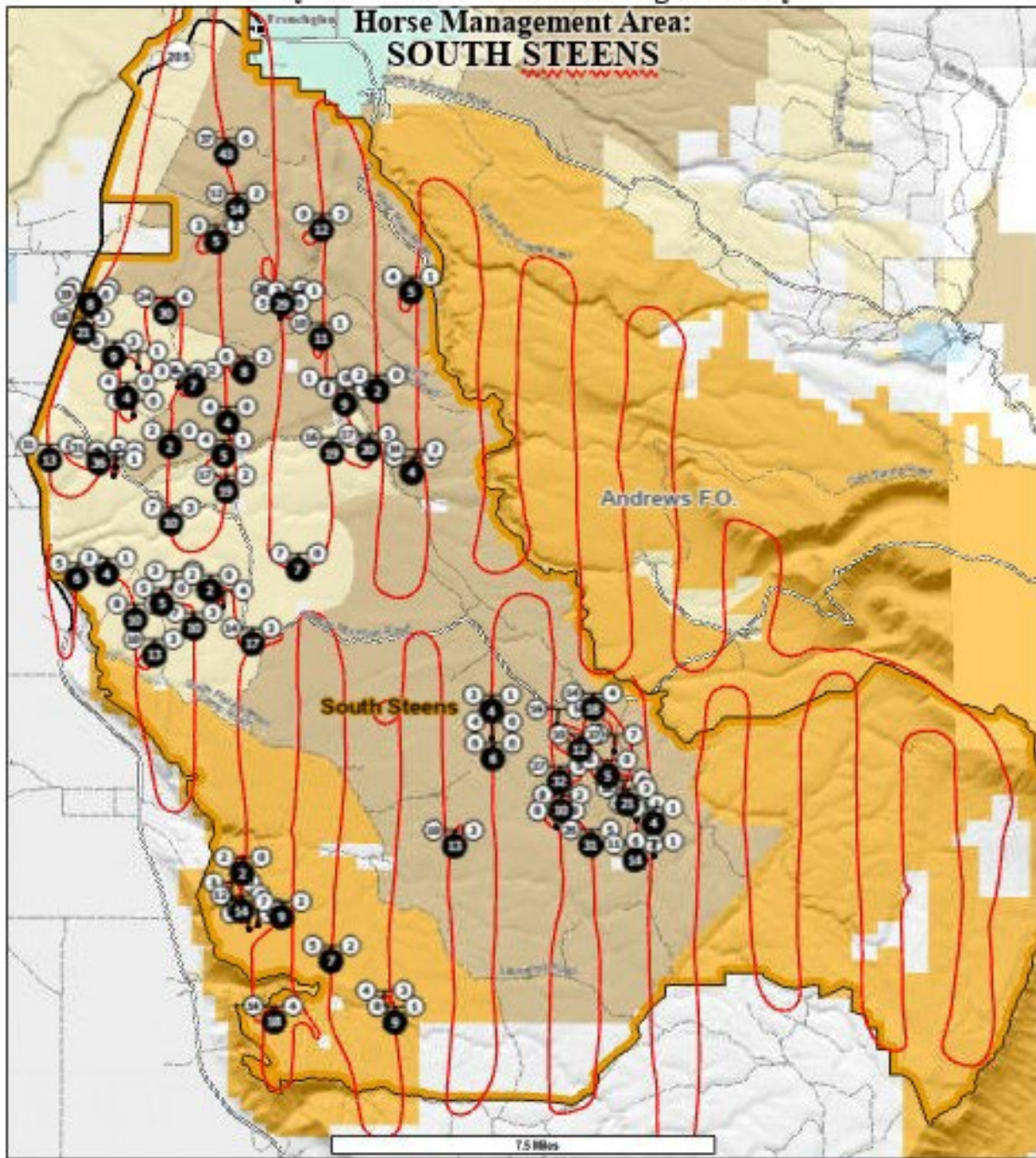
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May 2024 Double Observer Flight Survey

Horse Management Area: SOUTH STEENS



- Horses - Foals
Total Count
- Flight Path
- Wild Horse Herd
Management Area
- Town
- Highway
- Paved or Gravel Road
- Natural Improved
Surface Road
- Natural/Unimproved
Surface Road
- Field Office Boundary
- BLM Wilderness Study
Area
- Steens Mtn Wilderness
- Bureau of Land
Management
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife
Service
- State
- Privately Owned



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Bureau of Land Management
Bureau District Office
Note: Accuracy is subject to the Bureau of Land Management
and the accuracy of the data used in the survey. The data is for
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