



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
High Desert District
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Scoping Statement Multi-Year Gather Plan for the Adobe Town, Great Divide Basin, Salt Wells Creek, Little Colorado and White Mountain Herd Management Areas

Description of Project

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Rock Springs Field Office and the Rawlins Field Office are launching a 30-day public scoping period prior to preparing an environmental assessment regarding a multi-year gather plan for the Adobe Town, Great Divide Basin, Salt Wells Creek, Little Colorado and White Mountain Herd Management Areas (HMAs). The environmental assessment will analyze the potential impacts associated with the gather and removal of excess wild horses in these HMAs, as well as the potential impacts of using population growth suppression tools, such as fertility control.

Recent aerial surveys have shown that wild horse populations now exceed the established Appropriate Management Levels (AML) in all of the subject HMAs (see Table 1), and that there are excess wild horses on the range. Because of this, BLM plans to remove wild horses from these HMAs in the summer or fall of 2020, and to use population growth suppression tools to slow the rate of reproduction in these herds. The multi-year gather plan would also provide for similar activities to occur when the BLM determines there are excess wild horses in future years. Taking these actions would comply with the 2013 Consent Decree *Rock Springs Grazing Association v. Salazar* [Civil Action No. 11-CV-263-NDF].

Table 1. Current wild horse population estimates, and determination of excess wild horses.

HMA	AML Range	2019 Survey Count	2020 Population Estimate*	Excess Wild Horses†
Adobe Town	610 - 800	929	1,114	504
Great Divide Basin	415 - 600	1,069	1,282	867
Salt Wells Creek	251 - 345	745	894	643
Little Colorado	69 - 100	411	493	424
White Mountain	205 - 300	391	469	264
Total:	1,550 - 2,145	3,545	4,252	2,702

*The 2020 population estimate is calculated by adding the estimated foal crop (20%) to the 2019 survey count.

†Excess wild horses is calculated by subtracting low AML from the 2020 population estimate.

At this time the BLM has identified the following alternatives for managing wild horse populations within the subject HMAs. Each of these alternatives will be considered and analyzed in the environmental assessment.

- Gather and remove excess wild horses and apply PZP (porcine zona pellucida) or Gonna Con fertility control vaccine to a group of mares that will be released back into the HMAs. Establish a 60% to 40% male to female ratio within the HMAs.
- Gather and remove excess wild horses. Spay a group of mares and neuter a group of studs that will be released back into the HMAs. Apply PZP or GonaCon to the remaining mares released back onto the HMAs.
- Gather and remove excess wild horses, without conducting any population growth suppression activities.
- No Action – Do not conduct any gather or removal activities, and do not conduct any population growth suppression 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. Management objectives for wild horses include providing for the protection of the rangeland resource, while maintaining a self-sustaining, healthy population of wild horses on the public land in those areas where horses existed at the time the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act was passed (1971). Wild horse HMAs were established and confirmed through the RMP planning process.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

To comply with NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations, the BLM is preparing an environmental assessment (EA) for the proposed gather. 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://go.usa.gov/xpaEN> (click on the "Comment on Document" button toward the bottom right of the screen). If you cannot access this system, comments may be submitted by email to: blm_wy_rsfo_wildhorse_hmas@blm.gov, or by mail to:

BLM Rock Springs Field Office
High Desert District
Multi-Year Wild Horse Gather
280 Highway 191 North
Rock Springs, Wyoming 82901

Comments should be submitted by December 20, 2019. 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 regulation (40 CFR 1503.3) states 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://go.usa.gov/xpaEN>.


Kimberlee D. Foster
Rock Springs Field Manager


Dennis Carpenter
Rawlins Field Manager

Attachment:

1. Maps

cc: Interested Public







