



JAN 28 2020

Dear Interested Party:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Burns District Office is beginning the process of writing an environmental assessment (DOI-BLM-ORWA-B050-2020-0004-EA) titled Kiger and Riddle Mountain Herd Management Areas (HMA) Population Management Plan. The EA would analyze the environmental effects of various alternatives for maintaining the appropriate management level (AML) for wild horses within these HMAs over a ten-year timeframe. The AMLs for both the Kiger and Riddle Mountain HMAs were set in the Three Rivers Resource Management Plant (RMP) Record of Decision (ROD) and Rangeland Program Summary (1992), and reaffirmed in the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area (CMPA) RMP/ROD (2005) as a range of 51 to 82 and 33 to 56 wild horses, respectively.

The purpose of this letter is to provide interested parties an opportunity to participate in the development of this plan.

The project goals are to return and maintain the wild horse populations within the established AML in the Kiger and Riddle Mountain HMAs, prevent and protect rangeland resources from deterioration associated with the current overpopulation, and restore a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple use relationship on public lands in the area consistent with the provisions of Section 1333(b)(2) of the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act (WHB Act) of 1971, as amended. Through internal scoping, BLM has developed a proposed action that includes: helicopter gathering up to 100 percent of the wild horses in the HMAs; selecting mares and stallions to be released back to the HMA based on characteristics designated in the Three Rivers RMP (1992), the Riddle Mountain and Kiger Wild Horse HMA Plan (1996), and the Kiger Mustang Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) Management Plan (1996); treating mares being returned to the HMA with authorized and available fertility control vaccine to slow the population growth rate; re-establishing the population with a 50/50 sex ratio of horses; using bait trapping in areas where concentrations of wild horses are detrimental to habitat conditions or other resources; and conducting subsequent gathers over the next 10 years to efficiently maintain AML. The 1996 HMA and ACEC management plans are available at the Burns District BLM Office.

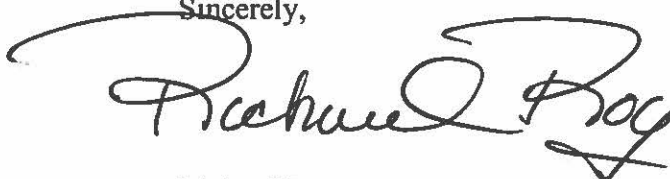
In this EA, BLM will analyze the anticipated effects of conducting various population management actions to maintain appropriate management levels (AML) over the 10-year timeframe of analysis and compare those action alternatives to taking no population management actions (no action alternative).

Using results from a 2017 simultaneous double-observer method aerial survey and an estimated 20 percent annual population growth rate, the BLM anticipates by the fall of 2020 the Kiger HMA would have approximately 109 adults and 22 foals, while Riddle Mountain HMA would have approximately 95 adults and 19 foals. There is a need to protect rangeland resources from deterioration associated with populations that exceed AML, as well as a need to maintain wild horse populations in balance with the four essential habitat components (forage, water, cover, and space) over the long term. This assessment is based on the following factors including, but not limited to:

- Results of a June 15, 2017 simultaneous double-observer method aerial survey estimated a population size of 78 horses (63 adults and 15 foals) in Kiger HMA and 73 horses (55 adults and 18 foals) in Riddle Mountain HMA.
- The land use plans that allocate use for wild horses in these HMAs provide for 984 animal unit months (AUM) for wild horses in Kiger HMA and 672 AUMs for wild horses in Riddle Mountain HMA. By fall 2020, use by wild horses would be exceeding the forage allocated to their use by 324 AUMs and 468 AUMs, respectively.
- Upland forage utilization monitoring documents moderate to severe utilization levels in portions of the Kiger HMA experiencing concentrated wild horse use.

Please provide information that you have on the status or condition of the resources or resource values of the proposed project area or alternatives to consider. Comments received from interested parties following receipt of this letter will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to wild horse population management activities and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that also achieve the purpose and need of the project. Please submit all replies by February 28, 2020, to Wild Horse and Burro Specialist Lisa Grant, Burns District Office, 28910 Highway 20 West, Hines, Oregon 97738 or send an email to blm_or_bu_whb@blm.gov. For questions or further information please email or call 541-573-4555.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Roy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and a stylized "Roy".

Richard Roy
Three Rivers Resource Area Field Manager

Enclosure

LLM:ORB-050:LGrant:ABruce:1-17-20:4700
LLM:ORB-050:LGrant:ABruce:1-27-20:4700

Kiger and Riddle Mountain HMA Population Management Plan Environmental Assessment

HMA Boundary
Steens Mountain CMPA
Resource Area Boundary
 Highways
 Not All Roads Are Shown
 Land Administration
 Bureau of Land Management
 State
 Privately Owned
 BLM Wilderness Study Area

