



Red Desert Complex Wild Horse Gather Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Q. Why is this gather necessary?

A. The gather is necessary to return wild horse populations closer to appropriate management levels (AMLs) and ensure long-term viability of sage-grouse populations within the complex.

The BLM is tasked with managing for healthy horses and sustainable, working public lands. Excess animals cause undue pressure on limited rangeland resources. As wild horse and burro populations rise, there are serious consequences for the animals and the land. Horses and burros starve, dehydrate and wander onto private property or highways. Land health and habitat for sage-grouse and other wildlife is being compromised.

The BLM manages the nation's public lands for multiple uses (wild horses, wildlife habitat, livestock grazing, etc.), in accordance with the 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act. Under the authority of the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, the BLM manages, protects and controls wild horses and burros. This law requires the BLM to remove excess wild horses and burros from the range to sustain the health and productivity of public lands.

Q. How many horses will be gathered and how many will be removed from the range?

A. The BLM will gather approximately 2,795 adult horses and remove approximately 2,670 adult horses to return the population closer to the appropriate management level.

Q. How many horses will be returned to the HMAs?

A. A total of approximately 125 select mares and stallions will be returned to the complex to ensure genetic variability and to preserve the New World Iberian Genotype present in the complex. The mares will all be treated with fertility control before they are released.

Q. What are the current population estimates and appropriate management levels?

A.

HMA	AML	Estimated adult horses (2018)	Estimated foals (2018)	Est. total population (2018)
Green Mountain	170-300	1,072	268	1,340
Crooks Mountain	65-85	476	119	595
Antelope Hills	60-82	303	76	379
Stewart Creek	125-175	606	152	758
Lost Creek	60-82	360	90	450
Totals	481-725	2,817	704	3,522

Q. Where will the removed horses go?

A. Excess wild horses removed from the complex will be initially shipped to short-term holding facilities located in Rock Springs, Wyoming; Axtell, Utah; and Cañon City, Colorado where they will be aged, dewormed, blood tested for Equine Infectious Anemia (known as EIA or Coggins Test), vaccinated, freeze marked and prepared for either the BLM's adoption program or long-term holding pastures in the Midwest.

After being prepared for adoption, some horses will be taken to the Wyoming Honor Farm in Riverton or the Mantle Adoption and Training Facility in Wheatland for gentling in order to have a better chance of being adopted.

Q. How will this gather affect wildlife?

A. The removal of excess wild horses from public rangeland is carried out to maintain rangeland health. Excess animals cause undue pressure on limited rangeland resources. With overpopulation on the range, the risk to the animals due to forage and/or water starvation increases significantly each year. Wildlife benefit from the management of wild horses by balancing forage and water sources so all species utilizing public rangelands will be healthier.

Because all of the Red Desert Complex occurs within Greater Sage-grouse habitat, removing excess wild horses will have a direct and beneficial effect on Greater Sage-grouse habitat. Of the 753,028 acres making up the complex, 512,446 acres (68 percent) are within GRSG Priority Habitat Management Area with the remaining 32 percent of the complex within General Habitat Management Area. As a result, the area contains important breeding, nesting and early and late brood rearing habitat

Q. Is the BLM removing horses to make room for more cattle grazing?

A. No. The removal of wild horses and burros from public rangelands is carried out to ensure rangeland health, in accordance with land-use plans that are developed in an open, public process. These land-use plans are the means by which BLM carries out its core mission, which is to manage the land for multiple uses while protecting the land's resources. Authorized livestock grazing on BLM-managed land has declined by nearly 50 percent since the 1940s; actual (as distinguished from authorized) livestock grazing on public rangelands has declined by 30 percent since 1971.

Q. Why is the BLM removing horses when there are already more than 46,000 animals in holding?

A. The ecosystems of public rangelands are not able to withstand the impacts from overpopulated herds, which include soil erosion, sedimentation of streams and damage to wildlife habitat. As for the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, Section 1333 of that law mandates that once the Interior Secretary "determines...on the basis of all information currently available to him, that an overpopulation exists on a given area of the public lands and that action is necessary to remove excess animals, he shall immediately remove excess animals from the range so as to achieve appropriate management levels."

The current estimated on-range population is **81,814** animals—over 55,000 more than the range can sustainably support (27,000). Although the BLM tries to place as many removed animals as possible into private care through adoption or sales, the public's demand for adoptable wild horses has declined sharply in recent years, primarily due to economic hard times.

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The BLM manages more than 245 million acres of public land located primarily in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The agency's mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America's public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. Diverse activities authorized on these lands generated \$75 billion in sales of goods and services throughout the American economy in fiscal year 2016—more than any other agency in the Department of the Interior. These activities supported more than 372,000 jobs.

Q. Why is BLM removing horses that appear to be or are in good condition?

A. The BLM gathers horses with different body conditions, including some that appear to be or are in good condition. The agency gathers excess animals from overpopulated herds to prevent worst-case scenarios in which removed horses would be emaciated because of insufficient forage on the range. When a herd management area population is within its appropriate management level, healthy and viable wild horses are able to survive and thrive during severe winters or drought

Q. What happens to horses that are not adopted?

A. Unadopted horses are fed and cared for in short-term corrals, long-term Midwestern pastures or wild horse eco-sanctuaries. Wild horses more than 10 years old and those passed over for adoption at least three times become eligible for sale, a transaction in which the title of ownership to the animal passes immediately from the Federal government to the buyer. (In the adoption process, the title of ownership passes from the Federal government to the adopter after the individual provides one year of humane care.) All horses in holding retain their status as “wild” animals and remain under the BLM’s protection.

Q. Will any of the horses be sent to slaughter?

A. No. While a December 2004 amendment to the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act authorizes the BLM to sell sale-eligible animals “without limitation,” the Bureau has not been and is not selling any wild horses to slaughterhouses or to “killer buyers.”

Q. What veterinary treatment will the removed horses receive?

A. The horses will be aged (based on the condition of their teeth), de-wormed, vaccinated, blood-tested, and freeze marked (marked with a cold brand). During the gather, an animal and plant inspection service (APHIS) veterinarian will be on-site to examine animals and make recommendations to BLM for care and treatment of wild horses.

Q. How far, in relation to the trap site, are the horses and foals being herded?

A. The trap site locations have not been determined at this time, but BLM strives to minimize the distance wild horses must be herded. Under normal circumstances this travel should not exceed 10 miles and may be much less dependent on existing conditions (i.e. ground conditions, animal health, extreme temperature (high and low), etc.).

Q. Why does BLM use helicopters to gather horses?

A. Agencies were granted the authority to use helicopters with the passage of FLPMA in 1976 with the assumption that gathers could be conducted more efficiently and effectively. But more importantly today, the use of helicopters has proven to be more humane than other types of gather methods when large numbers of animals need to be removed over wide areas or rugged terrain. Helicopters are able to move horses and burros at a proper pace; moreover, helicopter pilots can keep mares and foals together better than a horseback rider and can also better move the animals around such barriers as deep ravines, fences or roads.

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Q. Why doesn't the BLM use more fertility control?

A. The National Academy of Sciences found that no highly effective fertility-control methods are currently available. Research is being conducted by scientists from universities, state agencies, non-governmental organizations and the U.S. Geological Survey in cooperation with the BLM. At the same time, the BLM is using existing short-lasting contraceptives to slow population growth where possible.

Q. Will BLM spay mares or geld stallions in the future?

A. The BLM is trying to find alternative ways to keep horse populations within the AML and will continue to explore these topics. In 2015, the BLM began investing in research to find safe and effective methods to neuter and spay wild horses and develop longer-lasting contraceptive vaccines.

Q. How many wild horses are in Wyoming?

A. BLM Wyoming has 16 HMAs statewide and an AML range of 2,490 to 3,725 wild horses. The FY18 Wild Horse and Burro Public Lands Statistics for Wyoming shows the population estimate as of March 1 to be approximately 7,338 wild horses.

Q. What is the situation regarding wind breaks at the Rock Springs holding facility?

A. Wild horses at the Rock Springs Wild Horse Holding Facility are provided with man-made and natural wind breaks. In contrast, in Wyoming's on-range herd management areas, there are not many natural wind breaks because of the desert terrain. On-range wild horses huddle together in groups to protect one another from the elements, just as they do in corralled environments.

Q. Will there be any public viewing opportunities at the trap sites?

A. Yes, public viewing of gather operations are available on public land. To view the gather, you must contact Sarah Beckwith, public affairs specialist, at sbeckwith@blm.gov to have your name listed on the daily visitor's log. Those on the daily visitors log will be informed where and when to meet each morning to be escorted to the designated safety zone near the trap site. This will allow appropriate staffing for public viewing needs, and also allow visitors instant notification if a trap site needs to be moved, or gather operations suspended due to weather or logistics.

Q. Where may I learn more about the Wild Horse and Burro Program?

A. Please visit the BLM's Website at www.blm.gov/whb.