

## Questions & Answers for the White Mountain/Little Colorado Wild Horse Gather

### *Q. Why is this gather necessary?*

**A.** The current wild horse population in the White Mountain and Little Colorado (WMLC) Herd Management Areas (HMA) is above the Appropriate Management Level (AML) and BLM will gather excess horses to get the number back to low AML.

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 (as amended by Congress in 1976, 1978, 1996, and 2004), 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. The gather and removal of excess wild horses is necessary to ensure that healthy herds thrive on healthy rangelands.

The BLM has a mandate to manage for multiple uses (wild horses, wildlife habitat, livestock grazing, etc.) on public land in balance with each other.

BLM must also comply with the Consent Decree with the State of Wyoming, and the Court Order with private land owners.

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

**A.** Currently, the estimated population is approximately 970 horses. The estimated current wild horse population is based on the April 2010 flights and adjusted for two years' foal crop, and 14 percent unobserved population. Of the estimated 970 wild horses, approximately 696 are currently above the low AML for the White Mountain/Little Colorado HMAs.

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

**A.** A total of approximately 177 wild horses will be returned to the combined HMAs. It is estimated the ungathered wild horse population in these HMAs, approximately 10 percent or 66 wild horses in White Mountain, and 31 wild horses in Little Colorado, consisting of an assumed sex ratio of 50 percent stallions and 50 percent mares.

### *Q. How did you come up with the number to be returned to the HMAs?*

**A.**  $970$  (population total of WMLC HMAs)  $\times$   $90$  percent (gather efficiency) =  $873$  (wild horses gathered)  
 $970$  (WMLC population)  $-$   $873$  (wild horses gathered) =  $97$  (the estimated 10% not gathered)  
 $205$  (low White Mountain AML)  $+ 69$  (low Little Colorado AML) =  $274$  (combined AML)  
 $274$  (combined AML)  $- 97$  (the 10% wild horse population not gathered) =  $177$  (the number of wild horses to be returned to the HMAs.)

### *Q. What are the Appropriate Management Levels for the White Mountain/Little Colorado HMAs?*

#### **A. Appropriate Management Levels:**

White Mountain	205-300
Little Colorado	69-100
Total	274 – 400

#### **Current Population Estimates:**

White Mountain	660 (455 to be removed)
Little Colorado	310 (241 to be removed)
Total	970 (696 to be removed)



***Q. What will the remaining herd population of this Herd Management Area be?***

A. There will be approximately 205 horses in the White Mountain HMA after the gather, and 69 horses in the Little Colorado HMA for a combined total of 274.

***Q. What are the governing court cases?***

A. There are two court cases. In March 1981, the United States District Court for the District of Wyoming (No. C79-275K) held that BLM must remove all of the wild horses from the Rock Springs Grazing Association (RSGA) private lands “except that number which the RSGA voluntarily agrees to leave in said area.”

In August 2003, a Consent Decree was entered between the State of Wyoming and the United States regarding reducing wild horse populations in Wyoming to the AML. This out-of-court settlement was executed through the U.S. District Court for Wyoming (No. 03 CV 169D). Terms of the Agreement to be completed to maintain compliance with Wyoming Consent Decree include:

- If BLM determines through its inventory and projected reproduction rates that the wild horse population are likely to exceed AML in the following Fiscal Year, the BLM shall request funds to reduce the population to AML by December 15 of the next budget cycle year.

If the BLM fails to reduce the number of wild horses to AML by the required date, the State may petition the court to compel the BLM to do so.

***Q. Why was the decision changed?***

A. The initial decision record included spaying mares, but that portion of the decision has been tabled. BLM is working with veterinary scientists to develop a protocol to study the effects of spaying mares. In order to stay compliant with the 2003 Consent Decree and gather excess wild horses to low AML, the decision was modified to omit the gelding component pending further analysis and developing a monitoring strategy. Gelding remains a valuable tool to manage wild horse populations.

This decision will remove excess wild horses to low AML as the proposed action.

***Q. Under the gelding and spaying alternative, was the goal to make the WMLC HMAs non-producing?***

A. No. The goal is to reduce the number of foals born, thus reducing the number of future gathers necessary, making the WMLC a “minimally reproducing herd.”

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

A. BLM is trying to find alternative ways to keep horse populations within the AML and will continue to explore these topics.

***Q. Is BLM using any other population control method during this gather?***

A. Yes. All mares returned to the HMAs will be treated with a Porcine Zona Pellucida (PZP) vaccine. Approximately 40-60 mares to be returned to the HMAs would be treated with PZP during this gather. Sex ratios would also be adjusted to favor more stallions and fewer mares.

***Q. Where do the removed horses go?***

A. Excess wild horses removed from the HMAs will be initially shipped to a short-term holding facilities located in Rock Springs, Wyoming 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, horses will also be shipped to both of Wyoming’s training facilities – the Mantle Ranch located in Wheatland, and the Wyoming Honor Farm located in Riverton, where they will be gentled 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 the public rangelands is carried out to maintain rangeland health. Wildlife benefit from the management of wild horses by balancing forage and water sources so all species utilizing public rangelands will be healthier.

***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 35,000 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.”

Currently, the western rangeland free-roaming population of more than 38,497 wild horses (as of February 2011) exceeds by nearly 12,000 animals the number BLM has determined can exist in balance with other public rangeland resources and uses. 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. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and BLM Director Bob Abbey announced a set of proposals in October 2009 aimed at putting the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program on a sustainable track (see [www.blm.gov](http://www.blm.gov) for details).

***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 pro-actively gathers excess animals from overpopulated herds on a three-to-five year cycle to prevent worst-case scenarios in which removed horses would be emaciated because of insufficient forage on the range.

***Q. What happens to horses that are not adopted?***

**A.** Unadopted horses are fed and cared for in either short-term corrals or long-term Midwestern pastures. 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.) While a December 2004 law granting the BLM sale authority authorizes the agency 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.” 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. As noted above, 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 BLM 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).

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

**A.** Yes, although the gather is located on checkerboard land ownership pattern with a mixture of private, public, and state land, every opportunity will be made available for public viewing of gather operations. To view the gather, you must contact public affairs 24 hours in advance to have your name listed on the daily anticipated visitor's log. The PAO contact will inform those on the daily visitors log 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. 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.

***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.

***Q. Why is BLM allowing a federally indicted and convicted contractor to gather the horses?***

**A.** Mr. Dave Cattoor, a contractor whose company has been gathering and removing wild horses on behalf of the BLM since 1975, pled guilty to a misdemeanor count of “Use of Aircraft to Capture Wild Horses” on May 22, 1992. The incident to which he pled guilty occurred while his company was performing work on non-BLM lands for the Duckwater Indian Tribe in Nevada. Tribal members who were involved in the same legal case were later found innocent of all charges stemming from the incident. Mr. Cattoor has met and continues to meet all pertinent Federal regulations, which include certifying that no company employees have been convicted of animal cruelty charges. Mr. Cattoor’s company has consistently demonstrated its ability to safely, effectively, and humanely capture and handle wild horses and burros.

***Q. Does the BLM or the contractors use whips to move the horses through the pens and chute?***

**A.** No. The BLM or the gather contractors do not use whips. Flags or noise-making paddles are used to move horses through the pens and chutes. The flags are usually made by attaching a plastic grocery bag to the end of a sorting stick or buggy whip. The flag prevents the stick or whip from hitting the horse with any sort of impact or sting to it. Seeing and hearing the plastic flag motivates the animal to move away from the source of the stimulus. This technique is similar to those used for domestic and wild horses being trained using resistance-free methods.

***Q. How many wild horses are in Wyoming?***

**A.** Wyoming BLM has 16 HMAs statewide and an AML range of 2,490 to 3,725 wild horses. The FY 2011 Wild Horse and Burro Public Lands Statistics for Wyoming (February 2011), shows the current population estimated at approximately 5,333 wild horses.

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

**A.** Please visit the BLM’s Website at [www.blm.gov](http://www.blm.gov).