

Questions and Answers: 2020 Triple B/Maverick-Medicine Herd Management Areas (HMAs) Emergency Wild Horse Gather

Q. Why is this gather necessary?

A. The bait/water gather is necessary to address emergency conditions within the Maverick-Medicine and Triple B HMAs that threaten wild horse health and well-being, as well as crowding out wildlife that also compete for these limited resources. If a sufficient number of excess wild horses are not promptly removed from the area where water resources have become extremely limited, it is anticipated that individual wild horse body condition will continue to decline and that the most vulnerable horses - mares and foals in particular - will die.

In order to alleviate the competition for the limited water resources and prevent body condition decline and/or death of the most vulnerable horses, the BLM, has hauled water until an emergency gather operation could be conducted and approximately 360 excess wild horses removed from the Maverick-Medicine and Triple B HMAs. BLM has determined the situation within area is an emergency because the area springs have either gone dry or produce only a trickle of water. The current water resources are insufficient for the overpopulation of wild horses residing within the area. The situation is too extreme to be addressed through the normal gather cycle (BLM Handbook 4.7.2).

As well as prevent undue or unnecessary degradation of the public lands associated with excess wild horses, and 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 Burros Act. The BLM is concerned that the overpopulation of wild horses is impacting wildlife, such as mule deer, elk and pronghorn antelope.

The Maverick-Medicine and Triple B HMAs are overpopulated and animal conditions are declining due to range degradation and lack of sustainable water resources. Regular monitoring has occurred in the complex to observe wild horse body condition and range and water conditions. Dependent on the location within the HMAs animals body conditions have been observed in the range of 1.5-4.

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

A. Total number of wild horses gathered in the HMAs: 360

Total number of wild horses removed in the HMAs: 360

The HMAs are located in southern Elko County and Northern White County.

Q. What will the remaining herd population of this herd management area be?

A. Total number of wild horses remaining in the HMAs: 3,202

Q. Is there livestock grazing in this area?

A. No. The Maverick-Ruby 9 allotment has not seen livestock use since 2001 due to excess wild horse impacts in the area. Pot and Pony spring are part of the Medicine Butte grazing allotment which has sheep and cattle use, but due to the overpopulation of wild horses, livestock do not use this area.

Q. Does the wild horse overpopulation impact wildlife and plants?

A. Common wildlife species within the HMAs include coyote, black-tail jackrabbit, desert cottontail, bobcat, mountain lion and numerous raptors, reptiles and other small mammal species. Mule deer, elk, and pronghorn antelope are common big game species in the area. Currently, the overabundant population of wild horses is adversely affecting valuable habitat needed to support both native wildlife and wild horses.

With an Acceptable Management Level of 166-276 adult wild horses for the Maverick-Medicine HMA and 250-518 adult wild horses for the Triple B HMA, the current population estimate of 3,562 wild horses has strained the very limited water resources within the HMAs. This is also currently affecting the health of native wildlife found within HMAs, such as mule deer, elk and pronghorn antelope. On the HMAs most of the waters in the western two thirds of the HMAs range are insufficient to sustain the numbers of excess wild horses. Wild horses are currently staying in the valley bottoms around limited waters and are travelling five to eight miles one way in search of forage. Wild horses congregating on the developed and undeveloped water sources is limiting the access of the native wildlife and affecting their ability to meet their basic needs of water during the hot summers experienced on the HMAs. Forage resources within a 1-3-mile radius of the developed water resources are severely impacted due to the loitering of the excess wild horses, forcing both native wildlife and the wild horses to roam farther and farther in search of adequate forage. An emergency gather was last conducted in August of 2016, removing 51 animals. This emergency gather was conducted due to lack of water within the Maverick-Medicine HMA.

Wild horses often graze the same area repeatedly throughout the year. Forage plants in those areas receive little rest from grazing pressure. Continuous grazing by wild horses does not allow plants sufficient time to recover from grazing impacts. Such overgrazing results in reduced plant health, vigor, reproduction, and ultimately to a loss of native forage species from natural plant communities. Over time, this greatly diminishes habitat quality as abundance and long-term production of desired plant communities is compromised. If wild horse populations are not controlled in this area, forage utilization will exceed the capacity of the range.

Q. What are some of the effects of wild horse overpopulation on Threatened and Endangered Species?

A. Maintaining the existing wild horse over-population, which would increase with each successive foal crop, would result in continued and increasing impacts to threatened and endangered species populations and habitats. Wild horse populations would increase about 15-25% each year that a gather is postponed. Valley bottom habitats would continue to see locally heavy levels of utilization associated with wild horse use and areas of heavy use would continue to expand as wild horse populations continue to grow.

Q. Will there be any designated public observers at the trap site?

A. No. Due to the nature of the bait and water trap method, wild horses are reluctant to approach the trap site when there is too much activity; therefore, only essential gather operations personnel will be allowed at the trap site during gather operations.

Q. What Contractor will be used for this Gather?

A. Warner Livestock, LLC, of Spanish Fork, Utah

Q. How much will this gather cost?

A. The costs for the gather will be calculated at the end of the gather.

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

A. Since this gather is a bait/water trap gather no herding of the animals will occur.

Q. What veterinary treatment will the removed horses receive?

A. Once the horses arrive at the Palomino Valley Center, the crew will allow the horses to acclimate to domestic feed and monitor them for a period of time. Following, the horses will be aged (based on the condition of their teeth), de-wormed, vaccinated, blood-tested (for Equine Infectious Anemia), and freeze-marked (marked with a cold brand).

Q. Why is the 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.

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

A. The BLM may use flags or noise-making paddles 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. Will the BLM implement any population suppression techniques? If so, what method or fertility control drug will be used and how many animals will be treated and released?

A. No, this is an emergency gather based on lack of water therefore, all animals gathered will be removed.

Q. Why is the BLM removing horses when, as of July 2020, there are already over 47,000 animals in holding?

A. The BLM must remove thousands of wild horses and burros from the range each year to protect public lands from the environmental impacts of herd overpopulation – such as soil erosion, sedimentation of streams, and damage to wildlife habitat. In the case of the Triple B and Maverick-Medicine HMAs, excess horses exist outside the HMAs and the gather is needed not only to ensure balance on the range and reversal of downward trends, but to also conform to the directives within the 1987 Settlement and 2001/2002 IBLA orders which require maintenance of the AML.

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 over the last 10-plus years, leaving the federal agency in the unsustainable position of gathering excess horses while its holding costs spiral upward.

Q. Where do the removed horses go?

A. Excess wild horses, removed will be shipped to the Palomino Valley Center, Wild Horse and Burro Corrals, located in Sparks, Nev., where they will be prepared for the BLM's adoption and sales programs or long-term holding facilities located in Midwestern pastures.

Q. What happens to horses that are not adopted?

A. Un-adopted horses are fed and cared for in either short-term corrals or long-term Midwestern pastures. Wild horses over 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 animals 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. 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. Where may I learn more about the Wild Horse and Burro Program?

A. Please visit the BLM's website at <https://www.blm.gov/whb>