Veterinary Evaluation Report

Prepared by: Dr. Albert Kane
USDA APHIS Veterinary Services
Ft Collins, CO

Report Date: 10/7/21

Location/Event: Canon City Facility

Exam Date: 10/6/21

Animal ID: current population of horses at Canon City

History/Background: In response to concerns about the condition of horses at the Canon City facility, Steve Leonard (BLM Facility Manager and WH&B State Lead for CO) requested a review of the horses and housing conditions at the facility. During my visit I discussed the concerns that had been raised with Steve, Brian Hardin (CCI Agriculture Division/WHB Supervisor), Jason Kravig (CCI Operations Manager) as well as one of the attending veterinarians who was on site providing services at the facility. I also discussed by telephone the condition of the animals and my visit with another of the facility's attending veterinarians. The Henneke 1-9 body condition scoring system (attached) was used to evaluate body condition.

The goals of this visit were as follows:

1) to observe and review the condition of the majority of the horses at the facility,
2) examine and consult with BLM on any animals found to have a Henneke body condition score (BCS) of less than 3,
3) examine and consult with BLM on any animals identified by on-site staff as a concern due to body condition or other health concerns,
4) summarize and quantify my observations in a timely report back to CO and HQ BLM management.

Examination/Results: On arrival at the facility we reviewed the specifications for the alfalfa hay being fed (RFV 140-150, crude protein 19%) as well as pen sheets showing the number of animals in each pen and how much hay was being fed to each pen (average of 26lbs/head). It was noted that some pens with smaller (yearling) horses were being fed closer to 20lbs per head per day and other pens with wet mares and older (yearling) colts were being fed as much as 30-50lbs per pair per day.

Steve Leonard accompanied me during my walk through, and Brian Hardin was also present during part of our walk through the pens. Weather was clear and warm, dry, little wind with temperatures in the high 70s/low80s. I was given complete access to the facility, free to enter any pens and talk with any staff present. Various management activities were observed during my visit including feeding, cleaning pens and alleys, cleaning water tanks, spraying water to mitigate dust in the alley ways, veterinary care, sorting and preparing animals for shipment. The hay fed was examined and found to be good quality, green, weed free alfalfa. The amounts that were sun bleached were small, mostly attributable to bale surfaces and no spoiled or poor quality hay was observed. They hay was being fed as scattered on the ground throughout the pens. The distribution

was more than adequate for all animals to eat simultaneously plus additional space allowing them to change position during feeding. Fighting among the animals was not observed at any time including during feeding.

We walked through 39 pens and assessed body condition at a pen level for 1993 of the adult horses in residence. The horses in residence include those from the Red Desert gather in WY completed last year and horses from the recent West Douglas and Sand Wash Basin gathers. The classes of horses included nursing (wet) mares), dry mares, stallions, geldings, yearlings and a small number of burros (in good condition housed near the main road and not otherwise included in this report). Two pens of animals being sorted for shipment were observed but not counted or scored in detail. Nursing foals were considered along with their dams but not included in the 1993 count of those observed.

Overall the vast majority of the horses were in good condition (Henneke BCS of 4 or greater) with most having a BCS of 4 or 5, no obese (BCS 7-9) horses were observed. *Forty-nine of the 1993 horses observed (2.5%) were found to have a Henneke BCS of 3 (thin). This included 2 of 378 (0.5% of) dry mares, 9 of 411 (2% of) geldings, 37 of 1087 (3.4% of) wet mares, 0 of 67 (0% of) yearlings .*

At the start of my visit 13 animals were specifically brought to my attention due to poor body condition. Eleven of these (West Douglas horses BCS=2.5-2.75) had already been sorted into a separate pen for supplemental feeding. One Red Desert horse (BCS=3) was in a sick pen awaiting evaluation by the attending veterinarian and one Sand Wash Basin horse (BCS=2.75) had been identified for sorting into a sick pen for evaluation by the attending veterinarian and for supplemental feeding.

Other observations made during my visit included the following:

1) Many wet mares from the Red Desert and Sand Wash Basin groups still had older colts (over 6 months of age) at their sides,
2) Some mares in the Red Desert group had short tails, most likely from them being chewed by colts or other adult horses,
3) Neck tags on Red Desert yearlings were beginning to get snug and would soon need adjustment,
4) Hoof condition overall was good – hooves on Red Desert yearlings were soon to need their first trimming during this critical age for optimal hoof and lower leg development. The adults of the large Red Desert group would soon need to be trimmed over a short period of time having all arrived at roughly the same time. Similarly, the West Douglas/Sand Wash Basin groups while not needing to be trimmed for at least a few months would likely need to be trimmed over a relatively short time interval having arrived over a short period of time.
5) None of the pens including those pens containing animals sorted off for supplemental feeding had much if any residual hay left from the previous day's feeding.
6) The two attending veterinarians I spoke to no had no concerns regarding the condition of the horses at Canon City. One felt that most people were accustomed to looking at overly fat horses and that most people erroneously regarded a

BCS=4 horse, like a racehorse, as too thin when in fact it may simply be a very fit horse or a horse that was not an easy keeper. He did express concerns that BLM staff responsible for the day-to-day management of WHB may be reluctant to euthanize animals unless they are acutely suffering because of pressure from management not to euthanize animals even if they have a poor prognosis for recovery as outlined in BLM policy.

Discussion: The goal for BLM management in facilities is to maintain horses in good body condition (BCS of 4 or greater). BCS=3 horses should be specifically managed to improve their condition prior to shipping from any facility and those that have a poor prognosis for achieving and maintaining a body condition of at least 3 should be euthanized as an act of mercy as described in BLM policy (PIM2021-007). Guidance for facilities is to feed about 2.0-2.5% of body weight (20-25lbs for a 1000lb horse) or as much good quality feed as necessary to maintain all animals in good body condition (BCS at least 4).

Unlimited, free-choice feeding of all horses in a large group tends to overfeed the majority of animals with many becoming overly fat. Free choice feeding of large groups across the board is therefore not healthy for the majority of animals, wastes feed and is not an efficient way to feed horses. In large groups of horses being limit fed (ie. feeding by a calculated pounds of feed per head per day) the majority of the animals should be in good condition (BCS=4-6), some who are more aggressive eaters and easy keepers will become too fat (BCS=7-9) and some who are timid eaters, have dental problems or for various metabolic reasons are hard keepers will become too thin (BCS<4). Older horses (20+ YO), those with dental changes (shedding incisors or caps) or abnormalities and mares nursing foals tend to have a harder time maintaining their body condition. A good rule of thumb is that if 10% or more of animals in a large group are too thin there is likely a feed, feeding or herd level health problem that needs to be addressed. If 5% of the horses are too thin the situation should be investigated to ascertain the reason. One should expect 1-3% of animals to be thin (BCS=3) in any large group of horses that are limit fed. No animals should be maintained long term with a BCS<3. Optimizing body condition across the board should include some measures to adjust feed type, the energy content of the feed provided as well as the amount fed to the class (growing horse, dry mare, wet mare, gelding/stallion) and body condition of the horses, feeding as much quality feed as necessary to maintain at least a BCS=4.

Conclusion(s)/Recommendation(s):

The vast majority of the animals observed at the Canon City facility were in good condition. The quality of the alfalfa hay being fed was very good and the manner in which the horses were fed was appropriate for the conditions present. Only a few horses (50/1993 or 2.5%) were thin (BCS-3), a very few horses (12/1993 or 0.6%) were very thin (BCS=2-3) and none of the horses were emaciated (BCS≤2). The very thin horses had previously been sorted or were already identified for sorting into separate pens for extra feed. Overall conditions at the facility were good with clean pens, feet in acceptable

condition and animals with existing physical or medical problems identified and sorted into sick pens for veterinary examination and treatment as appropriate.

To further address the thin horses currently at the facility as well as the large number of recently captured horses the following recommendations are made:

1) Continue to sort horses by body condition with those that have a body condition score of less than BCS=4 identified and sorted into separate pens for additional feeding. Particular attention should be paid to nursing mares and new arrivals as they adjust to captivity and go through the process of preparation, castration etc. Those that improve to a BCS≥4 can be considered for return to the general population, but some animals may need to be fed extra or free choice amounts of good quality alfalfa hay indefinitely to maintain a BCS of at least 4.

2) Additional feeding for thin animals should include free-choice, good quality alfalfa available 24/7 such that there are always small amounts of hay left at the time of the next feeding.

3) The prognosis for animals that do not respond to additional feeding over a period of 30-60 days such that they can achieve and maintain at least a BCS=3 should be evaluated with the advice of a veterinarian and those with a poor prognosis for recovery and that cannot maintain at least a BCS=3 should be euthanized in accordance with BLM policy (PIM2021-007).

4) Consider weaning colts from thin mares at 4-5 months of age and consider weaning all colts by 6-9 months of age. Weaning at 6 months of age likely optimizes mare condition as well as feeding efficiency for mares and colts.

ALBERT KANE Digitally signed by ALBERT KANE
Date: 2021.10.08 10:56:17 -06'00'