

Questions and Answers for the Silver King Herd Management Area Wild Horse Gather

Q. Why is this gather necessary?

A. The helicopter gather is necessary to 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 strives to be a good neighbor in the communities we serve, ensuring public safety within and outside of the Silver King HMA is not at risk due to the overpopulation of wild horses and providing opportunities for other wildlife, such as pronghorn antelope and Elk, to have a thriving ecosystem.

The Silver King Herd Management Area (HMA) is over-populated and wild horses are foraging outside the HMA boundaries for food and water. Regular monitoring has occurred in the complex to observe wild horse body condition. Most animals observed have a Body Condition Score (BCS) of 2-4, based on the Henneke Body Condition Chart.

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

A. The BLM will gather and remove 980 wild horses from in and around the Silver King HMA, located in Lincoln County, about 16 miles north of Caliente, Nevada.

Q. What will the remaining herd population of this complex Area be?

A. A total of 244 wild horses will remain in the Silver King HMA.

Q. Is there livestock grazing in this area?

A. Yes, the Silver King HMA includes portions of eight (8) livestock grazing allotments, both cattle and sheep. Livestock grazing permittees have voluntarily reduced their use based on drought, limited forage, and wild horse numbers in excess of Appropriate Management Level (AML) and horse impacts to existing limited water sources. Livestock use complies with the grazing system outlined in the final multiple use decisions, agreements and term permit conditions that provide for periodic rest and deferment of key range sites.

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

A. No. The BLM carries out removal of wild horses and burros from public rangelands to ensure rangeland health and in accordance with land-use plans developed in an open, public process. These land-use plans are the means by which the 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-administered lands 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. Does the wild horse overpopulation impact wildlife and plants?

A. Common wildlife species within the Silver King HMA include coyote, black-tail jackrabbit, desert cottontail, bobcat, 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 wildlife and wild horses.

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). Upland habitats would continue to see locally heavy levels of utilization associated with wild horse use, which areas of heavy use would continue to expand as wild horse populations continue to grow. Continued heavy grazing would occur on spring meadow systems and creeks adversely effecting sage-grouse habitat.

Q. Why is the BLM removing horses when there are already over 50,000 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.

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. How much will this gather cost?

A. The BLM will calculate costs at the end of the gather.

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. Where do the removed horses go?

A. Excess wild horses, removed from the range, will be shipped to the Indian Lakes Off-Range Wild Horse and Burro Corrals in Fallon, Nevada, where they will be prepared for the BLM's adoption program or long-term holding 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. 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 designated public observers at the trap site?

A. Yes. A PAO will meet the public each morning at a specified location to escort them to the gather sites. Limitations will only be imposed to ensure safety and accomplishment of the mission. A “Know Before You Go” handout will also be posted on the BLM website so observers are adequately prepared for the conditions on the gather sites.

All visitors will be encouraged to sign-up for gather operations by calling the gather hotline number and leaving a message at 775-861-6700 (Wild Horse Gather Information Line).

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

A. That will be determined by the COR and the contractor but varies depending on health of the animals, terrain and weather.

Q. What Contractor will be used for this Gather?

A. Sun J Livestock, Inc., of Vernal, Utah.

Q. Why does the BLM use helicopters to gather horses?

A. Helicopter-driven gathers have proven to be more humane, effective, and efficient 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. Does the BLM use whips to move the horses through the pens and chute?

A. The BLM uses 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. How many of the mares gathered during this roundup will the BLM treat with the fertility-control vaccine PZP?

A. None.

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.