



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Wild Horse and Burro Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program

Fact Sheet

What is the BLM's Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program?

The Bureau of Land Management is committed to the health, welfare and safety of all wild horses and burros under the agency's management and care. The Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program formalizes that commitment by establishing standard operating procedures and handling practices for wild horses and burros. The BLM re-affirmed the program in [Permanent Instruction Memorandum 2021-002](#).



What is "animal welfare"?

Animal welfare is the physical and psychological well-being of animals and how they cope with their environments. Animal welfare science considers three aspects of the animal's physical and psychological state: body, mind and behavior. The "body" is about an animal's health, function, nutrition, growth, and freedom from injury and disease. The "mind" includes an animal's emotional state, pleasures, suffering and fear. "Behavior" refers to an animal's innate and learned characteristics inherent to a horse or burro.

How does the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program protect animal welfare?

The program was developed to ensure wild horses and burros are consistently treated with care and compassion. All BLM, volunteer, partner and contractor staff are required to adhere to program standards when performing official duties. This includes operations on the range, during gathers, at off-range corrals, pastures and adoption events, when transporting animals and after animals are placed into private care by adoption. The program also establishes requirements for frequent training by BLM, volunteer, partners and contractor staff and it implements assessments of BLM and contractor operations to monitor compliance.

What standards and handling practices are in place?

The BLM currently has handling practices and standards in place for gather operations, transportation, off-range corrals, and adoption and sale events. Program standards for off-range pastures, following placement into private care by adoption and during on-the-range operations (excluding gathers) are under development.

How are the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program standards developed?

The BLM developed the standards in collaboration with veterinarians and animal welfare experts from the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of California, Davis and based on extensive experience and knowledge of handling wild horses and burros. This knowledge and experience is important considering that wild horses and burros have little to no experience or history with human contact.

Does the BLM monitor and report compliance with the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program?

Compliance with the program is monitored by assessments conducted by a BLM team and through self-assessments conducted by the BLM staff responsible for the activity. For example, during gathers an on-site team, which would include team members from other BLM offices, may conduct an assessment of the gather to determine compliance in addition to a self-assessment completed by the on-site team. In the coming years, expert independent third-party assessments will also be used to conduct welfare assessments. Assessment reports are provided to BLM personnel and made available at [BLM.gov/WHB/AnimalWelfare](https://www.blm.gov/WHB/AnimalWelfare).

What are some examples of standards in place to safeguard animal welfare during gathers?

One of the BLM's top priorities during gather operations is to ensure safe and humane treatment. A few examples of the many standards in place include not pursuing animals to a point of exhaustion and covering all gates and panels at the holding pen with at least 48 inches of material such as snow fence to create a visual barrier for the animals.

What happens when there is non-compliance with the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program?

Any actions taken during BLM operations that do not comply with the program must be documented in any self-assessments completed by the BLM staff responsible for the operation. Non-compliant actions observed during internal assessments are documented in the Assessment Report, which includes an overall rating of compliance. Ratings of less than 70% compliance require an additional assessment of the operation, when possible. Non-compliance at any time may result in corrective actions by BLM management and/or contracting officers, as appropriate to the situation.

Depending on the operation and the nature of the non-compliance issue, corrective actions may include: stopping operations until the non-compliance issue(s) is/are resolved, providing additional training and education, or developing a plan to bring operations into compliance. Egregious or willful acts of abuse will result in a non-compliance rating in the Assessment Report and will result in immediate corrective action.

When will independent third-party assessments take place?

The BLM began conducting self assessments and internal assessments at gathers in 2021 and will continue to conduct assessments of operations for which standards have been developed as part of its efforts to refine and enhance its assessment tools. The BLM plans to begin third-party assessments in 2023.

What can the public do if they witness a non-conformance with the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program?

Any member of the public who observes or has factual information that a federally protected (untitled) wild horse or wild burro has been treated inhumanely, including potential non-conformance with the program, is asked to contact the BLM at wildhorse@blm.gov or 866-468-7826 with your name, contact information, and specific information about what was observed.

Where can I find more information about the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program?

More information about the program can be found at [BLM.gov/WHB/AnimalWelfare](https://www.blm.gov/WHB/AnimalWelfare).