

FY2023 Reveille HMA Wild Horse Gather Questions and Answers (for the Public and Media)

Q. What is the official name for this gather?

A. 2023 Reveille Wild Horse Gather

Q. Why is this gather necessary?

A. Through analysis of monitoring and trend data, inventories, climate and other relevant factors, it has been determined that excess horses occur in the Reveille HMA. The population is currently 1.2 times the established AML of 138 wild horses, with a large portion of the population located outside of the established HMA boundary. Additionally, the Tonopah Field Office is bound to a 1987 Stipulated Settlement and 2001 and 2002 IBLA Orders that require the wild horse population be maintained within AML.

The helicopter gather is necessary in order 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 primary issue in this HMA is arid rangeland that is not highly productive, with existing downward trends in the perennial vegetation. The Reveille HMA is very arid, only receiving 3-5 inches of precipitation in the lower elevations. The most recent frequency trend studies completed in the HMA indicate status and downward trends, particularly in the presence of key perennial grass species.

This gather is in line with the ten-year plan approved in the Decision for the Reveille HMA Gather Plan Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-NV-B020-2020-0006-EA) signed January, 17, 2020, which provided for future gathers to work to achieve and maintain the established AML in this HMA. Reducing the excess wild horses in the Reveille HMA will protect the health of the horses and the habitat in the HMA while providing opportunities for other wildlife, to have a thriving ecosystem.

Q. What are the details of the Court Order?

A. The HMA has an AML of 138 horses, as decided by a 2001 Final Multiple Use Decision (FMUD) and a 2001 Amended Wild Horse Decision and enforced by IBLA Orders from 2001 and 2002. On October 1, 1987, a Stipulated Settlement to dismiss appeals pending before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, and to resolve civil litigation, was entered into by the Fallini family, the State of Nevada, and BLM (CV-R-85-535-BRT). The settlement stated that the area (Reveille HMA) will be managed for a population of between 145 and 165 wild horses. It also provides that if/when range monitoring finds substantial improvement or substantial deterioration, the BLM may amend this provision governing the population of wild horses, and that BLM retains discretion to make adjustments in the multiple use balance within the HMA. Under the Stipulated Settlement, if the wild horse population exceeded 165 horses within the Reveille Allotment, BLM was required to remove excess horses within 120 days, and removal of excess horses had to first occur within the non-HMA areas of the Reveille Allotment.

On June 13, 2001, the Final Multiple Use Decision (FMUD) for the Reveille Allotment adjusted the AML to 138 wild horses for the Reveille HMA after BLM analyzed available monitoring data through the Reveille Allotment Evaluation completed in 1999. The evaluation included assessment of utilization of livestock and wild horses, precipitation data, use pattern mapping, ecological site data descriptions, wildlife habitat condition data, lotic (stream) and lentic (springs) riparian functionality assessments, and carrying capacity analysis to allocate use to livestock and wild horses. *“It has been determined that a thriving natural ecological balance can*

be obtained through an AML of 138 wild horses (maximum), or 1,661 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) for the Reveille Herd Management Area. When the census shows that wild horses exceed the AML of 138 animals, a gather will be initiated within 120 days to reduce wild horses to a level which may allow up to three years of population increases before again reaching the AML” (FMUD, 2001).

The AML was established consistent with the Allotment Specific Objectives for the Reveille HMA, which is to “manage wild horse and/or burro populations within the Reveille Herd Management Areas at levels which will preserve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance consistent with other multiple use objectives”. The BLM currently establishes AML as a range; however, the Reveille AML was established as a single number with provisions to allow for removal to a lower number in order to provide for up to three years of population growth without exceeding the AML between gathers, consistent with BLM’s management of wild horses within an AML range. The interested public was involved in the decision-making process leading to the FMUD.

The wild horse decision identified in the FMUD was appealed by Fallini and Fallini Living Trust in August 2001, which resulted in the original decision being remanded to the BLM by the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA) in order to update and re-issue the decision to include provisions of the 1987 Stipulated Settlement (IBLA 2001-327). The Amended Wild Horse Management Decision that was issued on October 5, 2001, identified that BLM would conduct an annual census (survey) of the horses in the Reveille Allotment, and stated that when the inventory shows that horses exceed the AML of 138 animals that a gather would be initiated within 120 days to reduce the wild horses to a level that allows up to three years of population growth before again reaching the AML.

A second appeal was filed by Fallini and Fallini Living Trust following the issuance of the amended decision (IBLA 2002-60). This appeal pertained to the notice of the census (inventory) results being provided to the appellants within 30 days, and the duty of the BLM to remove wild horses from outside of the HMA boundaries first when conducting gathers. In this case, IBLA clarified the decision and noted that “*the BLM is bound by the provisions of the court order [Stipulated Settlement] with respect to the management of the wild horses within the allotment*”. As such, nothing in this EA should be construed in a manner that would be inconsistent with the 1987 Stipulated Settlement, the Amended Wild Horse Management Decision or the orders issued by IBLA.

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

A. The BLM will gather approximately 129 wild horses and remove up to 76 excess wild horses within and outside of the boundaries of the Reveille HMA. The BLM expects the helicopter gather to take approximately 5-6 days.

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

A. The post gather goal is to have a population of 80-100 horses which would allow up to three years before AML is exceeded given a 15-20% annual rate of increase.

Q. How many horses will be released back to the range during this gather operation?

A. This gather is classified as a selective removal with the intention of releasing approximately 53 horses. The actual number of horses released will be dependent on the actual gather numbers. Mares released will be treated with fertility control. (GonaCon Equine).

Q. When was the last time that AML was achieved in this HMA?

A. The last wild horse gather of the Reveille HMA occurred February 6 through February 12, 2020, where AML was achieved.

Q. How many of the mares gathered during this roundup will the BLM treat with the fertility-control vaccine?

A. The goal is to release approximately 53 horses back to the range, of which 27 should be comprised of mares. All released mares would be treated with GonaCon Equine fertility control vaccine.

Q. Will BLM re-treat horses originally treated with fertility control in 2020?

A. It is possible that some of those chosen for release could be mares that were originally treated in previous gathers. During the 2020 gather, 22 mares were treated with PZP-22 and subsequently released back to the range, with 21 of them having been treated during the 2014, 2017, 2020 Reveille or 2016 Stone Cabin gathers.

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 to prevent worst-case scenarios.

BLM may take preventative action and is not required to wait until the range is damaged before removing wild horses. Proper range management dictates herd reduction before it causes damage to the range land (IBLA 677, 1996). In the case of the Reveille HMA, available range monitoring data does not indicate that the AML should be adjusted or increased and that excess horses need to be removed to ensure reversal of downward trends in order to provide for a Thriving Natural Ecological Balance in the HMA. Additionally, a substantial number of horses are residing outside of the HMA further indicating that an excess population exists. The BLM is also bound by the 1987 Settlement and 2001/2002 IBLA Orders which require achievement of a population consistent with the AML, and removals when the population exceeds the AML.

It is obviously more humane for the horses to be gathered before animal health decline begins. The gather and removal of healthy wild horses is the best for the horses, the range and for subsequent adopters of the horses.

Q. Has or will any research been done to study the Reveille horses genetics?

A. Genetic sampling analysis was completed for the Reveille HMA after the 2010, 2014, and 2017 gathers (Cothran 2010, 2015, 2017). Hair samples would be acquired approximately every 10 years, to determine whether BLMs management is maintaining acceptable genetic diversity (avoid inbreeding depression). Most herds sampled to date demonstrated high heterozygosity and allelic diversity from herds of mixed origins. The results of Reveille herd sampling since 2010 indicate a higher number of variants than the average for feral herds and a similarity with the light racing and riding breeds, followed closely by the Oriental and Arabian breeds. The reports from these analyses concluded that the herd has been fairly stable, genetically and of a mixed ancestry.

After the 2017 gather, 68 samples were analyzed for ancestral data. Once compiled, the data showed that the highest breed similarities were Hackney Horse, Quarter Horse, Shetland Pony and Garanno. The Shetland Pony is likely indicative of draft breeds. Refer to the chart at the end of this document. An HMA ancestral comparison was also completed comparing the Reveille HMA samples to the North and South Stone Cabin and Saulsbury HMAs and Nevada Wild Horse Range as well as to itself. The highest results (besides the Reveille HMA) were for

the Nevada Wild Horse Range, followed by South Stone Cabin which indicates a common ancestry and likely continuous wild horse movement between these areas.

Q. What are the horses from the Reveille HMA like? What should I expect if I adopt one?

A. The Reveille HMA wild horses are average in size, with adults weighing approximately 800-900 pounds, and reaching 14 to 15 hands in height (though they have been known to exceed 16 hands). Henneke body condition averages class 4-5 (moderately thin to moderate). Colors primarily consist of bay, sorrel, and roan, with occasional occurrences of black and pinto.

Feedback to the BLM about adopted Reveille horses has been positive. Adopters often post stories on the social media site Facebook in various privately-run wild horse Facebook groups, including one specifically called Reveille Mustangs. Some adopters report that their Reveille horses are gaited.

Q. Is there livestock grazing in this area?

A. Yes. The Reveille Grazing Allotment surrounds the HMA and there is one livestock operator currently authorized to graze livestock in this allotment annually. The operator is authorized to use 25,730 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) of forage each year in the Reveille Allotment. An AUM is the amount of forage needed to sustain one cow, five sheep, or five goats for a month. The allotment consists of 31 Base Water Service Areas (BWSAs)/grazing management use areas grazed on a rotating basis guided by water developments turned on and off seasonally. In general, waters are turned on and off and cattle are moved between BWSAs approximately in mid-March, mid-April, July 1, mid-July, mid-September, and October 1. Seven BWSAs overlap the HMA.

The Reveille HMA is just 16% of the size of the Reveille Allotment. Carrying capacity calculations completed in the Final Reveille Allotment Evaluation determined that 2,210 AUMs would be allocated inside the Reveille HMA for use by 184 head of livestock (which represents less than 10% of the total permitted grazing in the Reveille Allotment).

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 and animal 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. Yes. The Reveille HMA provides habitat for many species of wildlife, including large mammals like mule deer, pronghorn antelope, and big horn sheep. Elk are known to occur in the area. The Reveille HMA additionally provides habitat for small mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and insects common to the Great Basin. Golden eagle and other raptor species are known to nest and forage within the allotment. Railroad Valley and Hot Creek Valley Tui chub occur within the Cane and Twin Spring complexes. Several special status passerine species are known to nest and forage within the action area. Five special status plant species have been observed within or near the Reveille allotment boundary.

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 the long-term production of desired plant communities is and will continue to be compromised. If wild horse populations are not controlled in this area, forage utilization will exceed the capacity of the range. A gather is necessary to remove the excess wild horses and maintain the AML in order to reverse downward trends and ensure a thriving natural ecological balance on the range.

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

A. No federally listed threatened or endangered species inhabit the Reveille HMA. Maintaining the existing wild horse over-population, which would increase with each year's foals, (approximately 15-25% annually in the Reveille HMA) would result in continued and increasing impacts to sensitive species and their habitats. Upland habitats would continue to see locally heavy levels of utilization associated with wild horse use, in 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 springs adversely effecting habitat important a host of wildlife species.

Q. Why is the BLM removing horses when, as of May 2023, there is already over 60,500 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 Reveille HMA, excess horses exist outside the HMA 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.

Q. How much will this gather cost?

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

Q. Where do the removed horses go?

A. Excess wild horses, removed from the 2023 Reveille HMA gather, will be shipped to the Ridgecrest Off-Range Wild Horse and Burro Corrals, located in Ridgecrest, CA., where they will be prepared for the BLM's adoption and sales programs, or long-term holding facilities located in Midwestern pastures.

Q. What veterinary treatment will the removed horses receive?

A. Once the horses arrive at the Ridgecrest Off-Range Corrals, 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. Will there be any designated public observers at the trap site?

A. Yes. Once gather operations have begun, those wanting to view gather operations must call the Reveille gather hotline nightly at (775) 861-6700 to receive specific instructions on each days' meeting location and time.

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.

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

A. That will be determined by the Lead COR and the contractor but varies depending on health of the animals, terrain and weather. It is anticipated that most groups will be gathered from under 10 miles away from trap sites. The COR and on-site APHIS Veterinarian will observe and monitor the horses as they are gathered and make appropriate determinations on travel distances and speeds.

Q. What Contractor will be used for this Gather?

A. Cattoor Livestock Roundup Inc. of Nephi, 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. 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 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. Where may I learn more about the Wild Horse and Burro Program?

A. Visit the BLM’s Website at www.blm.gov/whb.

Reveille Genetics Analysis: The genetics analysis chart was created by compiling all of the ancestral data sheets for 68 wild horses gathered and subsequently re-released back to the Reveille Herd Management Area in February 2017. This data was compiled following advice from Gus Cothran of Texas A&M. The Ancestral Genetics reports provided by Gus Cothran reflected a 1st, 2nd and 3rd similarity for each horse. Dr. Cothran advised assigning 3 points to #1, 2 points to #2 and one point to #3. Next, the columns for each breed were summed, and then divided by 68 to provide an average index for each breed which was then multiplied by 10 to provide a usable index.

Reveille HMA Ancestral DNA Chart

