



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

Questions and Answers

BLM Northern California District Wild Horse and Burro Program
Sept. 13, 2023

Surprise Complex Wild Horse and Burro Gather

Q: What is the Surprise Complex Wild Horse Gather?

A: The Bureau of Land Management Applegate Field Office plans to remove excess wild horses from three herd management areas (High Rock, Wall Canyon and Fox Hog) called the Surprise Complex. This is part of a plan that was implemented for a 10-year timeframe to bring the wild horse population to within the established appropriate management level, or AML.

Q: Where are these herd management areas?

A: These HMAs are on BLM-managed public lands in Washoe and Humboldt counties, Nevada. They are within the jurisdictional boundaries of the Applegate Field Office based in Alturas, California. They are east of Cedarville, Calif.

Q: Why do these horses need to be removed?

A: Populations in the herd management areas have exceeded the levels affirmed in the BLM Surprise Resource Area Management Plan (2008), which is our land use plan for the region. This overpopulation of wild horses is causing damage to rangeland resources such as springs and riparian areas and cultural resources such as sites containing evidence of early human occupation.

Q: How many horses will you remove from the range?

A: Our gather plan calls for capturing 494 wild horses and removing 404 of those from the range. Up to 90 horses will be returned to their herd management areas to maintain viable, healthy populations. Mares returned to the range will be treated with fertility control drugs to slow on-range population growth.

Q: What authority does the BLM have to remove these wild horses?

A: The Wild Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 requires the BLM to manage, protect and control wild horse and burro populations on public lands where they existed when the law was passed. The BLM must assure that wild horses and burros exist in a “thriving natural ecological balance” with other authorized rangeland users and available resources including forage and water. When populations exceed levels that allow for a thriving natural ecological balance the BLM is required to remove the excess animals.

Q: What is the appropriate management level and what is the current population?

A: The AML for the three HMAs in this complex is an aggregate of 213 to 371 animals. Based on census flights from 2022 and population modeling, we believe the current aggregate population is about 617 wild horses.

Q: Will you continue to maintain appropriate management levels in each of the HMAs?

A: Yes. Here is a summary of current populations and AMLs:

- Wall Canyon: Estimated population, 66; AML, 15-25
- High Rock: Estimated population, 270; AML, 78-120
- Fox Hog: Estimated population, 281; AML, 120-226

Q: Has the public been involved in this plan?

A: Yes. We received and analyzed about 3,000 comments on an environmental assessment that analyzed population management approaches for the Complex for 10 years beginning in 2021. These actions included helicopter drive trapping, bait and water trapping and fertility control. Additionally, the public participated in development of the above referenced resource management plan (2008) that affirmed population levels.

Q: How will you gather these horses?

A: We will hire a contractor who will use a helicopter drive trapping method to move bands of horses across the landscape and into a capture corral.

Q: How can we make arrangements to observe?

A: We will set up a daily information phone line and share the number via media, the web and social media. You will be able to reserve space for the observation areas that will be set up each day. We will follow any Covid prevention protocols in place at the time.

Q: What happens to horses taken from the range?

A: Horses under age 5 will be prepared for placement in private ownership through our adoption and sales programs. Older horses will be placed in our long-term pasture system.

Q: If we see a wild horse we would like to adopt while we are observing the gather, can we reserve it?

A: Sorry, but you cannot reserve a wild horse on the range. We will need to prepare it for the adoption/sales program, a process that involves medical care and vaccinations. Horses generally can be available for adoption about six weeks after they arrive at one of our preparation centers.

Q: Where can I see Surprise Complex horses available for adoption?

A: Initially, horses will be taken to our Litchfield Corrals near Susanville, Calif. Please contact the corrals at 530-254-6575 for current hours and adoption appointment information.