

**National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board Meeting
June 2023 Recommendations**

Advisory Board Recommendation 1:

Removals coupled with meaningful, impactful fertility control will improve the health and welfare of free-roaming horses and burros as well as rangeland health, and will foster diverse, bipartisan, broad support. This will help reflect the need for robust, long term funding from Congress. Since “fertility control” is the common interest of so many interested publics, the Board recommends that BLM and the USFS develop operational plans outlining how robust, meaningful, programmatic fertility control will be incorporated into HMA and Territory management plans. The Board recognizes that specific HMA/Territory fertility control plans have not been developed, and that each HMA/Territory will require a different approach. This effort can also serve as demonstration sites, which can also validate PopEquus.

BLM Response: The BLM has policy which guides population growth suppression efforts which includes fertility control planning and implementation. The IM number 2022-044 describes BLM's approach to gather scheduling and fertility control activities in BLM herd management areas (HMAs). The BLM has NEPA and decisions in place for many HMA's and Complexes which authorize gather, removal, and fertility control implementation. However, the ability to gather excess wild horses to reach appropriate management levels (AML) is the critical piece to this process. Fertility control is most effective in HMAs at or near AML.

USFS Response: The USFS updated Territory Plans and associated NEPA will include the use of fertility control as a management option. We are developing an Agency-wide Strategic Plan to help each Territory incorporate fertility control measures in management plans. We are encouraging staff subdivide large Territories into smaller areas that can be more suited to on-range fertility control applications.

Advisory Board Recommendation 2:

Due to protracted drought and other climate related issues in the West, the board recommends that the BLM and USFS begin determining the process of analysis that will enable locally relevant, short- and long-term range health considerations to guide decisions towards determining AML.

BLM Response: The BLM has determined AML for all HMA's, in some cases the AML has been determined based upon agreements with affected private landowners, forage allocations based upon average forage growth years, habitat use and space or available water resources. Re-evaluation of AML in light of recent drought cycles would likely decrease AML in many HMA's adding to the number of excess wild horses needing to be removed from the range. This may be helpful in areas where the population is currently at or near AML, however it will not make an appreciable difference while there is inadequate funding and space to care for additional excess animals, especially in areas

which are exponentially over current AML. BLM WHB Program currently holds monthly drought and resource condition meetings with all the states to discuss current conditions of the HMAs within their states.

USFS Response: Current range conditions for the USFS are evaluated by range staff with input from other program areas and cooperating agencies. At this time, essentially none of the Territories are within even the upper limits set for AML. Once we have a population trend line approaching AML, we will review each Territory's AML. If conditions have changed, we would then start the process to evaluate AMLs.

Advisory Board Recommendation 3:

The BLM and the USFS should further centralize their respective WH&B programs to increase the program's effectiveness and their ability to respond to emergencies. Specifically, we recommend:

Advisory Board Recommendation 3 Subpart A:

Continuing to manage long-term holding nationally to facilitate animal movements and better coordinate budgets among different states and HMAs.

BLM Response: The BLM will explore this recommendation further. The BLM WHB Program recognizes the value of continuity of leadership and direction from the Headquarters Office to the States. The BLM WHB Headquarters Office maintains organizational effectiveness by having positions located throughout the country. This allows WHB Program operations to be closer to the ground and streamlines its business practices. Further centralizing the program, including increased operational control from headquarters, could include the planning and execution of all budgets as well as performance and direction of work. It could also include improved communications internally and with the public.

The BLM WHB Program recently underwent a reorganization as part of the BLM headquarters changes. During this process, the agency maintained organizational effectiveness by relocating its Wild Horses & Burros Program operations closer to the lands we manage and day-to-day activities and streamlined some of its business practices. The program continues to work effectively with leadership in the states and WHB state leads in managing daily program operations. The latest Table of Organization is posted on the BLM website at <https://www.blm.gov/about/organization-chart/>. Additionally, the Board received a handout at the last meeting with the WHB Program roles and responsibilities.

USFS Response: The USFS agrees that long-term holding should be managed nationally. However, without dedicated Congressional funding, the USFS is unable to construct or expand corral facilities. BLM corrals are no longer able to accept FS animals. The capacity of the corral on the Modoc National Forest in California is primarily consumed by the requirements of a Settlement Agreement.

That leaves only the small corral on the Carson National Forest in New Mexico (capacity 125) for excess gathered animals.

Advisory Board Recommendation 3 Subpart B:

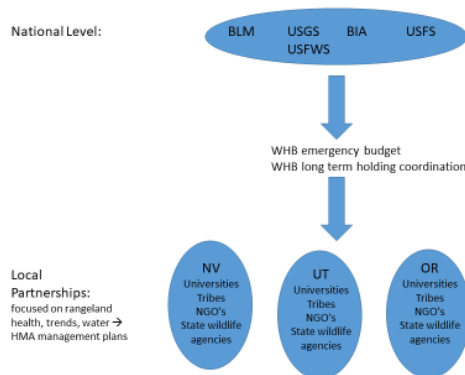
Advocating for establishment of a centrally administered, separate budget from new appropriations for emergency gathers so that states can follow through on long-term, strategic plans to gather and contracept their horse populations.

BLM Response: Please see BLM’s response to part a of this recommendation.

FS Response: The USFS is open to discussions about a separate process for emergency management of WHB and see several options; the best option would utilize no-year funds managed at the national level.

Advisory Board Recommendation 3 Subpart C:

Developing budgets across multiple years would enable BLM to create long-term strategic management plans.



BLM Response:

USFS Response: The USFS is developing a Strategic Plan to include gathers, contraception use, and other aspects of management.

Advisory Board Recommendation 4:

The Board recommends that the BLM and the USFS explore creative ways to garner additional funding sources and capacities (as allowed by law or statute) outside of the appropriations process that will enable effective management of horse and burro populations (e.g., Colorado’s Senate Bill 23-275).

Specifically: Proactively facilitating development of partnerships that would augment efforts to professionally collect local data on rangeland health trends, which can be incorporated into agency plans.

BLM Response: BLM recently received the ability to acquire funds via donations from the public and is currently working on the most appropriate path forward to ensure such funds are spent in the manner intended with transparency. It is possible that the BLM could utilize cost recovery accounts funded by stakeholders to implement gather, removal, holding and fertility control implementation. The BLM could develop policy/guidance as to when these would be appropriate and how to prioritize such actions or develop a pilot project describing the desired outcomes and request project proposals which would be ranked and selected or not for a formal trial to assist in developing formal policy addressing these options.

Over the past decade BLM has invested a great amount of time, expertise, and funds into the collection of data, specifically assessment, inventory and monitoring (AIM) data to assess rangeland health conditions and trends. Additionally, the BLM has for many years utilized cooperative monitoring agreements and sponsored training sessions for interested stakeholders and public to facilitate data collection and communication with interested parties.

Lastly, the BLM is beginning conversations with the new CEO of the Foundation for America's Public Lands, our official charitable partner, on how we might work together on this program. The Foundation intends to support marketing for adoptions as well as amplify data and research to support the sustainable coexistence of these animals with local communities while maintaining the health and integrity of our public lands and waters. For more information about the Foundation for America's Public Lands please see the following website: [Wild Horses and Burros - America's Public Lands \(americaslands.org\)](http://americaslands.org)

USFS Response: There are partnerships at the USFS that help fund, in small ways, management of horses and burros in at least two regions. The USFS actively works with NRCS and USGS to provide data on the health of rangelands.

Advisory Board Recommendation 5:

The board recommends that the BLM and USFS request consultations with Tribal Governments and initiate and/or maintain discussions with other government entities responsible for management of free-roaming horse populations to ensure actions taken in HMAs and on Territories are not undermined by emigration or immigration of horses and burros from other areas.

BLM Response: The BLM consults with Tribes and coordinates with other organizations to responsibly manage wild horse and burro populations vs. other feral or stray horses on BLM managed lands. It is incumbent upon the BLM to ensure population numbers are kept up to date and reported yearly in the public land stats. Field Offices are responsible for this coordination and consultation to ensure that wild horse and burro populations are affected to the least possible extent by turnouts, strays, and feral horse populations. BLM coordinates with USFS to gather Joint Management Areas/complexes in the most effective manner, based upon each agency's priorities.

USFS Response: The FS continues to work with Tribal governments on WHB management. One tribe has agreed that the policy for removing their horses from FS lands will now be under the astray laws. We hope this change will address a long-standing immigration issue. We have also engaged with tribes to guide development of their own plans to deal with free roaming horses on their lands.

Advisory Board Recommendation 6:

The board recommends that the USFS continue to advocate for its own separate budget for management of wild, free-roaming horses and burros, given that 20% of the total free-roaming population is on USFS land.

USFS Response: Senior management will discuss this recommendation.

Advisory Board Recommendation 7:

The Board supports the commitment of the agency to the CAWP and recommends continuing internal training and increasing the level of public educational opportunities.

BLM Response: Thank you for your support in the CAWP, this program is not a full three years old until the end of December 2023; however, in those three years the wild horse and burro program lead by our CAWP coordinator has increased our own awareness of animal welfare. We are committed to continuing internal training and getting more external training for those connected with CAWP internal assessments. We have now completed enough internal assessment of wild horse and burro gathers, off-range corrals, and adoption/sale events to be able to strengthen our assessment tool for each of those activities in fiscal year 2024.

USFS Response: The FS is developing trainings for both employees and external groups. We plan on hosting the employee training in the fall of 2023.

Advisory Board Recommendation 8:

The board recommends continually refining and improving the level of care, handling and treatment provided by the WH&B Program. Specifically, we recommend CAWP bolster and expand guidelines for transportation and quarantine procedures.

BLM Response: We appreciate your recommendation to continually refine and improve the level of care, handling, and treatment that we provide, we believe that as we complete more internal assessments, we will be able to see where we might need to make those refinements or improvements. Currently with the 14 internal gather assessments, the 22 internal off-range corral assessments, and the 7 internal adoption/sale event assessments we are averaging 95%, 88%, and 91% respectively or an average of a good rating. We anticipate these rating to remain near the same or in some cases go up as our staff becomes more familiar with the comprehensive animal welfare program and standards. Additionally, based on your recommendation to bolster and expand guidelines for transportation and quarantine procedures the CAWP team has been working on how to best conduct transportation assessments. The CAWP team will be working to implement a

more robust transportation and adoption/sale event assessment in fiscal year 2024, part of that includes to have greater detail and expectations in the assessment tool for transportation and adoption/sale events. In order to expand or add additional standards specific to transportation or quarantine procedures those changes would need to be done through policy.

USFS Response: The FS is evaluating updates for the CAWP guidelines, which were developed in 2013. We are devising modifications and additional areas to establish welfare standards that are suited to the situation in the FS. The FS is utilizing the expertise of the WHB Program staff to refine guidelines for transportation and biosecurity measures.