



FY2024 White Mountain Wild Horse Complex

Questions and Answers

Why are you removing so many horses?

The White Mountain HMA's appropriate management level (AML) is 205-300 wild horses. BLM completed a population survey for the HMA in 2022 and found 549 wild horses present on the HMA at that time. Considering an estimated annual growth rate of 20%, the estimated number of wild horses within this HMA in 2024 is 791 animals. The BLM aims to gather approximately 586 wild horses to bring the HMA down to low AML.

The BLM is required by law to manage and protect wild horses and burros under the authority of the [Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971](#).

Why are horses being gathered?

The Bureau of Land Management has the responsibility to manage and protect healthy herds of wild horses and burros as well as the public lands on which they roam, as required under the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act.

Chronic wild horse overpopulation in fragile ecosystems endangers overall land health, with the possibility of permanent, irrecoverable damage to important resources and impacts to other wildlife populations. The gather is also necessary to remove animals from private lands and areas not designated for their long-term use. This decision record comes after receiving public input in February 2024.

How can you ensure genetic diversity when you're removing horses to the LOW appropriate management level?

One of the BLM's top priorities is ensuring the genetic diversity of wild horses and burros. Monitoring of wild horse genetics has shown that wild horses are genetically diverse. Just like other wildlife populations, genetic diversity among wild horses and burros is essential for their long-term health and survival. A diverse gene pool increases the resilience of wild horses and burros, making them better equipped to adapt to changing environmental conditions, resist diseases, and thrive on public lands.

To safeguard genetic diversity, BLM specialists carefully monitor herd demographics and population data to identify potential concerns before they escalate into significant issues. Hair samples are taken during gather operations and sent to researchers for careful analysis.

Why does BLM use helicopters to conduct gathers?

Helicopters start the wild horses moving in the right direction and then back off sometimes one-quarter to one-half mile from the animals to let them travel at their own pace; horses are moved at a more rapid pace when they need to be turned or as they reach the entrance to the capture site.

Helicopter pilots are better able to keep mares and foals together than horseback riders; pilots can also more effectively move the animals around such barriers as deep ravines, fences, or roads. Hughes-500 helicopters are used by our well-trained contractors.

Did the BLM hold it's annual required public hearing about the use of helicopters during gathers?

Yes, the national public hearing regarding the use of motorized vehicles (including helicopters) within the HMAs was held on May 23, 2024, and covered all HMAs for the year.

But aren't helicopter gathers inhumane?

The BLM's helicopter gathers have been proven to be more humane, effective and efficient than other types of gather methods when large numbers of animals need to be removed over large areas or rugged terrain. Injuries to wild horses and burros during gathers are rare. The vast majority (99%+) of wild horses and burros are gathered without severe incident or injury that causes death. In FY2023, out of 5,759 animals gathered, less than one third of one percent (0.31%, or 18 animals) were lost due to an injury that occurred at the gather event.

A [recent study published in the Journal of Equine Veterinary Science](#) found that BLM's wild horse and burro gathers are considered much safer than similar gather operations (usually for scientific research projects) of elk, deer and caribou.

Read the [Top 5 Things to Know about Wild Horse and Burro Gathers](#).

Why can't the BLM just issue fertility treatments?

While fertility control can help slow population growth, gathering and removing excess animals is the only way to reduce an overpopulation in the near-term. Gathers are also important instruments for treating and releasing animals with fertility control, which can help reduce herd growth rate and lower the need to remove animals from public lands.

Is GonaCon-Equine safe to use on wild horses as a fertility control vaccine?

GonaCon-Equine is a safe vaccine that is registered with the EPA and approved for use in wild horses. Capitalizing on the agency's successful research and development efforts, the BLM has been increasing its use of GonaCon-Equine to manage population growth. It's now used in over 15 HMAs throughout the west. One dose of GonaCon can cause moderate effects that may last two years, but a second dose can prevent pregnancy for 4-5 years.

What happens to the horses after they're removed from the range?

Wild horses will be moved to temp holding for no more than 48 hours. From there, all removed horses will be transported to the Wheatland Off-Range Corral or Rock Springs Wild Horse Holding Facility. Upon arrival to either facility, they will be checked by a veterinarian and readied for the agency's wild horse Adoption and Sales programs. BLM staff and contractors will use the best available science and handling practices for wild horses while meeting overall gather goals and objectives in accordance with the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program.

Why doesn't the BLM reduce livestock grazing instead of gathering wild horses?

Reducing grazing to shift forage use to wild horses would not be in conformance with the Lander Resource Management Plan and is contrary to the BLM's multiple-use mission. It was Congress' intent to manage wild horses as one of the many uses of the public lands, not the single use. Therefore, the BLM is required to manage wild horses on healthy and productive public lands, in balance with wildlife, domestic livestock, vegetation and other uses.

Additionally, livestock are managed by grazing permits. They can be confined to specific pastures and limited to specific periods/seasons of use to minimize impacts to public lands. Conversely, wild horses are present year-round, and their impacts to rangeland resources cannot be controlled through establishment of a grazing system. Thus, impacts from wild horses can only be addressed by limiting their numbers to a level that does not adversely impact rangeland resources and other multiple uses.

Returning the population of wild horses to within the herd's AML is expected to help improve rangeland conditions, providing positive impacts to the vegetation which would benefit both livestock and wild horse grazing. The analysis and decision for this 10-year plan did not make any adjustments to permitted livestock use following the gather (in other words, removed horses will not be replaced by livestock). Changes in the amount of forage allocated for livestock use are made through land use planning decisions.

How often do horses get injured or die during gathers?

Injuries to wild horses and burros during gathers are rare. The vast majority (99%+) of wild horses and burros are gathered without severe incident or injury that causes death. A recent study published in the Journal of Equine Veterinary Science found that BLM's wild horse and burro gathers are considered much safer than similar gather operations (usually for scientific research projects) of elk, deer, and caribou.

If a serious injury occurs to a wild horse or burro during gather operations, the BLM will typically make a concerted effort to gather the animal for treatment if it has not been captured. If the injury is serious, the BLM may euthanize an injured animal as an act of mercy. For example, it would be inhumane to leave a wild horse with a broken leg on the range.

How does the BLM determine if a potential adopter is on the "up and up" and the adopted animal is not destined for a slaughterhouse in Canada or Mexico?

The BLM has a robust adoption process to ensure animals go to good homes. The BLM screens potential adopters alongside a list of individuals that have been determined to be ineligible. All animals adopted from BLM are subject to inspection by BLM specialists prior to being titled. This is to ensure that the adopter is complying with all requirements of their Private Maintenance and Care Agreement (PMACA) relating to animal welfare/wellbeing. Where deficiencies are found, BLM works with the adopter to correct them. If compliance is not or cannot be attained, the adopter will either voluntarily relinquish the animal back to BLM or BLM will repossess the animal.

In the latter case, if a determination is made that an adopter violated any of the Prohibited Acts outlined in their PMACA, the agency may issue a Decision Letter that would render them ineligible to participate in the adoption program in the future. Certain violations – such as selling/transferring

animals prior to receiving title – may also be referred to BLM Law Enforcement for investigation and, from there, potentially to the appropriate U.S. Attorney who may exercise discretion whether or not to prosecute.

More information about the requirements for adopting can be found at [Adoption Program | Bureau of Land Management \(blm.gov\)](#).