



# United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
Ely District Office  
Star Route 5, Box 1  
Ely, Nevada 89301

G 4/16/80  
IN REPLY REFER TO

4700  
(N-043)

April 16, 1980

Wild Horse Organized Assistance  
P. O. Box 555  
Reno, Nevada 89505

Dear Ms. Lappin:

Attached is a copy of the environmental assessment and capture plan for the proposed horse gather in the Buck-Bald area for your review and comment.

We would appreciate it, if you could return your comments in the self-addressed envelope to this office by May 16, 1980.

If you have any questions about the environmental assessment feel free to contact our wild horse specialist, Richard Howard.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Neil B. McCleery  
District Manager

Enclosure



*Save Energy and You Serve America!*

## CAPTURE PLAN FOR BUCK-BALD HORSE GATHER

### INTRODUCTION

This document outlines the process and the events involved with the Buck-Bald Horse Gatherers. Included are the number of horses to be captured, the time and method of capture, and the handling of captured horses (wild and branded horses). Also outlined are the BLM personnel involved with the roundup, the delegation of authority, the briefing of the contractor(s), and the public meeting to be held. Maps are enclosed to help readers locate the proposed gathering area.

### Number of Horses to be Gathered

The proposed number of horses to be gathered is 400 to 500 animals. This number is tentative because it is not known what the contract cost will be at the present time, how the capturing process will proceed due to climatic conditions, and the animals' behavior and other unforeseen factors. The actual number of horses captured may be slightly higher or lower.

### Time and Method of Capture

The roundup is scheduled to start after July 15, 1980 and to be completed by September 30, 1980. Other roundups may be scheduled in this area within an 18 month period. The time of this roundup is not desirable, but due to fund restrictions this is the only time that the roundup can be scheduled. This time is not desirable because the horses are generally located at higher elevations, requiring more careful work and planning in moving them and in locating traps. A helicopter's fuel efficiency, load capacity and working ability are greatly reduced at this time of year due to hot weather. And in addition, this time of year is generally the end of the foaling season, when greater care and caution must be used in handling mares with young foals.

The method of capture to be used will be a helicopter, and horseback riders at the wings of portable traps.

Other methods of capture are not being considered because of the increased cost per horse. Water trapping, though easier on horses, is not feasible due to the numerous springs, reservoirs and other water sources available to horses in the proposed gathering area. Water traps take time to construct and require time for horses to accept as part of their environment; the time allotted to this roundup is limited. Also, water traps after being used a few times are not successful in capturing horses. Trapping horses by running them on horseback is not feasible because it is too easy to lose the horses after starting them towards the trap; injuries to both people and horses is more likely, and the cost factor shown from previous roundups using this method indicates that the costs are prohibitive.

*If more branded animals are found, will less WH be removed?*

The following stipulations will be applied to the helicopter and wing trap capture method:

1. The helicopter and pilot furnished by the contractor must be certified by the Office of Aircraft Services, Department of the Interior to perform this mission, and shall be under the direct supervision of the authorized officer at all times. Further the terms of 43 CFR 4730.7-2, it shall be governed by the following reservations/restrictions:
  - (a) The Contracting Officer's Authorized Representative (COAR) shall have the means to communicate with the pilot and be able to direct the use of the helicopter, at all times. The BLM will furnish the necessary radio equipment.
  - (b) The COAR shall be able to observe the effects of the use of the helicopter on the well-being of the animals.
2. Under the provisions of 43 CFR 4730.4, the use of the helicopter shall further be regulated to the extent that:
  - (a) The helicopter shall be used in such a manner that bands or herds will tend to remain together.
  - (b) The rate of movement shall not exceed limitations set by the COAR who shall consider terrain, weather, distance to be traveled and condition of animals. Maximum distance for horse movement will be 10 miles under ideal conditions and will be less where safety of animals could be jeopardized.
3. All trapping of the horses shall be subject to the following reservations/restrictions:
  - (a) All trapping will be done by helicopter and wing riders by driving the horses into temporary traps.
  - (b) All materials and labor to build and remove the traps will be provided by the contractor.
  - (c) All traps sites will be located on BLM land. General areas for trap locations within the gathering area may be specified by the COAR after consultation with the contractor to assure removal of horses from specific areas. Specific trap site locations will be selected by the contractors but must be approved by the COAR prior to trap construction.
  - (d) All traps and holding corrals shall be constructed in a manner as to hold and handle the horses safely and humanely. All traps and holding corrals will be inspected and approved by the COAR prior and/or during their use.

- (e) All trap and camp sites will be cleaned up per direction of the COAR at the conclusion of the contract.

Transportation and Handling of Captured Horses

1. All motorized equipment employed in the transportation of captured horses shall, under the provisions of 43 CFR 4740.4(b), be subject to the following reservations and/or restrictions:
  - (a) All such transportation shall be in compliance with appropriate State and Federal laws and regulations applicable to the humane transportation of horses and burros.
  - (b) Vehicles shall be in good repair, of adequate rated capacity, and carefully operated so as to insure that captured animals are transported without undue risk or injury.
  - (c) Vehicles shall be inspected and approved by the COAR prior to award of contract.
  - (d) Where required by the COAR, animals shall be sorted as to age, size, temperament, sex, and condition when transporting them so as to minimize, to the extent possible, injury due to fighting and trampling.
  - (e) The COAR shall consider the condition of the animals, weather conditions, type of vehicles, and distance to be transported when planning for the movement of captured animals. The COAR shall provide for any brand and/or health services required for the captured animals.
  - (f) The COAR shall be responsible for determining the need for and providing treatment for sick or injured animals. The COAR shall also determine if an injured animal must be destroyed and provide for destruction and disposal of carcasses.
2. If captured animals are held more than 12 hours at the trap site, food and water will be provided by the contractor to the animal. All animals will be humanely and expediently transported to the central holding facilities at Palomino Valley (Reno, Nevada) and/or Delta, Utah.

3. Government furnished property (GFP):

The following GFP will be furnished the contractor (by the COAR at time of award:

1 Handy Talky

1 Handy Talky w/aircraft adapter furnished by the COAR at time of Notice to Proceed, for period of the contract.

A holding facility within or near the gathering area, where captured horses may be collected from trap sites and held for sorting and resting prior to trucking to central holding facilities, including feed and water at this facility.

Handling of Branded Horses

Branded horses will be sorted from wild horses at the holding facility in the gathering area after inspection by the COAR and State brand inspector.

Claims by individuals will be limited to branded horses and current year's colts of branded mares. Final determination on claimed horses will be made by BLM.

Before horses can be turned over to the individual(s), the Bureau must collect a trespass fee, gathering costs, and any other associated costs.

Unclaimed branded horses will be turned over to the State brand inspector and will be handled under the state estray laws.

BLM Personnel and Delegation of Authority

The COAR and the Project Inspector will be Richard Howard, with George Cropper as alternate. The COAR will be directly responsible for conducting the roundup, and can appoint other BLM personnel to assist with the roundup.

Other BLM personnel that will be needed to help are an archaeologist to clear trap sites for cultural resources, YACC personnel to help construct temporary holding and sorting facilities in the gathering area, and a BLM law enforcement agent to protect BLM personnel and property from unlawful activities.

The COAR is directly responsible for reporting the roundup proceedings to the Ely District Manager, the Nevada State Office, and District Public Affairs officer.

Contractor's Briefing

The contractor, after award of the contract, will be briefed on his duties and responsibilities before the notice to proceed is issued to

him. A tour of the area, if necessary, will also be conducted to help familiarize the contractor with the area.

#### Public Meeting

One public meeting will be held in Ely at a place and time to be determined before the roundup is started to get public input on the gathering process using helicopter. Wild Horse protection groups and the public will be notified in ample time to allow them to attend the meeting. Wild Horse groups have been notified and asked for input into the environmental assessment, and will be given the opportunity to review the assessment.

DECISION RECORD/RATIONALE

NV-040-0-20

Based on the review of the Environmental Assessment and public input, it has been determined that the implementation of the proposed action (removal of no more than 500 trespass and wild horses) would result in significant beneficial impacts to the environment. Therefore the removal of 800 horses, removal of trespass branded horses, and the no action alternatives are rejected and the proposed action is adopted as mitigated.

Rationale

Significant direct and indirect environmental benefits are anticipated for wildlife, livestock and wild horses with the adoption of the proposed action.

The first alternative (removal of 800 horses) was favored by livestock interests, but wild horse groups felt that this would constitute a major Federal action and would deplete the wild horse population in this area. They are very strongly opposed to this alternative. Another comment submitted by wild horse groups was that more studies should be established and conducted over several years before trying to justify a removal of this magnitude. Due to the strong opposition, this alternative is rejected.

The "no action" and "removal of trespass branded horses" would pave the way for continued and accelerating habitat deterioration proportional to unchecked reproduction levels of wild horses.

The proposed action does not constitute a major Federal action which would significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Richard T. Watts  
Richard T. Watts, Manager  
Egan Resource Area, Ely District

June 10, 1980  
Date

Neil B. McCleery  
Neil B. McCleery  
District Manager, Ely District

June 12, 1980  
Date

NV-040-0-20

BUCK-BALD HORSE GATHERING  
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT RECORD

County

White Pine

Planning Area

Cherry Creek

Status

MFP Completed

Prepared by:

Richard D. Howard, Range Conservationist



## DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

### Background

The Buck/Bald Mountain - Long Valley areas of White Pine and Elko Counties in Nevada have a large population of wild horses and trespass branded horses which is recognized by resource specialists to be in excess of present grazing capacities. This area involves land administered by the Ely District and Elko District of the BLM with wild, free-roaming horses intermingled with trespass branded horses. The area has historically provided important wildlife habitat, and has been subjected to heavy livestock, wild horse and trespass branded horse use. Currently increased mining activities and seismic exploration are taking place in the area, decreasing the usable habitat for the above mentioned animals. Observations over recent years by qualified Bureau of Land Management field personnel have resulted in growing concerns of general range deterioration combined with steadily increasing and unmanaged horse populations which reside in the subject area on a yearlong basis.

Another factor complicating wild horse management in this area is that domestic horses have been released in the area. Also, it appears that colts are being caught, branded, and released. It is not uncommon to see branded colts following unbranded mares. Bureau personnel check this area regularly for unlawful harrassment of wild horses however as of this date not enough evidence has been collected to file charges against anyone.

During the 1974 claiming period, five individuals claimed 1,117 horses; of the total claim, 940 horses were actually removed. This figure does not include progeny. See attached appendix 1 for figures on claims, and added background information.

Fund restriction and wide-spread controversy regarding wild horse manipulation have generally complicated this aspect of habitat management. The proposed project area is starting to come into the lime-light since it contains a critical deer wintering area.

### Proposed Action

The Egan Resource Area, Ely District and Wells Resource Area, Elko District, Bureau of Land Management, propose to gather an estimated 400 to 500 excess wild and/or privately owned horses using a helicopter and portable wing traps beginning on or about July 16, 1980. Gathering operations may be conducted over an 18 month period and may include gathering during two or three separate time periods to reduce horse herds to a more manageable level of approximately 800 horses.

The proposed gathering operations would be conducted from the east boundary of the Ruby Lake National Refuge and extend east to the middle of Butte Valley in Elko County and extend four (4) miles

to ten (10) miles from the Elko-White Pine County line north in Elko County (see map No. 1) In White Pine County, the area extends from the Elko-White Pine County line south to U.S. Highway 50; the eastern boundary would be the crest of the Butte Mountains and extend west to the eastern side of Newark Valley (see map No. 2). The roundup will be concentrated in the Maverick Springs Range within the gather area in order to capture as many branded horses as possible.

Temporary traps with deflector wings encompassing less than one acre would be constructed. The use of a contracted helicopter and horse wranglers would be necessary to drive and direct horses in a careful and efficient manner. Hazards such as cliffs, fences, and old mine shafts would be scouted in advance and existing roads and trails would be used. Wild horses would be transported by truck to temporary holding facilities in Palomino Valley, Nevada, and/or Delta, Utah for adoption processing, then shipped to distribution centers in the midwest for adoption. Horses that might be held at the trap site in excess of 12 hours would have food and water provided. Branded trespass horses and their current year's foal would be impounded and held until trespass fees, gathering fees, and associated costs are paid to the Bureau, and then would be turned over to the owner(s). Other branded horses not claimed will be treated under the Nevada State estray laws.

The proposed action is considered an "interim measure" to assist in control of habitat over-utilization pending completion of mandated Grazing Environmental Impact Statements and formal vegetative allocations which will not be fully implemented until after 1985.

#### Alternatives

Different methods of capturing wild horses are discussed in the capture plan (attached) and will not be discussed in the alternatives section of this assessment.

The three main viable alternatives to the proposed action are removal of 800 horses, only trespass branded horses and the no action alternative.

#### Alternative 1 - Removal of 800 horses over an 18 month period from July 15, 1980 to January 15, 1982

This alternative would constitute a 67 percent reduction of horses in the gather area and approximately 400 wild horses would be left at the completion of all gathering operations. The initial gathering operation would be conducted this summer, with the removal of an estimated 400 horses and other gathering operations could be conducted as funds become available for this purpose. These operations would be subject to the stipulations and mitigating measures of the proposed action plus the following additional stipulations and mitigating measures.

- a) Priority will be given to gathering in areas where trespass branded horses are concentrated.

- b) No gathering operations would be conducted during the foaling and breeding seasons, from March 1, 1981 to July 15, 1981, or under any situation that would create undue stress on horses.
- c) Wild horse groups and public will be notified before any gathering operations take place.
- d) Priority will be given to avoid winter gathering in heavy deer concentration areas when deer use is high.

The major advantages to this alternative are:

- a) Allow planning for management of wild horses.
- b) Competition for existing resources would be substantially alleviated.

The major disadvantages to this alternative are:

- a) The magnitude of this proposal may offend people who want to see more wild horses left in the area.
- b) Horses may be subject to additional stress of more gathering operations.

#### Alternative 2 - Removal of Trespass Branded Horses

There are an estimated 175 trespass branded horses in the proposed gathering area. Removal of these horses would provide temporary relief by leaving only wild horses in this area.

The major advantages to this alternative are:

- a) Eliminate management problems concerning wild horses being mixed with trespass branded horses.
- b) Allow planning for management of wild horses.

The major disadvantages to this alternative are:

- a) It would require excessive handling of both wild and trespass horses, making injury to horses and people more common.
- b) The cost factor would be higher per horse captured.
- c) Over-utilization of range resources would still be occurring, resulting in further range degradation.
- d) Competition between horses and other animals would still be excessive.

Alternative 3 - No action

Under the "status quo" alternative, no horses would be gathered.

Major Advantages of this Alternative

- a) Funds allotted for this roundup could be diverted to other roundups in the state of Nevada.
- b) Horses would be left alone.

Major Disadvantages of this Alternative

- a) Management problems concerning wild horses being mixed with trespass branded horses would become more complicated and complex.
- b) Planning for management of wild horses would be set back indefinitely.
- c) Over-utilization of range resources would increase.
- d) Competition between horses and other animals would continue to be excessive.

DESCRIPTION OF THE EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

Nonliving

The subject area is rural in character. Topography consists of valley floors, alluvial fans, canyons, mountains, steep ridges, and basins. Annual precipitation varies from 20 inches in higher elevations to 8 inches or less at the lower elevations. The bulk of the precipitation occurs through early spring rains and winter snows. Temperatures range from summer maximums in excess of 90 degrees F. to winter lows falling well below zero.

Air quality is good, although short-term increases in fugitive dust levels occur as the result of climatic variations and vehicular traffic.

Soil textures are generally loams, clay loams, and silt loams, most of which are capable of supporting desirable species of vegetation. The following table depicts soil characteristics:

<u>General Distribution</u>	<u>Principal Soil Orders</u>	<u>Soil Productivity</u>	<u>Erosion Susceptibility</u>
Mountains	Mollisols	Moderate-high	Moderate
Benches and Alluvial Fans	Aridisols	Moderate	Moderate
Valley Floors	Aridisols and Entisols	Low	Slight

Springs, reservoirs, wells, and intermittent streams provide an adequate water supply of generally fair to good quality. Competition by large animals (wildlife, horses, livestock) for use of the water is a threat to future maintenance of water quality as evidenced by excessive trampling of undeveloped springs, seeps, and wet meadows.

#### Living Components

Major plant associations may be generally characterized as big sagebrush-grass, mid sagebrush-grass, pinyon pine-juniper, winterfat-saltbush flats. For more detailed information see attached map of vegetative types.

The dominant shrub in the big sagebrush-grass community is big sagebrush (Artemisia tridentata). Other shrubs of this type occurring are greasewood, (Sarcobatus Vermiculatus); gray rabbitbrush, (Chrysothamnus nauseosus); at higher elevations Utah serviceberry, (Amelanchier utahensis), and bitterbrush, (Purshia tridentata). Common forbs include buckwheat, (Eriogonum spp.), princess plume, (Stanleya pinnata); mustards, (Brassica spp.), and lupine, (Lupinus spp.). Common grasses include great basin wildrye, (Elymus cinereus); western wheatgrass, (Agropyron smithii); Sandberg bluegrass, (Poa secunda); bluebunch wheatgrass, (Agropyron spicatum); Indian ricegrass, (Oryzopsis hymenoides); squirreltail, (Sitanion hystrix); and where perennial grasses have been over utilized or removed by fires, cheatgrass, (Bromus tectorum) has become the dominant understory.

The dominant shrubs in the mid-sagebrush-grass are low sagebrush, (Artemisia arbuscula) and black sagebrush, (Artemisia arbuscula nova). Black sagebrush occurs more frequently than low sagebrush in this area. Other common shrubs occurring in this type are little rabbitbrush, (Chyrsothamnus viscidiflorus); shadscale, (Artiplex confertifolius); winterfat, (Ceratoides lanata); and Mormon tea, (Ephreda nevadensis). Common forbs in this type are mustards, (Brassica spp.); buckwheats, (Eriogonum spp.); locoweeds, (Oxytropis spp and Astragalus spp.) Pepper weeds, (Lepidium spp.) and penstemon, (Penstemon spp.) Common grasses include western wheatgrass, (Agropyron smithii); Sandberg bluegrass, (Poa secunda); Indian ricegrass, (Oryzopsis hymenoides), and squirreltail, (Sitanion hystrix).

Pinyon pine-juniper type occurs on valley benches and extends into the higher elevations. The pinyon pine, (Pinus monophylla) and Utah juniper, (Juniperus osteosperma), are the dominant overstory. Understory plants include segments from the big-sagebrush-grass and mid-sagebrush-grass communities. Other shrubs occurring in the pinyon pine-juniper type not already listed are curleaf mountain mahogany, (Cercocarpus ledifolius); green Mormon tea, (Ephredra viridis), and snowberry (Symphoricarpos spp.) At higher elevations and where water is at or near the ground surface there are scattered patches of aspen, (Populus tremuloides) in the area.

The fourth major plant association is the winterfat-salt-bush flats. This plant association occurs on the valley bottoms and lower valley

benches. The dominant shrubs in this type are shadscale, (Artriplex confertifolia), and winterfat, (Ceratoides lanata). Other common shrubs in this type are spiny hopsage, (Grayia spinosa); greasewood, (Sarcobatus vermiculatus); budsage, (Artemisia spinescens); kochia (Kochia spp.); little rabbitbrush, (Chyrsothamnus viscidiflorus), and big sagebrush, (Artemisia tridentata). The most common forbs are buckwheats, (Eriogonum spp.), and mustards, (Brassica spp.). The most common grasses are Indian ricegrass, (Oryzopsis hymenoides); squirreltail, (Sitanion hystrix), and sand dropseed grass, (Sporobolus spp.).

Invasions of halogeton, (Halogeton glomeratus); Russian thistle, (Salsola kali), and cheatgrass, (Bromus tectorum) are common where areas have been disturbed by man and/or overgrazed by livestock. Little rabbitbrush has replaced the dominant desirable shrubs in this type where overgrazing has occurred.

There is no past or current record of any threatened or endangered plants in the proposed horse gathering area.

Horses have occurred in this area for many years. They are all descendents of ranch horses that were released in the area and have continued to propagate. It has been documented by Anthony Amaral in his book Mustang, that no horses occurred in the Great Basin prior to settlement by trappers, miners, and ranchers. Aerial census efforts conducted during 1978 and 1980, and BLM estimates indicate approximately 1,200 horses presently reside in the gathering area on a yearlong basis. This compares to approximately 700 to 800 horses in this area in 1978.

Horses prefer grasses and grasslike species but they also will utilize shrubs and forbs when necessary. In the subject area, moderate to heavy use by horses and other grazing animals has reduced desirable grasses to the point that only shrubs and less available grasses remain. Shrubs are severely hedged and are being replaced by less desirable and unpalatable species such as halogeton.

Numerous game and non-game wildlife species utilize the subject area on a seasonal or yearlong basis. Game species include mule deer, sage grouse, blue grouse, chukars, several species of ducks, geese, and cottontail rabbits. Non-game species include rodents, reptiles, and amphibians common to the Great Basin, pinyon jays, ravens, hawks, golden eagles, coyotes, badgers, bobcats, and horned larks. A more complete list of wildlife species can be found in the Cherry Creek URA. See attached map with wildlife use areas.

Mule deer are a highly important species. Presently there are an estimated 950 to 1,100 mule deer in the proposed gathering area on a year-long basis. Mule deer food consumption is influenced by seasonal preference, availability and quality of forage. Shrubs such as bitterbrush provide crucial food requirements for mule deer winter

survival. Forbs and grasses provide important feed in the spring and early summer, but shrubs remain important for cover fawning areas.

Mule deer concentrations are greatest in portions of the proposed gather area where mountain shrub and sagebrush-grass vegetation types are found. Shrubs, especially big sagebrush, antelope bitterbrush, curleaf mountain mahogany, and Utah serviceberry provide key forage for deer. The use of grass and forbs increases in the spring and summer months. One of the most critical elements is the amount and quality of browse available during winter months. Meadow areas are being lost to gully erosion and lowering of water tables, a direct cause related impact from overgrazing. Riparian areas and high elevation browse stands are declining in condition.

An estimated 11,500 to 12,000 deer winter in the subject area; there is a summer population of approximately 950 to 1,100 deer.

An estimated 700 deer inhabit the Buck and Bald Mountains on a yearlong basis, and an estimated 250 to 400 deer inhabit the Butte Mountains on a yearlong basis.

Livestock (cattle and sheep) use portions of 17 allotments within the gathering area throughout the year. Use by livestock has traditionally been heavy. Use by allotment is shown as follows:

AUM's Total Active Preference	Current Year in Gather Area		3-Year Average in Gather Area		Allot- ment No.	% of Use in Gather Area
	AUM's Active	AUM's Nonuse	AUM's Active	AUM's Nonuse		
9,129 ++	63	29	81	10	0603	1%
90 +++					0604	
90 +++					0605	
23,995 +++++	4,375	19,620	6,487	17,508	0606	
996	* ---	996	---	996	0609	
2,466	* 740	1,726	---	2,466	0610	
10,099 ++	3,013	2,744	2,979	2,777	0611	57%
648 ++	4	3	4	3	0612	1%
278 (Cook) 563 (Wright)	* ---	563	340	223	0619	
1,056	340	716	851	205	0620	
1,500	1,500	---	1,500	---	0621	
17,835 ++	1,113	670	1,557	227	0501	10%
698 ++	4	3	6	1	0502	1%
8,755 ++	310	128	306	132	0503	5%
<u>78,207 ++</u>	<u>11,462</u>	<u>27,198</u>	<u>14,111</u>	<u>24,548</u>	- TOTAL	

Current Year Use: 29.6% Active Use in Gather Area  
38,660 AUM's Preference in Gather Area (Ely District)

3 Year Average : 36.5% Active Use in Gather Area  
38,659 AUM's (Preference in Gather Area (Ely District))

\* Not accurate reflection because operator may be making more use next year, (just acquired the privileges thru transfer).

++ Total Active Preference AUM's outside of the gathering area.

+++ Allotment 0604 and 0605 have been excluded because no horse use occurs in these allotments. They are completely fenced.

++++ AUM Average is two year average.



ELKO PORTION IN GATHER AREA

<u>Total Active Preference</u>	<u>Current Year in Gather Area</u>		<u>3 Year Average in Gather Area</u>		<u>Allotment No.</u>
	<u>AUM's Active</u>	<u>AUM's Nonuse</u>	<u>AUM's Active</u>	<u>AUM's Nonuse</u>	
920	920	---	920	---	Bald Mountain
785	785	---	785	---	Ruby #9
1,864	700	1,164	700	1,164	Maverick Springs Allotment
<u>3,569</u>	<u>2,405</u>	<u>1,164</u>	<u>2,405</u>	<u>1,164</u>	- TOTAL

67% Active Use in Elko Portion of Gather Area

Livestock use has remained fairly consistent over the last three years. The average AUM preference over the last three years in the gather areas (including Elko and Ely Districts) 42,228 AUM's, with about 39 percent of these AUM's taken in active use and 61 percent of these AUM's remaining in non-use. Current year's preference in the gather area (includes Elko and Ely Districts) is 42,229 AUM's with 33 percent of these AUM's being taken in active use and 67 percent remaining in non-use.

Ecological Interrelationships

Ecological interrelationships are complex and diverse. For purposes of this analysis, discussion has been limited to major relationships concerning environmental elements affected by wild horses. Wild horses, as with other large mammals, are selective in their grazing patterns, tending to graze some plants heavily and others not at all. As numbers of horses increase, these areas of overuse become larger, and desirable plants are replaced by undesirable and less palatable species. This is evidenced by the invasion into white sage flats in the gathering area by halogeton and little rabbitbrush. This in turn lowers the carrying capacity for all animals, including horses.

Competition for space, forage and water between livestock, wildlife and wild horses affects survival and reproductive rates of each.

Human Values

Contrasting and varied topography make the gathering area visually pleasing to many people. Major population centers are far removed, the nearest community being Ely, Nevada, which is located 30 miles to the southeast.

Wild free-roaming horses were declared to be "living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the west" by Public Law 92-195, the

Wild Horse and Burro Act. As such, they have educational, scientific, and cultural values to the people of the region and nationally. Local attitudes regarding the presence of wild horses, both generally and in the subject area, are varied. The greatest potential interest in preserving and viewing horses arises from the Reno and Las Vegas areas, and on a national level. It is felt that very little recreational use of horses either by viewing or photography is made by visitors in the area.

Known cultural values (archaeological remains) exist in the general gathering area. Little formal investigation has been conducted within this area; however, potential for evidence of previous human occupation is medium to high.

Lands included within the subject area are in various stages of Wilderness Inventory. The proposed action would have no significant impact on wilderness characteristics (see attached clearance).

There are high recreational values for big game hunting due to large concentrations of mule deer. Limited sage grouse and chukar hunting also occurs.

#### ANALYSIS OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

##### Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action - Remove 400 to 500 Wild Horses

###### Nonliving Components

Negligible impacts to air quality would occur during gathering operations and handling of horses, resulting from helicopter and vehicle exhaust emissions. Short-term increases in fugitive dust levels caused by operation of ground vehicles and running horses would occur.

Sites which presently exhibit active soil erosion would be positively impacted as would the water quality of sources presently exhibiting severe trampling and resultant contamination through sediment increase and/or fecal deposits in water.

Reduced competition between wildlife, livestock, and horses for water sources would be a high positive impact.

No impact on water quality would result from the horse gathering operation or the handling of horses which would be conducted away from water. Reduced horse numbers would lessen grazing and trampling at waterholes and riparian areas. This would provide a more favorable habitat for all animals.

### Living Components

An area less than one acre in size (trap location), would be severely trampled during gathering operations. Vegetative regeneration would be expected within 2-3 years depending on climatic conditions.

It is expected that the intensity of livestock grazing would remain at approximately the same level.

A decrease in the horse population could be expected to have a positive impact on areas which presently exhibit soil erosion or have potential erosion characteristics.

The decreased horse population would have a high positive impact on terrestrial plants over a period of time. The decreased grazing pressure would slow downward trends in overall range condition because of increased vigor and density of desirable perennial plants.

A negative impact on horses would be expected during gathering and handling. This would result from traumatic effects of capturing, trapping, loading and hauling of the animals. Enough horses would remain to maintain a viable herd and provide for interaction between bands. There would be a high positive impact on remaining horses, livestock and wildlife because of reduced competition with horses for available forage. A negligible impact to other terrestrial animals is expected during the gathering process. Other animals could be temporarily frightened or displaced by the increased activity in the area.

A positive impact would be expected for future management of wild horses since the gathering operations would be centered in the Maverick Springs Range where the larger concentration of trespass branded horses are located. Removal of these horses would clarify horse ownership and remove the potential for wild horses being converted to private uses.

### Ecological Interrelationships

A decrease in the horse population would result in a positive impact on vegetative succession. By reducing the competition for forage, the more palatable climax and subclimax species would be able to regain their vigor, thus allowing them to remain established. If the climax species remain established, the unpalatable invader species would not become dominant.

### Human Values

Should significant archaeological remains be present at the specific location of the trap, damage or destruction could result.

Removal of wild horses would reduce viewing opportunity, and affect those who value horses. Removal of horses will have an economic impact on those ranchers who have trespass branded horses that are

captured, since they will have to pay gathering costs, trespass fees and other associated costs before these animals can be turned over to them. Removal of horses would benefit ranchers by reducing competition for existing forage and eventually the increased forage would provide economic benefits for them.

A potential exists for possible animosity between private horse owners and Bureau personnel.

The entire project area is currently in VRM (Visual Resource Management) interim management class III status. The proposed project will result in a limited and temporary disturbance of soil and vegetation, and a temporary structure on the landscape. Once the portable traps are removed there will be no residual short-term or long-term impacts on the visual resources. Therefore, a visual contrast rating is not necessary for this proposed project.

#### Recommended Mitigating Measures

- (1) Horse handling should be kept to a minimum. Capture and transporting operations are exceedingly traumatic to the animals. Minimizing the handling would increase the safety of the animals, as well as the handlers.
- (2) No gathering should be allowed between March 1, 1980 and July 15, 1980 because of the potential stress to pregnant and lactating mares and the possibility of induced abortions. Gathering may be resumed after the foaling period and after foals are grown enough to withstand the stress of gathering operations.
- (3) Horses should not be run more than 10 miles during gathering operations and gathering will be done in the early morning and early evening to avoid overheating horses during the hot weather when the first roundup is scheduled.
- (4) A veterinarian will be on call during gathering operations.
- (5) Helicopters will be used with caution. A qualified district BLM representative will be present during gathering attempts to insure strict compliance with the above mileage limitations and CFR 4700 regulations.
- (6) Captured horses that are obviously aged, lame deformed, or sick should be humanely disposed of at the trap site.
- (7) Captured horses that are clearly unsuitable for adoption but that do not fall under (6) above, should be collared with identifiable neck bands and released for study purposes.
- (8) A cultural resource investigation by an archaeologist or D.A.T. should be made prior to any trap construction. If a significant find is discovered, an alternate trap site should be selected.

- (9) Every effort will be made to keep mares and their young foals together. Mares with foals on the ground will be separated from stallions and barren mares before shipping to central BLM facilities at Palomino Valley (Reno, Nevada) and/or Delta, Utah.
- (10) Horses will not be held more than 12 hours without food or water (due to hot weather at the time of the roundup).
- (11) A BLM law enforcement agent will be present during the gathering operation to provide protection for personnel working on the roundup.
- (12) Intensity of livestock grazing in the gather area will remain at approximately the same level until approval of the final grazing EIS.
- 13) Winter horse gathering operations will take every effort to avoid being conducted in winter deer use areas when deer use is high.

#### Residual Impacts

Reduced competition for water and vegetation should result in improved plant vigor, condition, and reproductive potential. A sufficient horse population would remain to maintain a viable horse herd.

#### Relationships Between Short-term Use and Long-term Productivity

The impacts of this proposed action would enhance the environment for a short period of time. Over utilization of forage by uncontrolled horse populations would increase to a degree detrimental to the horses themselves, as well as wildlife and livestock. (It is estimated that horses in this area are increasing at a rate of 13 percent per year.)

#### Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources

None.

#### Alternatives

- (1) Removal of 800 horses.
- (2) Removal of Trespass Branded Horses.
- (3) No Action.

#### Environmental Impacts

Alternative 1 - Removal of 800 horses.

#### Non-Living Components

Reducing the horse population by 800 head combined with maintaining livestock use at approximately the same level would have a positive

impact on soils susceptible to erosion. Gullies and soil compaction would decrease, reducing the loss of soil and decrease water sedimentation and establish a favorable environment for maintaining and increasing the density of preferred and desirable forage plants over a period of time.

#### Living Components

An initial negative impact would occur to the horses from the stress of the horse gathering operations of this magnitude. Over a period of time with the increase in preferred and desirable forage, the horses, wildlife, and livestock would benefit from the reduced competition for these plants.

The reduced grazing pressure as a result of this alternative would significantly slow the downward trend in overall range condition, and improvement in conditions could be expected sooner than if the proposed action or the other alternatives are accepted.

A very positive impact would be expected for future management of wild horses since emphasis will be given to conducting gathering operations where trespass branded horses are concentrated in larger numbers. The trespass branded horse situation would be virtually eliminated from this area, and the current incidents of using wild horses for private gain would be significantly reduced and possibly eliminated.

#### Ecological Interrelationships

A positive impact on vegetative succession could be expected from this alternative. The reduced horse numbers combined with maintaining livestock use at approximately the same level would increase the desirable and preferred forage plants' vigor and reproductive capacity. Vegetative succession could be expected to progress to a higher seral stage with undesirable and invader plant species making up a lesser and insignificant portion of the total vegetative cover. This would eventually result in higher productivity and population increase for all animals.

#### Human Values

There would be a mixed impact on these values. First there would be a negative impact on people who enjoy seeing large numbers of wild horses because of the reduced horse numbers, but these people when observing horses in this area would be compensated by knowing that the horses that are observed are truly wild and free-roaming horses and not someone's trespass domestic horses. The opportunity to harass and brand wild horses would be significantly reduced and people involved in these illegal activities would reduce or stop these activities because the work involved in capturing horses would be greater than the benefits that could be received. Ranchers in the area would experience economic gain from the increased forage even though it is expected that livestock use will not increase. This economic benefit

would result from increased pounds of gain per animal, and increase value of the AUM's as the forage condition and quality improves.

#### Recommended Mitigating Measures

Same as the proposed action and the four additional measures listed under this alternative on pages 2 and 3.

#### Residual Impacts

Wild horse populations though reduced, would have the opportunity to increase without decreasing the quality and quantity of available forage, and virtually free from illegal horse gathering operations.

#### Relationships Between Short-Term Use and Long-Term Productivity

The impacts of this alternative would enhance the environment for a longer period of time at least until the court mandated grazing EIS is completed and vegetative allocations can be made. Forage resources would be given the opportunity to increase and improve in quality without being over grazed by livestock and horses. Wild horses though reduced initially would be able to increase without over grazing desirable vegetation and without being harrassed by illegal mustangers. Wildlife would benefit from eventually improved habitat conditions and decreased competition for existing resources.

#### Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources

None.

#### Environmental Impacts

Same for Alternatives 2 and 3.

#### Non-Living Components

Uncontrolled horse populations combined with wildlife and livestock use would have a negative impact on soils susceptible to erosion. Gullies and soil compaction would increase, causing not only loss of soil but increase water sedimentation and increase loss of preferred and desirable forage plants.

#### Living Components

A negative impact on vegetation and animals is anticipated under these alternatives. Uncontrolled horse numbers would increase to the point that most available forage would be utilized to the detriment of livestock, wildlife, and the horses themselves.

Livestock operators are using less than half of their total preference but horses are making the balance of AUM's used over 50 percent. This is not a major problem, but the main problem is that horses concentrate

in preferred forage areas yearlong and tend to overuse them, moving only when climatic conditions force them to move to other areas. This makes the competition for the forage in these areas severe with wildlife and livestock. Wildlife (mule deer) have controls placed on their population levels; livestock are regulated by numbers, season of use and area of use. But at present horses do not have any active controls on their population and the continued growth and expansion of their numbers will make excessive demands on the vegetative resource.

#### Ecological Interrelationships

A negative impact surrounding vegetative succession should be anticipated from these alternatives. The uncontrolled horse numbers combined with livestock and wildlife use would have a continuing adverse effect on the dominant desirable vegetative species. Continued heavy grazing of preferred forage plants would cause continued loss of plant vigor and reproductive capacity. Vegetative succession would regress to a lower seral stage with undesirable forage species making up a greater portion of the total vegetative cover. This would ultimately result in lower productivity and population decline for all animals.

#### Human Values

There would be greater opportunity to view horses through steadily increasing populations. But an increased die-off of wild horses would offend many people's values. Also, certain individuals would have increased opportunities to brand and harass wild horses, using them for their private gain. Ranchers in the area would experience a severe economic impact through the loss of forage and AUM's from the increasing horse population.

#### Recommend Mitigating Measures

None

#### Residual Impacts

Wild horse populations would continue to increase, resulting in further deterioration of vegetation and reduced carrying capacities.

#### Relationship Between Short-Term Use and Long-Term Productivity

Continued overuse would result in the eventual loss of soil and desirable plants through erosion and a general lowering of productivity of habitat on a long-term basis.

#### Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources

Continued overgrazing of the forage resources would result in wind and water erosion of unprotected soils. The soils removed from hills and mountainsides by erosion constitutes an irretrievable resource loss.



PERSONS, GROUPS, AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES CONSULTED

Nevada State Grazing Board No. 4 - Ely, Nevada  
Nevada State Department of Wildlife - Ely, Nevada  
International Society for the Protection of Wild Horses and Burros -  
Reno, Nevada  
Wild Horse Organized Assistance, Reno, Nevada  
American Horse Protection Association, Washington, D.C.  
American Humane Association, Denver, Colorado  
Animal Protection Institute, Sacramento, California  
U.S. Humane Society, Washington, D.C.  
Fund for animals, Salt Lake City, Utah  
National Mustang Association, St. George, Utah  
National Wild Horse Association, Las Vegas, Nevada  
Wild Horse and Burro Committee for National Academy of Science,  
Logan, Utah  
Nevada Division of Forestry  
Nevada Division of State Parks  
Nevada Division of Environmental Protection  
Nevada Department of Wildlife  
Mr. Craig C. Downer, P.O. Box 456, Minden, Nevada 89423  
Elko District, Bureau of Land Management, Elko, Nevada 89801

INTENSITY OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Local Newspapers in both Ely and Elko have long been critical of the Bureau of Land Management wild horse management program. A series of articles and one editorial in the Ely Daily Times in October of 1978 focused on problems in another area. Letters are received periodically at the local Bureau of Land Management level that are highly critical of Bureau of land Management horse round-ups and the general treatment given wild horses. These letters highlight the sympathy and intense feeling one segment of the public has for wild horses.

Nationally, the issue of wild horses on western public rangelands has been an intense controversy spanning many years and beginning prior to the passage of the Wild Horse and Burro Act in 1971. Wild Horse preservationists are generally concerned with maintaining adequate habitat on public lands for optimum population levels of wild horses.

Ranchers who graze livestock on public lands view wild horses as competitive with livestock for forage and water and thus a threat to their interests. However, some ranchers and others support a maintenance of reasonable numbers of wild horses. Certain ranchers in this area have been reported to use wild horses for their private gain, and have trespass branded horses in the area; they will be opposed to any roundups.

Sportsmen and other wildlife interests also see horses as a competitive threat to wildlife populations and cite competition for food, water, cover, and space as being detrimental.

Nevada, the state with the highest wild horse population, was also the home state of the wild horse protection movement fostered by the late Velma Johnston ("Wild Horse Annie"). In Nevada, ranching is a mainstay business in rural counties. The levels of public interest in wild horses are high in Nevada, both from the protection and removal viewpoints. The Bureau of Land Management in Nevada has been and is involved in wild horse related court litigation. Litigations have been brought mainly by protectionist groups seeking to stop what they view as unwarranted horse gathering. However, the Nevada Department of Wildlife filed suit in 1979 in an attempt to expedite Bureau of Land Management horse gathering processes.

#### PARTICIPATING STAFF

Richard T. Watts, Manager  
Egan Resource Area

George W. Cropper, Chief  
Division of Resource Management

Richard Howard  
Wild horse and Burro Specialist

Kathy Kushler  
Environmental Coordinator

Larry Jung  
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Roddy Hardy  
Threatened and Endangered Plant Specialist

Jake Rajala  
Outdoor Recreation Planner

Mark Goeden  
Supervisory Range Conservationist, Egan Resource Area

Mike Perkins  
Wildlife Biologist, Egan Resource Area

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In many portions of the proposed gather area there is clear evidence of declining or deteriorated habitat condition. Excessive use by grazing animals, principally horses and livestock, is the primary causal factor. The subject area also provides key seasonal and yearlong habitat for many species of wildlife, notably mule deer.

Removal of 400 to 500 wild horses as proposed would be highly beneficial from the habitat management viewpoint. This would constitute removal of approximately 33 percent to 42 percent of the existing population, leaving sufficient numbers to maintain a viable herd.

The alternative proposing the removal of 800 horses would benefit this area tremendously because the trespass branded horse situation would be virtually eliminated, illegal horse gathering and branding operations could be virtually shut down, and habitat conditions could be expected to improve sooner. However, negative reactions from the various wild horse groups may be expected with the acceptance of this alternative.

Public interest is likely to be intense due to the controversial nature of the wild horse issue and the national visibility of the program. Viewpoints both pro and con should be anticipated.

Acceptance of the "no action" or the "removal of trespass branded horses" alternatives would result in a continuing acceleration of habitat damage. Under these alternatives there is a significant potential for eventual direct loss of wildlife and horses.

FINAL DRAFT

Reviewed by

	<u>Initial</u>	<u>Date</u>
Richard T. Watts, Manager Egan Resource Area	<u>RTW</u>	<u>6/12/80</u>
Kathy L. Kushler Environmental Coordinator	<u>KLK</u>	<u>6/12/80</u>

## APPENDIX I

The proposed removal of 400 horses from the Buck, Bald and Maverick Area is just one of the management tools to be utilized to improve deteriorating range conditions. The following is a breakdown of current or proposed activities to be utilized for overall habitat improvement.

### 1. Trespass Abatement

Trespass by livestock and branded horses has been and continues to be a problem. Increased range use supervision has resulted in several trespasses, one of which has resulted in the permittee being scheduled to appear before an Administrative Law Judge.

While trespass is still an occasional problem, it has been reduced and is not as flagrant as it was in the past. It is anticipated that a high level of range use supervision will be maintained after the removal of the wild and branded horses.

Trespass branded horses are a major problem, despite numerous claimed and branded horses being removed during the claiming period allowed under the Wild Horse and Burro Act. It is estimated that 15-20 percent of the horses to be removed will bear the brands of several past and present permittees. The removal of these branded horses will eliminate a portion of the overall problems related to the current range deterioration.

### 2. Cooperation of Permittees

During the past several years, several permittees have improved and maintained eleven additional waters within the area. These waters have provided livestock, wildlife and wild horses with water which was otherwise unavailable or inadequate.

One permittee has acquired additional AUM's (Animal Unit Months) outside the district in hopes of relieving some of the grazing pressure currently being exerted upon his allotment. Another has taken some non-use and is planning to keep his cattle off of the white sage flats during the critical growing season. This action, however, without some reduction in horse numbers, will not accomplish the desired goal. Until such time as we are able to allocate the available forage, livestock reductions will continue to be on a voluntary basis.

### 3. Habitat Management Plans

A habitat management plan is currently being prepared to improve and protect crucial mule deer winter range which falls within the area. This crucial winter range is currently being impacted not only by wild horses, but by livestock grazing and intense mining and oil and gas exploration.

Projects associated with this HMP include, but are not limited to, prescribed burning, various vegetative manipulations, water development, protection of riparian habitat, acquisition of private property through exchange, livestock and wild horse reductions, along with grazing system revision and/or development.

4. Mining/Oil and Gas Exploration

The area is currently undergoing intense exploration for oil and gas; mining claims and prospects cover the area and Amselco is currently operating a small open pit mine and heap leaching process, with anticipated expansion in the future. Amselco has established a permanent camp, constructed an all-weather haul road and is preparing to apply for a power line right-of-way through Mt. Wheeler Power Company.

All of these activities have impacted and will continue to impact not only the wildlife, but the wild horses as well. Habitat has been and will be taken out of production, thus forcing all large herbivores to compete for a decreasing availability forage.

The loss of habitat isn't the only impact caused by these intensive activities. Such things as disruption of migration routes, disruption of major trail systems to water and actual physical harassment are occurring and are expected to increase as the search for precious metals, oil and gas intensifies.

Amselco has tentatively agreed to cooperate in the development of waters, protection of riparian habitat and revegetation of abandoned drill pads within the crucial mule deer winter range. These projects without some constraints or reductions, not only on wild horses but also livestock, will fail to achieve their goal. Constraints upon the mule deer rest with the State of Nevada through the establishment of hunting seasons and bag limits and cannot be addressed by the Bureau.

In addition, Amselco has recently announced bringing into production three adjacent open pits with full scale production expected to be achieved by 1981.

CLAIMED HORSES IN BUCK-BALD GATHER AREA

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Number removed at the end of the Claiming Period</u>
*1.	Art Cook	237	145
2.	Frank Mader (Rose	200	Claim filled
3.	Paul Held	33	15
4.	Pete Cordano	150	134
5.	Kay Lear	235	Claim filled
6.	Julian Goicoechea	44	0
7.	Robert Healy (Paris)	100	Claim filled
8.	Joe Salvi	9	2
9.	Bertrand Paris & Sons	109	Claim filled

\*Art Cook still maintains claim to approximately 300 head.

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FENCING?

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The loss of habitat isn't the only impact caused by these intensive activities. Such things as disruption of migration routes, disruption of major trail systems to water and actual physical harassment are occurring and are expected to increase as the search for precious metals, oil and gas intensifies.

Amselco has tentatively agreed to cooperate in the development of waters, protection of riparian habitat and revegetation of abandoned drill pads within the crucial mule deer winter range. These projects without some constraints or reductions, not only on wild horses but also livestock, will fail to achieve their goal. Constraints upon the mule deer rest with the State of Nevada through the establishment of hunting seasons and bag limits and cannot be addressed by the Bureau.

WHAT ABOUT IN HORSE AREAS

In addition, Amselco has recently announced bringing into production three adjacent open pits with full scale production expected to be achieved by 1981.



Roddy Hardy  
Threatened and Endangered Plant Specialist

Jake Rajala  
Outdoor Recreation Planner

Mark Goeden  
Supervisory Range Conservationist, Egan Resource Area

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Wildlife Biologist, Egan Resource Area

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In many portions of the proposed gather area there is clear evidence of declining or deteriorated habitat condition. Excessive use by grazing animals, principally horses and livestock, is the primary causal factor. The subject area also provides key seasonal and yearlong habitat for many species of wildlife, notably mule deer.

Removal of 400 to 500 wild horses as proposed would be highly beneficial from the habitat management viewpoint. This would constitute removal of approximately 33 percent to 42 percent of the existing population, leaving sufficient numbers to maintain a viable herd.

Public interest is likely to be intense due to the controversial nature of the wild horse issue and the national visibility of the program. Viewpoints both pro and con should be anticipated.

Acceptance of the "no action" or the "removal of trespass branded horses" alternatives would result in a continuing acceleration of habitat damage. Under these alternatives there is a significant potential for eventual direct loss of wildlife and horses.

SECOND DRAFT

Reviewed by

	<u>Initial</u>	<u>Date</u>
Richard T. Watts, Manager Egan Resource Area	<u>REW</u>	<u>4-10-80</u>
Kathy L. Kushler Environmental Coordinator	<u>KKK</u>	<u>4-11-80</u>

1200  
 500  
 700  
 12  
 1400  
 700  
 8400

1200  
 12  
 2400  
 1200  
 14400

1200 st.

14,440

pref.	active	NU
78,207	11,462	27,198

The current year's use of 38,660 Aums for livestock is only one Aum less than for the 3 year average use.

If 175 ~~of~~ trespass houses and assumed progeny of 13%  $\frac{175}{.13} = 525$  - approx 200 trespass houses

would be removed resulting in the reduction of 300 wild horses.

page 9 (para 2) states livestock will remain approx the same. This could not possibly be the case for I'm sure Mr Wright did not purchase additional Aums to not graze them. Cook's permit states is in question - resolution not due until summer.

~~Roughly then~~

A proportionate reduction in livestock would be in order for it is their over use, with horse contributing that has resulted in the decline.

areas have been disturbed by man and/or overgrazed by livestock. Little rabbitbrush has replaced the dominant desirable shrubs in this type where overgrazing has occurred.

There is no past or current record of any threatened or endangered plants in the proposed horse gathering area.

Horses have occurred in this area for many years. They are all descendents of ranch horses that were released in the area and have continued to propagate. It has been documented by Anthony Amaral in his book Mustang, that no horses occurred in the Great Basin prior to settlement by trappers, miners, and ranchers. Aerial census efforts conducted during 1978 and 1980, and BLM estimates indicate approximately 1,200 horses presently reside in the gathering area on a yearlong basis. This compares to approximately 700 to 800 horses in this area in 1978. *IT DOESN'T MATTER WHERE THEY CAME FROM* *25% INCREASE PER YEAR?*

Horses prefer grasses and grasslike species but they also will utilize shrubs and forbs when necessary. In the subject area, moderate to heavy use by horses and other grazing animals has reduced desirable grasses to the point that only shrubs and less available grasses remain. Shrubs are severely hedged and are being replaced by less desirable and unpalatable species such as halogeton.

Numerous game and non-game wildlife species utilize the subject area on a seasonal or yearlong basis. Game species include mule deer, sage grouse, blue grouse, chukars, several species of ducks, geese, and cottontail rabbits. Non-game species include rodents, reptiles and amphibians common to the Great Basin, pinyon jays, ravens, hawks, golden eagles, coyotes, badgers, bobcats, and horned larks. A more complete list of wildlife species can be found in the Cherry Creek URA. See attached map with wildlife use areas.

Mule deer are a highly important species. Presently there are an estimated 950 to 1,100 mule deer in the proposed gathering area on a year-long basis. Mule deer food consumption is influenced by seasonal preference, availability and quality of forage. Shrubs such as bitterbrush provide crucial food requirements for mule deer winter survival. Forbs and grasses provide important feed in the spring and early summer, but shrubs remain important for cover fawning areas. *950-1100 DEER*

Mule deer concentrations are greatest in portions of the proposed gather area where mountain shrub and sagebrush-grass vegetation types are found. Shrubs, especially big sagebrush, antelope bitterbrush, curlleaf mountain mahogany, and Utah serviceberry provide key forage for deer. The use of grass and forbs increases in the spring and summer months. One of the most critical elements is the amount and quality of browse available during winter months. Meadow areas are being lost to gully erosion and lowering of water tables, a direct cause related impact from overgrazing. Riparian areas and high elevation browse stands are declining in condition.

An estimated 11,500 to 12,000 deer winter in the subject area; there is a summer population of approximately 950 to 1,100 deer.

An estimated 700 deer inhabit the Buck and Bald Mountains on a yearlong basis, and an estimated 250 to 400 deer inhabit the Butte Mountains on a yearlong basis.

Livestock (cattle and sheep) use portions of 17 allotments within the gathering area throughout the year. Use by livestock has traditionally been heavy. Use by allotment is shown as follows:

AUM's Total Active Preference	Current Year in Gather Area		3-Year Average in Gather Area		Allot- ment No.	% of Use in Gather Area
	AUM's Active	AUM's Nonuse	AUM's Active	AUM's Nonuse		
9,129 ++	63	29	81	10	0603	1%
90 +++					0604	
90 +++					0605	
23,995 +++++	4,375	19,620	6,487	17,508	0606	
996	* ---	996	---	996	0609	
2,466	* 740	1,726	---	2,466	0610	
10,099 ++	3,013	2,744	2,979	2,777	0611	57%
648 ++	4	3	4	3	0612	1%
278 (Cook) 563 (Wright)	* ---	563	340	223	0619	
1,056	340	716	851	205	0620	
1,500	1,500	---	1,500	---	0621	
17,835 ++	1,113	670	1,557	227	0501	10%
698 ++	4	3	6	1	0502	1%
8,755 ++	310	128	306	132	0503	5%
<u>78,207 ++</u>	<u>11,462</u>	<u>27,198</u>	<u>14,111</u>	<u>24,548</u>	- TOTAL	

Current Year Use: 29.6% Active Use in Gather Area  
38,660 AUM's

3 Year Average : 36.5% Active Use in Gather Area  
38,659 AUM's (Average preference)

- \* Not accurate reflection because operator may be making more use next year, (just acquired the privileges thru transfer).
- ++ Total Active Preference AUM's outside of the gathering area.
- +++ Allotment 0604 and 0605 have been excluded because no horse use occurs in these allotments. They are completely fenced.
- ++++ AUM Average is two year average.

ELKO PORTION IN GATHER AREA

<u>Total Active Preference</u>	<u>Current Year in Gather Area</u>		<u>3 Year Average in Gather Area</u>		<u>Allotment No.</u>
	<u>AUM's Active</u>	<u>AUM's Nonuse</u>	<u>AUM's Active</u>	<u>AUM's Nonuse</u>	
920	920	---	920	---	Bald Mountain
785	785	---	785	---	Ruby #9
1,864	700	1,164	700	1,164	Maverick Springs Allotment
<u>3,569</u>	<u>2,405</u>	<u>1,164</u>	<u>2,405</u>	<u>1,164</u>	- TOTAL

67% Active Use in Elko Portion of Gather Area

Livestock use has remained fairly consistent over the last three years. The average AUM preference over the last three years in the gather areas (including Elko and Ely Districts) 42,228 AUM's, with about 39 percent of these AUM's taken in active use and 61 percent of these AUM's remaining in non-use. Current year's preference in the gather area (includes Elko and Ely Districts) is 42,229 AUM's with 33 percent of these AUM's being taken in active use and 67 percent remaining in non-use. *CAN BE PICKED UP AT ANY TIME*

Ecological Interrelationships

Ecological interrelationships are complex and diverse. For purposes of this analysis, discussion has been limited to major relationships concerning environmental elements affected by wild horses. Wild horses, as with other large mammals, are selective in their grazing patterns, tending to graze some plants heavily and others not at all. As numbers of horses increase, these areas of overuse become larger, and desirable plants are replaced by undesirable and less palatable species. This is evidenced by the invasion into white sage flats in the gathering area by halogeton and little rabbitbrush. This in turn lowers the carrying capacity for all animals, including horses. *WHEN PREFERENCE IS GIVEN, THE OVER ALLOCATION IS Automatic*

Competition for space, forage and water between livestock, wildlife and wild horses affects survival and reproductive rates of each.

## Human Values

Contrasting and varied topography make the gathering area visually pleasing to many people. Major population centers are far removed, the nearest community being Ely, Nevada, which is located 30 miles to the southeast.

Wild free-roaming horses were declared to be "living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the west" by Public Law 92-195, the Wild Horse and Burro Act. As such, they have educational, scientific, and cultural values to the people of the region and nationally. Local attitudes regarding the presence of wild horses, both generally and in the subject area, are varied. The greatest potential interest in preserving and viewing horses arises from the Reno and Las Vegas areas, and on a national level. It is felt that very little recreational use of horses either by viewing or photography is made by visitors in the area.

Known cultural values (archaeological remains) exist in the general gathering area. Little formal investigation has been conducted within this area; however, potential for evidence of previous human occupation is medium to high.

Lands included within the subject area are in various stages of Wilderness Inventory. The proposed action would have no significant impact on wilderness characteristics (see attached clearance).

There are high recreational values for big game hunting due to large concentrations of mule deer. Limited sage grouse and chukar hunting also occurs.

## ANALYSIS OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

### Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action - Remove 400 to 500 Wild Horses

#### Nonliving Components

Negligible impacts to air quality would occur during gathering operations and handling of horses, resulting from helicopter and vehicle exhaust emissions. Short-term increases in fugitive dust levels caused by operation of ground vehicles and running horses would occur.

Sites which presently exhibit active soil erosion would be positively impacted as would the water quality of sources presently exhibiting severe trampling and resultant contamination through sediment increase and/or fecal deposits in water.

Reduced competition between wildlife, livestock, and horses for water sources would be a high positive impact.

No impact on water quality would result from the horse gathering operation or the handling of horses which would be conducted away from water. Reduced horse numbers would lessen grazing and trampling at waterholes and riparian areas. This would provide a more favorable habitat for all animals.

#### Living Components

An area less than one acre in size (trap location), would be severely trampled during gathering operations. Vegetative regeneration would be expected within 2-3 years depending on climatic conditions.

It is expected that the intensity of livestock grazing would remain at approximately the same level.

A decrease in the horse population could be expected to have a positive impact on areas which presently exhibit soil erosion or have potential erosion characteristics. *As forage increases, will wild horses benefit also?*

The decreased horse population would have a high positive impact on terrestrial plants over a period of time. The decreased grazing *NOT UNLESS ALL GRAZING ANIMALS ARE REDUCED.* pressure would slow downward trends in overall range condition because of increased vigor and density of desirable perennial plants.

A negative impact on horses would be expected during gathering and handling. This would result from traumatic effects of capturing, trapping, loading and hauling of the animals. Enough horses would remain to maintain a viable herd and provide for interaction between bands. There would be a high positive impact on remaining horses, livestock and wildlife because of reduced competition with horses *Reduction could also stimulate increases unless precautions are taken.* for available forage. A negligible impact to other terrestrial animals is expected during the gathering process. Other animals could be temporarily frightened or displaced by the increased activity in the area.

#### Ecological Interrelationships

A decrease in the horse population would result in a positive impact on vegetative succession. By reducing the competition for forage, the more palatable climax and subclimax species would be able to regain their vigor, thus allowing them to remain established. If the climax species remain established, the unpalatable invader species would not become dominant.

#### Human Values

Should significant archaeological remains be present at the specific location of the trap, damage or destruction could result.

Removal of wild horses would reduce viewing opportunity, and affect those who value horses. Removal of horses will have an economic impact on those ranchers who have trespass branded horses that are

captured, since they will have to pay gathering costs, trespass fees and other associated costs before these animals can be turned over to them. Removal of horses would benefit ranchers by reducing competition for existing forage and eventually the increased forage, would provide economic benefits for them. *No licensing of horses in areas of wild horses*

A potential exists for possible animosity and physical violence between certain individuals and Bureau personnel. *ONLY AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL SHOULD HAVE ACCESS.*

The entire project area is currently in VRM (Visual Resource Management) interim management class III status. The proposed project will result in a limited and temporary disturbance of soil and vegetation, and a temporary structure on the landscape. Once the portable traps are removed there will be no residual short-term or long-term impacts on the visual resources. Therefore, a visual contrast rating is not necessary for this proposed project.

#### Recommended Mitigating Measures

- (1) Horse handling should be kept to a minimum. Capture and transporting operations are exceedingly traumatic to the animals. Minimizing the handling would increase the safety of the animals, as well as the handlers. *SEPARATION IN SHIPPING*
- (2) No gathering should be allowed between March 1, 1980 and July 15, 1980 because of the potential stress to pregnant and lactating mares and the possibility of induced abortions. Gathering may be resumed after the foaling period and after foals are grown enough to withstand the stress of gathering operations.
- (3) Horses should not be run <sup>HARD</sup> more than 10 miles during gathering operations and gathering will be done in the early morning and early evening to avoid overheating horses during the hot weather when the first roundup is scheduled.
- (4) A veterinarian will be on call during gathering operations.
- (5) Helicopters will be used with caution. A qualified district BLM representative will be present during gathering attempts to insure strict compliance with the above mileage limitations and CFR 4700 regulations.
- (6) Captured horses that are obviously aged, lame, deformed, or sick should be humanely disposed of at the trap site.
- (7) Captured horses that are clearly unsuitable for adoption but that do not fall under (6) above, should be collared with identifiable neck bands and released for study purposes.
- (8) A cultural resource investigation by an archaeologist or D.A.T. should be made prior to any trap construction. If a significant find is discovered, an alternate trap site should be selected.



- (9) Every effort will be made to keep mares and their young foals *REFER to pg 10* together. Mares with foals on the ground will be separated from stallions and barren mares before shipping to central BLM facilities at Palomino Valley (Reno, Nevada) and/or Delta, Utah.
- (10) Horses will not be held more than 12 hours without food or water (due to hot weather at the time of the roundup).
- (11) A BLM law enforcement agent will be present during the gathering operation to provide protection for personnel working on the roundup.

Residual Impacts

Reduced competition for water and vegetation should result in improved plant vigor, condition, and reproductive potential. A sufficient horse population would remain to maintain a viable horse herd.  
*WHAT DATA WOULD THIS BE BASED ON? IF ALL HORSES ARE TO BE GATHERED? MANIPULATION*

Relationships Between Short-term Use and Long-term Productivity

The impacts of this proposed action would enhance the environment for a short period of time. Over utilization of forage by uncontrolled horse populations would increase to a degree detrimental to the horses themselves, as well as wildlife and livestock. (It is estimated that horses in this area are increasing at a rate of 13 percent per year.) *13% per year*

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources

None.

Alternatives - Removal of Trespass Branded Horses and No Action

Environmental Impacts

Same for both alternatives.

Non-Living Components

Uncontrolled horse populations combined with wildlife and livestock use would have a negative impact on soils susceptible to erosion. Gullies and soil compaction would increase, causing not only loss of soil but increase water sedimentation and increase loss of preferred and desirable forage plants.

Living Components

A negative impact on vegetation and animals is anticipated under these alternatives. Uncontrolled horse numbers would increase to the point that most available forage would be utilized to the detriment of livestock, wildlife, and the horses themselves.

Livestock operators are using less than half of their total preference but horses are making the balance of AUM's used over 50 percent. This is not a major problem, but the main problem is that horses concentrate in preferred forage areas yearlong and tend to overuse them, moving only when climatic conditions force them to move to other areas. This makes the competition for the forage in these areas severe with wildlife and livestock. Wildlife (mule deer) have controls placed on their population levels; livestock are regulated by numbers, season of use and area of use. But at present horses do not have any active controls on their population and the continued growth and expansion of their numbers will make excessive demands on the vegetative resource.

#### Ecological Interrelationships

A negative impact surrounding vegetative succession should be anticipated from these alternatives. The uncontrolled horse numbers combined with livestock and wildlife use would have a continuing adverse effect on the dominant desirable vegetative species. Continued heavy grazing of preferred forage plants would cause continued loss of plant vigor and reproductive capacity. Vegetative succession would regress to a lower seral stage with undesirable forage species making up a greater portion of the total vegetative cover. This would ultimately result in lower productivity and population decline for all animals.

#### Human Values

There would be greater opportunity to view horses through steadily increasing populations. But an increased die-off of wild horses would offend many people's values. Also, certain individuals would have increased opportunities to brand and harass wild horses, using them for their private gain. Ranchers in the area would experience a severe economic impact through the loss of forage and AUM's from the increasing horse population.

#### Recommend&Mitigating Measures

None

#### Residual Impacts

Wild horse populations would continue to increase, resulting in further deterioration of vegetation and reduced carrying capacities.

#### Relationship Between Short-Term Use and Long-Term Productivity

Continued overuse would result in the eventual loss of soil and desirable plants through erosion and a general lowering of productivity of habitat on a long-term basis.

#### Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources

Continued overgrazing of the forage resources would result in wind

and water erosion of unprotected soils. The soils removed from hills and mountainsides by erosion constitutes an irretrievable resource loss.

PERSONS, GROUPS, AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES CONSULTED

Nevada State Grazing Board No. 4 - Ely, Nevada

Nevada State Department of Wildlife - Ely, Nevada

International Society for the Protection of Wild Horses and Burros -  
Reno, Nevada

Wild Horse Organized Assistance, Reno, Nevada

American Horse Protection Association, Washington, D.C.

American Humane Association, Denver, Colorado

Animal Protection Institute, Sacramento, California

U.S. Humane Society, Washington, D.C.

Fund for animals, Salt Lake City, Utah

National Mustang Association, St. George, Utah

National Wild Horse Association, Las Vegas, Nevada

Wild Horse and Burro Committee for National Academy of Science,  
Logan, Utah

Nevada Division of Forestry

Nevada Division of State Parks

Nevada Division of Environmental Protection

Nevada Department of Wildlife

Mr. Craig C. Downer, P.O. Box 456, Minden, Nevada 89423

Elko District, Bureau of Land Management, Elko, Nevada 89801

INTENSITY OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Local Newspapers in both Ely and Elko have long been critical of the Bureau of Land Management wild horse management program. A series of articles and one editorial in the Ely Daily Times in October of 1978 focused on problems in another area. Letters are received periodically at the local Bureau of Land Management level that are highly critical of Bureau of Land Management horse round-ups and the general treatment given wild horses. These letters

highlight the sympathy and intense feeling one segment of the public has for wild horses.

Nationally, the issue of wild horses on western public rangelands has been an intense controversy spanning many years and beginning prior to the passage of the Wild Horse and Burro Act in 1971. Wild Horse preservationists are generally concerned with maintaining adequate habitat on public lands for optimum population levels of wild horses.

Ranchers who graze livestock on public lands view wild horses as competitive with livestock for forage and water and thus a threat to their interests. However, some ranchers and others support a maintenance of reasonable numbers of wild horses. Certain ranchers in this area have been reported to use wild horses for their private gain, and have trespass branded horses in the area; they will be opposed to any roundups.

Sportsmen and other wildlife interests also see horses as a competitive threat to wildlife populations and cite competition for food, water, cover, and space as being detrimental.

Nevada, the state with the highest wild horse population, was also the home state of the wild horse protection movement fostered by the late Velma Johnston ("Wild Horse Annie"). In Nevada, ranching is a mainstay business in rural counties. The levels of public interest in wild horses are high in Nevada, both from the protection and removal viewpoints. The Bureau of Land Management in Nevada has been and is involved in wild horse related court litigation. Litigations have been brought mainly by protectionist groups seeking to stop what they view as unwarranted horse gathering. However, the Nevada Department of Wildlife filed suit in 1979 in an attempt to expedite Bureau of Land Management horse gathering processes.

#### PARTICIPATING STAFF

Richard T. Watts, Manager  
Egan Resource Area

George W. Cropper, Chief  
Division of Resource Management

Richard Howard  
Wild horse and Burro Specialist

Kathy Kushler  
Environmental Coordinator

Larry Jung  
Wilderness Specialist

Temporary traps with deflector wings encompassing less than one acre would be constructed. The use of a contracted helicopter and horse wranglers would be necessary to drive and direct horses in a careful and efficient manner. Hazards such as cliffs, fences, and old mine shafts would be scouted in advance and existing roads and trails would be used. Wild horses would be transported by truck to temporary holding facilities in Palomino Valley, Nevada, and/or Delta, Utah for adoption processing, then shipped to distribution centers in the midwest for adoption. Horses that might be held at the trap site in excess of 12 hours would have food and water provided. Branded trespass horses and their current year's foal would be impounded and held until trespass fees, gathering fees, and associated costs are paid to the Bureau, and then would be turned over to the owner(s). Other branded horses not claimed will be treated under the Nevada State estray laws.

The proposed action is considered an "interim measure" to assist in control of habitat over-utilization pending completion of mandated Grazing Environmental Impact Statements and formal vegetative allocations which will not be fully implemented until after 1985.

#### Alternatives

Different methods of capturing wild horses are discussed in the capture plan (attached) and will not be discussed in the alternatives section of this assessment.

The two main viable alternatives to the proposed action are removal of only trespass branded horses and the no action alternative. Removal of more horses at this time would be beneficial for all resources, but due to fund restrictions it is impossible to consider this alternative. However, plans are being made to reduce the horse numbers in this area as funds become available for this purpose.

#### Alternative 1 - Removal of Trespass Branded Horses

There are an estimated 175 trespass branded horses in the proposed gathering area. Removal of these horses would provide temporary relief by leaving only wild horses in this area.

The major advantages to this alternative are:

- a) Eliminate management problems concerning wild horses being mixed with trespass branded horses. *IF ALL ARE CAUGHT*
- b) Allow planning for management of wild horses.

The major disadvantages to this alternative are:

- a) It would require excessive handling of both wild and trespass horses, making injury to horses and people more common.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

The Egan Resource Area, Ely District and the Wells Resource Area, Elko, District, Bureau of Land Management, propose to gather between 400 to 500 excess wild and/or privately owned horses using a helicopter and portable wing traps beginning on or about July 16, 1980. Gathering operations may be conducted over an 18 month period and may include gathering during two or three separate time periods to reduce horse herds to a manageable level.

Background

The subject area involves land administered by the Ely District and Elko District with wild, free-roaming horses intermingled with trespass branded horses. The area has historically provided important wildlife habitat, and has been subjected to heavy livestock, wild horse and trespass branded horse use. Currently increased mining activities and seismic exploration are taking place in the area, decreasing the usable habitat for the above-mentioned animals. Observations over recent years by qualified Bureau of Land Management field personnel have resulted in growing concerns of general range deterioration combined with steadily increasing and unmanaged horse population which reside in the subject area on a yearlong basis.

*PROVIDE & PROTECT  
HABITAT*

Another factor which complicates the horse situation in this area is that certain individuals are turning horses loose, and it appears that one individual in particular catches colts, brands them, and turns them back out on the range. "It is not uncommon to be in the area and see branded colts following unbranded mares." Several attempts have been made to apprehend this individual, but so far the Bureau has not been able to catch him in the act of branding horses. Bureau personnel check this area regularly for unlawful harrassment of wild horses. *Will the BUREAU BRAND "ALL" W/H RELEASED? If not, why not?*

During the 1974 claiming period, five individuals claimed 1,117 horses; of the total claim, 940 horses were actually removed. This figure does not include progeny. See attached appendix 1 for figures on claims, and added background information. *NONE ATTACHED hed*

Fund restriction and wide-spread controversy regarding wild horse manipulation have generally complicated this aspect of habitat management. The proposed project area is starting to come into the limelight since it contains a critical deer wintering area.

Proposed Action

The proposed gathering operations would be conducted from the east boundary of the Ruby Lake National Refuge and extend east to the middle of Butte Valley in Elko County and extend four (4) miles to ten (10) miles from the Elko-White Pine County line north in Elko County (see map No. 1). In White Pine County, the area extends from the Elko-White Pine County line south to U.S. Highway 50; the eastern boundary would be the crest of the Butte Mountains and extend west to the eastern side of Newark Valley (see map No. 2).

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

# Memorandum

8500  
(N-043)

TO : Manager, Egan Resource Area

DATE: April 8, 1980

FROM : Wilderness Specialist

SUBJECT: Proposed Buck-Bald Wild Horse Gathering

The proposed Buck-Bald horse gathering involves an area which includes a review unit presently in the intensive inventory phase of the wilderness program in the Ely District. This is: NV-040-034, Buck Mountain.

After a review of the proposed action and its impact on wilderness values, it is recommended that the action be allowed with the following restrictions on operations within intensive inventory areas:

1. All ground vehicular operations take place on existing roads and ways.
2. All traps be of a temporary nature.



- b) The cost factor would be higher per horse captured.
- c) Over-utilization of range resources would still be occurring, resulting in further range degradation.
- d) Competition between horses and other animals would still be excessive.

Alternative 2 - No action

Under the "status quo" alternative, no horses would be gathered.

DESCRIPTION OF THE EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

Nonliving

The subject area is rural in character. Topography consists of valley floors, alluvial fans, canyons, mountains, steep ridges, and basins. *REMOTE RIDGES?* Annual precipitation varies from 20 inches in higher elevations to 8 inches or less at the lower elevations. The bulk of the precipitation occurs through early spring rains and winter snows. Temperatures range from summer maximums in excess of 90 degrees F. to winter lows falling well below zero.

Air quality is good, although short-term increases in fugitive dust levels occur as the result of climatic variations and vehicular traffic.

Soil textures are generally loams, clay loams, and silt loams, most of which are capable of supporting desirable species of vegetation. The following table depicts soil characteristics:

<u>General Distribution</u>	<u>Principal Soil Orders</u>	<u>Soil Productivity</u>	<u>Erosion Susceptibility</u>
Mountains	Mollisols	Moderate-high	Moderate
Benches and Alluvial Fans	Aridisols	Moderate	Moderate
Valley Floors	Aridisols and Entisols	Low	Slight

Springs, reservoirs, wells, and intermittent streams provide an adequate *SEASON-OF-USE* water supply of generally fair to good quality. Competition by large animals (wildlife, horses, livestock) for use of the water is a threat to future maintenance of water quality as evidenced by excessive trampling of undeveloped springs, seeps, and wet meadows.

Living Components

Major plant associations may be generally characterized as big sagebrush-grass, mid sagebrush-grass, pinyon pine-juniper, winterfat-saltbush flats. For more detailed information see attached map of vegetative types.



The dominant shrub in the big sagebrush-grass community is big sagebrush (Artemisia tridentata). Other shrubs of this type occurring are greasewood, (Sarcobatus Vermiculatus); gray rabbitbrush, (Chrysothamnus nauseosus); at higher elevations Utah serviceberry, (Amelanchier utahensis), and bitterbrush, (Purshia tridentata). Common forbs include buckwheat, (Eriogonum spp.), princess plume, (Stanleya pinnata); mustards, (Brassica spp.), and lupine, (Lupinus spp.). Common grasses include great basin wildrye, (Elymus cinereus); western wheatgrass, (Agropyron smithii); Sandberg bluegrass, (Poa secunda); bluebunch wheatgrass, (Agropyron spicatum); Indian ricegrass, (Oryzopsis hymenoides); squirreltail, (Sitanion hystrix); and where perennial grasses have been over utilized or removed by fires, cheatgrass, (Bromus tectorum) has become the dominant understory.

The dominant shrubs in the mid-sagebrush-grass are low sagebrush, (Artemisia arbuscula) and black sagebrush, (Artemisia arbuscula nova). Black sagebrush occurs more frequently than low sagebrush in this area. Other common shrubs occurring in this type are little rabbitbrush, (Chyrsothamnus viscidiflorus); shadscale, (Artiplex confertifolius); winterfat, (Ceratoides lanata); and Mormon tea, (Ephreda nevadensis). Common forbs in this type are mustards, (Brassica spp.); buckwheats, (Eriogonum spp.); locoweeds, (Oxytropis spp and Astragalus spp.) Pepper weeds, (Lepidium spp.) and penstemon, (Penstemon spp.) Common grasses include western wheatgrass, (Agropyron smithii); Sandberg bluegrass, (Poa secunda); Indian ricegrass, (Oryzopsis hymenoides), and squirreltail, (Sitanion hystrix).

Pinyon pine-juniper type occurs on valley benches and extends into the higher elevations. The pinyon pine, (Pinus monophylla) and Utah juniper, (Juniperus osteosperma), are the dominant overstory. Understory plants include segments from the big-sagebrush-grass and mid-sagebrush-grass communities. Other shrubs occurring in the pinyon pine-juniper type not already listed are curlleaf mountain mahogany, (Cercocarpus ledifolius); green Mormon tea, (Ephredra viridis), and snowberry (Symphoricarpos spp.) At higher elevations and where water is at or near the ground surface there are scattered patches of aspen, (Populus tremuloides) in the area.

The fourth major plant association is the winterfat-salt-bush flats. This plant association occurs on the valley bottoms and lower valley benches. The dominant shrubs in this type are shadscale, (Artriplex confertifolia), and winterfat, (Ceratoides lanata). Other common shrubs in this type are spiny hopsage, (Grayia spinosa); greasewood, (Sarcobatus vermiculatus); budsage, (Artemisia spinescens); kochia (Kochia spp.); little rabbitbrush, (Chyrsothamnus viscidiflorus), and big sagebrush, (Artemisia tridentata). The most common forbs are buckwheats, (Eriogonum spp.), and mustards, (Brassica spp.). The most common grasses are Indian ricegrass, (Oryzopsis hymenoides); squirreltail, (Sitanion hystrix), and sand dropseed grass, (Sporobolus spp.).

Invasions of halogeton, (Halogeton glomeratus); Russian thistle, (Salsola kali), and cheatgrass, (Bromus tectorum) are common where

## CAPTURE PLAN FOR BUCK-BALD HORSE GATHER

### INTRODUCTION

This document outlines the process and the events involved with the Buck-Bald Horse Gathers. Included are the number of horses to be captured, the time and method of capture, and the handling of captured horses (wild and branded horses). Also outlined are the BLM personnel involved with the roundup, the delegation of authority, the briefing of the contractor(s), and the public meeting to be held. Maps are enclosed to help readers locate the proposed gathering area.

### Number of Horses to be Gathered

The proposed number of horses to be gathered is 400 to 500 animals. This number is tentative because it is not known what the contract cost will be at the present time, how the capturing process will proceed due to climatic conditions, and the animals' behavior and other unforeseen factors. The actual number of horses captured may be slightly higher or lower.

### Time and Method of Capture

The roundup is scheduled to start after July 15, 1980 and to be completed by September 30, 1980. Other roundups may be scheduled in this area within an 18 month period. The time of this roundup is not desirable, but due to fund restrictions this is the only time that the roundup can be scheduled. This time is not desirable because the horses are generally located at higher elevations, requiring more careful work and planning in moving them and in locating traps. A helicopter's fuel efficiency, load capacity and working ability are greatly reduced at this time of year due to hot weather. And in addition, this time of year is generally the end of the foaling season, when greater care and caution must be used in handling mares with young foals.

The method of capture to be used will be a helicopter, and horseback riders at the wings of portable traps.

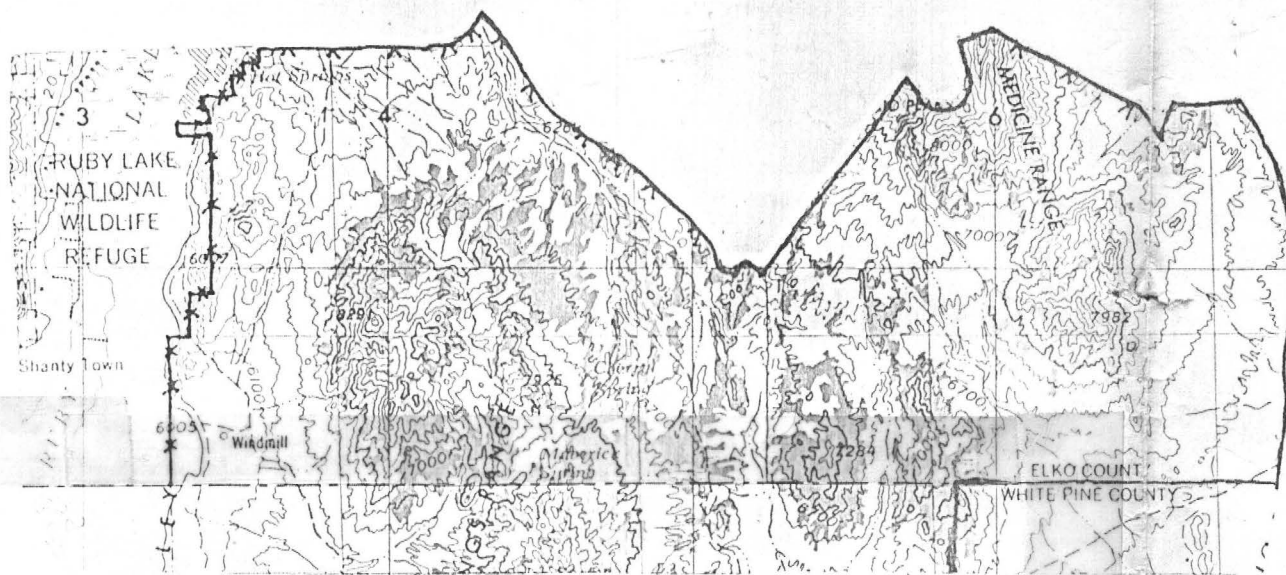
Other methods of capture are not being considered because of the increased cost per horse. Water trapping, though easier on horses, is not feasible due to the numerous springs, reservoirs and other water sources available to horses in the proposed gathering area. Water traps take time to construct and require time for horses to accept as part of their environment; the time allotted to this roundup is limited. Also, water traps after being used a few times are not successful in capturing horses. Trapping horses by running them on horseback is not feasible because it is too easy to lose the horses after starting them towards the trap; injuries to both people and horses is more likely, and the cost factor shown from previous roundups using this method indicates that the costs are prohibitive.

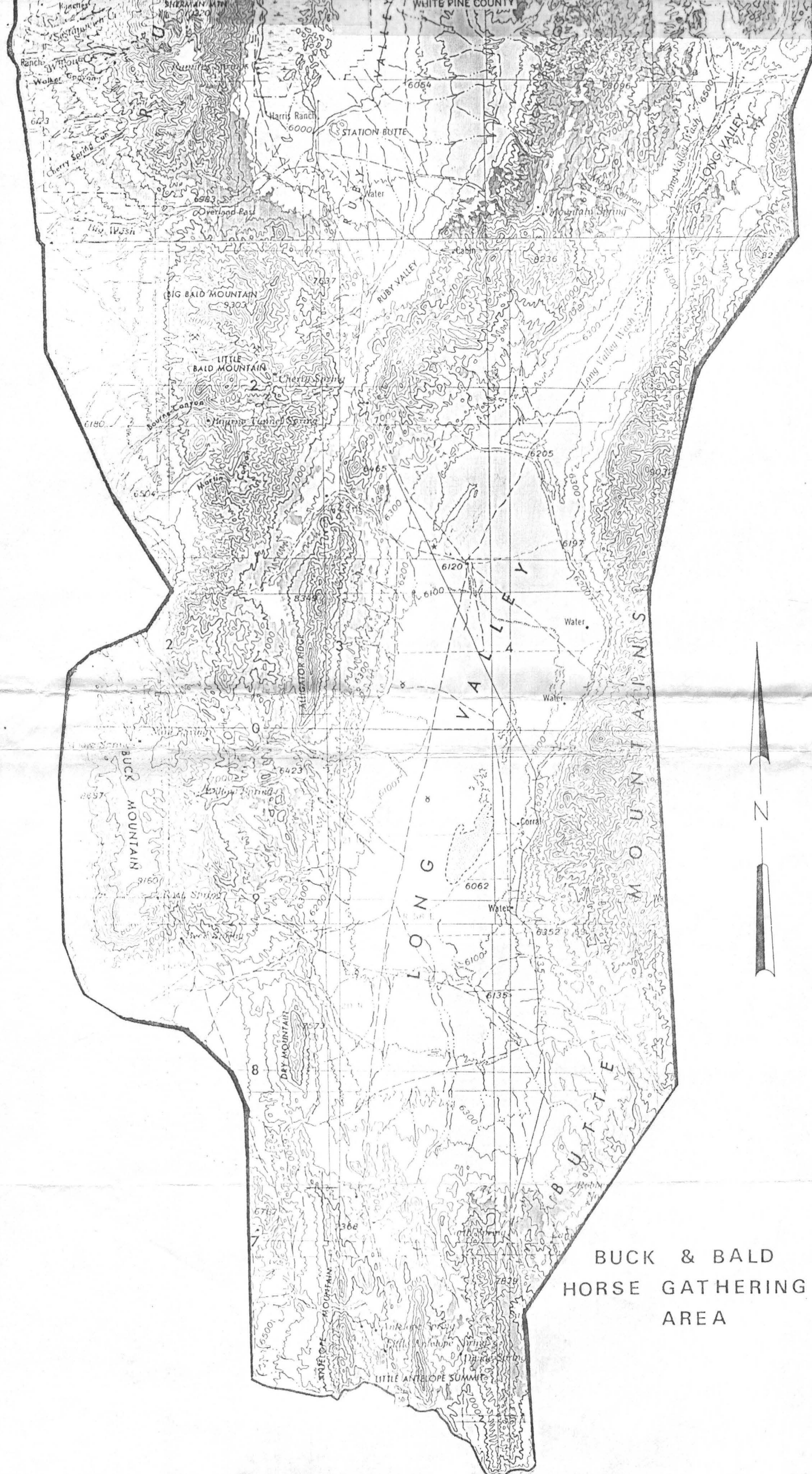
ELKO COUNTY AREA IN THE BUCK-  
BALD HORSE GATHER



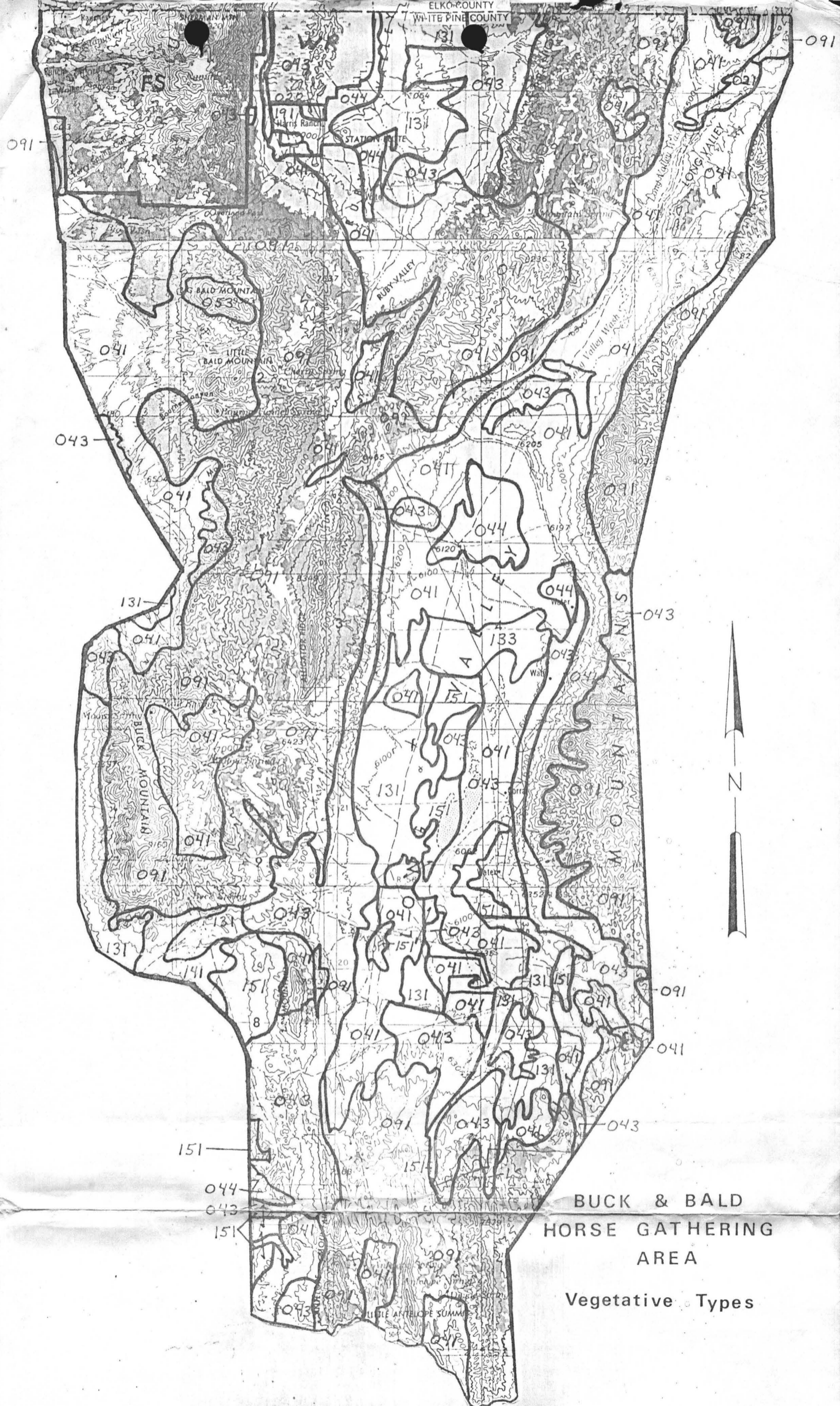
BUCK & BALD

ELKO COUNTY AREA IN THE BUCK-  
BALD HORSE GATHER





BUCK & BALD  
HORSE GATHERING  
AREA



BUCK & BALD  
HORSE GATHERING  
AREA  
Vegetative Types

5/23/80

May 23, 1980

Mr. Neil McKleery, District Manager  
Bureau of Land Management  
Post Office Box 831  
Ely, Nevada 89801

Dear Mr. McKleery:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to comment upon the Egan Resources' Buck-Bald Wild Horse Gathering Plan.

Background, page 1, paragraph 2

WHOA! can appreciate the need for mineral independence and fuel-self sufficiency; however, the impacts and how the Bureau intends to deal with those impacts upon the wild horses was not addressed, only mentioned. It would appear that impacts must be determined prior to leasing of the federal lands, if alternatives are to be sought that would mitigate those impacts. PL 92-195 clearly states the wild horses will be protected, managed and controlled, and we would interpret that to mean their habitat--if threatened, would be the Bureau's responsibility. Living space, cover and forage, water MUST be provided, even if it means lesser AUM's available to livestock in adjoining allotments.

page 1, paragraph 3

The individuals to which the proposal refers are well known to this organization and we support whole-heartedly the removal of trespass horses and wonder why it has taken the Bureau nearly nine years to take such action? If horses were no longer claimed after 1975, please explain why the Bureau cannot take action upon individual or band that occurs on any animals under five years of age, clearly to us it is a violation of not only state laws but PL 92-195 itself.

A Alternative (disadvantages, pg. 3)(c)

We question on what data is this based on? Over optimistic range surveys and the allocation of preference with no allocation to wildlife or wild horses; very definitely indicates that wild horse populations have not been the problem--over allocation, illegal use, and mismanagement and insufficient field supervision has led to the depleted conditions.

A discussion in the alternatives stated that funds were insufficient to reduce the horse population to the desired level, how then does the bureau plan to have increased field supervision?

(a)

What happens to trespass horses that are not caught? Will they not be the seed used for further illegal harassment of the wild horses?

1978 1980  
1979 22 77

Description of Existing Environment

Although trespass was discussed lightly, I believe that the illegal use, which has a severe impact on the wild horses (due to forage etc and not identified) should be listed in the existing conditions. At least a five year average is some basis on which to determine for one's self what the root problem really is.

1980-Egan  
1200

page 5

1077

Usually aerial surveys provide the basis over a period of years in estimating the population increases; if the estimate is 1200, then the District is implying without stating such that the population doubled (700) from 1978?

page 5

It is generous of the permittees to cooperate in this manner, and rather rude of us to state that it is about time. Two years ago and before that horses were not even an "item" and so in our minds they are paying for mis-use of years past.

page 5, paragraph 4,5

States 950-1100 deer population in gathering area yearlong--pg 6 states 11,500-12,000 deer in winter with 950-1100 in summer. The statements conflict with one another. Page 5 would indicate there were no deer than 1100 deer during the year. How many AUMs have been set aside for this expansion?

page 6

The non-use can be from a number of factors: climate, water, and market in addition to the allocation of forage to other legitimate range uses. The Elko portion shows largely active preference, and since the non-use can be picked up at any time; what is to prevent the Bureau from reducing the horses, reducing livestock and once the horses are gone, increasing the livestock? In which case would not alleviate the range conditions, only prolong them.

Throughout the plan the impact of the horses has been identified as negative, nowhere in the proposal have we seen any of the beneficial impacts of the horses; such as upper incisors (which cut grasses), the ability to disperse over a wider area, as a perissodactyl can consume coarser and dryer forage--leaving newer shoots to the exposure of the sun, reseed ranges, trample seeds, paw out vegetation for wildlife in winter, etc.

The use is 42,228 AUMs-livestock; and 14,400 AUMs wild horses, including those trespass and progeny; therefore the lion's share of forage still favors livestock and thereby the impact is livestock with horses contributing.

Statement, page 7 (bottom)

Is inconsistent with the Bureau claims (inventories).

Page 9, paragraph 6

Reduction of the horses could also stimulate reproduction. What is the basis for determining the remaining numbers and viability?

paragraph 6

The ecosystem is constantly changing, the land, the soil and the plants; how does the Bureau intend to save Mother Nature from herself?

paragraph 7

We believe these in trespass are very wise to the Bureau system. If they claim



Page three

them under trespass laws, full costs are transferred to them plus the trespass fee. If they wait they can bid for them at public auction for a lesser fee than trespass and capture costs.

Page 10

(3) believe 10 miles in excess for young colts and hot weather

(4) from where and how long

(5) ground to air control by the Bureau

(6) describe aged?

(7) to gather what information?

Page 11 paragraph 8

13% rate of increase is not consistent with 1978-1980 estimates.

Page 12, paragraph 2

see comment page 5 (our page two)

There was some indication in conversation with Mr. Howard that more reductions would be desired, but funds prevented this. If this is the case how can the Bureau assure us that monitoring, collecting of data and supervision of the ranges will also not be cut short by funding.

We are disturbed to think that to prevent abuses by a certain percentage of your permittees, that wild horses would have to pay the penalty of capture in order to prevent those individuals from harassing them. I believe sufficient information exists that would allow for prosecution of the individuals should this continue to be the case. We believe the Bureau has turned its head for too long in this case.

If harassment of the herds are sufficient to cause this concern why hasn't the District considered branding the wild horses?

We would not mind seeking additional funds for the District if we were convinced the damage was horses and if livestock were going to be managed as the Bureau has claimed they have been managed in the past. We certainly will not support reductions so that livestock will benefit.

We would like to know how many horses will be removed from each of the allotments, listed similarly to the table on preferences.

Most sincerely,

Dawn V. Lappin (Mrs.)  
Director