



# United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

705 East Fourth Street  
Winnemucca, Nevada 89445

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7/15/80  
IN REPLY REFER TO

4700/1791  
(N-027.8)

July 15, 1980

National Horse Organized Assistance  
Dawn Lappin  
P.O. Box 555  
Reno, NV 89504

Dear Ms. Lappin:

The Lava Beds Herd Use Area (HUA), approximately 15-20 miles east of Gerlach, Nevada, has shown a marked increase in wild horse and burro numbers in the past eleven years, which when combined with other grazing activities has caused a deteriorating range condition and has adversely affected the ecological balance of the area.

An inventory conducted in the spring of 1969 revealed a total of 26 wild horses in the HUA. The most recent inventory, conducted in February 1980, revealed a total of 789 horses and 38 burros. After the completion of this foaling season, it is estimated that there will be 876 horses and 42 burros (based on an 11% net increase in numbers per year). These 918 animals will utilize approximately 11,016 AUMs of forage. This is in addition to the 2,106 AUMs of licensed domestic livestock use, and approximately 157 AUMs of wildlife use, which results in a total use demand in 1980 of 13,279 AUMs. Preliminary figures from the 1979 range survey indicate that the carrying capacity for the HUA is estimated to be 5,607 AUMs. This indicates that the HUA is overobligated by an estimated 7,672 AUMs, or 137%.

Because of this situation significant resource damage is occurring in the HUA; perennial grasses are being grazed close to 100 percent yearly, and sagebrush and hopsage plants are being pawed out by horses in search of the protected grasses in the shrub understories. This is causing a significant decrease in the percentage of ground cover and is contributing to increased soil erosion problems, plus increased wildlife and livestock competition for forage.



On June 18, 1980, a meeting was held in the Winnemucca District Office with one of the affected livestock operators, Wild Horse Organized Assistance, and the Nevada Department of Wildlife. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the various management options available to the bureau to protect the soil and vegetation resources from further deterioration, and to insure the preservation of a healthy, viable, and productive wild horse/burro herd. The livestock operator, in charge of the cattle operation in the HUA, stated that for the past five years (the period of time when the horse herds started showing their most notable gains) he has voluntarily reduced his cow herd by 84%, to compensate for the lack of forage in the area. Listed below are several alternatives that the group decided should be analyzed in the forthcoming Environmental Assessment (EA) as possible management options.

#### Alternatives

1. Proportionate reduction of livestock and wild horses/burros to meet the carrying capacity.
2. Reduce the wild horse/burro numbers to interim management levels of 90/30 respectively and don't alter the present domestic livestock use.
3. Reduce the wild horse/burro numbers to interim management levels and allow domestic livestock numbers to increase in succeeding years at the same rate as the wild horses until the carrying capacity is reached.
4. Reduce the wild horse/burro numbers to interim management levels and modify the season of use for the sheep operation by having them come off one month earlier than the present license requires or change the area of use to the valley floors, or a combination of both.

Should a roundup be determined necessary, it would possibly begin in November or December 1980, depending on the availability of funds and manpower, and would continue until the proposed number of horses/burros are captured.

In accordance with Section 14 of the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-514), we invite your comments concerning the management options.

Upon completion of the draft EA, a copy will be available upon request.



If you require any further information please contact Brad Hines  
or Rodger Bryan at this office.

If you care to comment on any or all of these alternatives, please  
do so by August 4, 1980.

Sincerely yours,

*Vaden G. Stickley*  
Vaden G. Stickley  
Acting District Manager