



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Winnemucca District Office
5100 East Winnemucca Boulevard
Winnemucca, Nevada 89445
702-623-1500

In Reply Refer To:
NV022.40

May 28, 1997

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed with this letter is a copy of a Draft Gather Plan for the McGee Mountain Burro Herd Management Area (HMA). If you have comments on the enclosed Draft please forward them to us within 30 days of the date of this letter.

If you have questions concerning the gather plan please feel free to contact Ron Hall of my staff, at (702) 623-1574 or write to the above address. Thanking you in advance for your involvement in our Wild Horse and Burro Management Program.

for Duane E. Wilson
Colin P. Christensen
ADM Renewable Resources
Winnemucca District Office

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Winnemucca District Office
Division of Renewable Resources

McGee Mountain Draft
Wild Burro Removal Plan

1997

Draft McGee Mountain HMA

Wild Burro Removal Plan

I. INTRODUCTION

The intent of this removal plan is to outline the methods and procedures to be used in gathering and removing 50 burros from the McGee Mountain HMA and an area between the Sheldon Antelope Refuge boundary and the west slopes of Pueblo Mountains NE of the HMA (See Appendix 1). The proposed action would reduce the burro population of the management area to a number within the AML range established in the Alder Creek Allotment Final Multiple Use Decision (FMUD's) dated January 27, 1994. The proposed removal operation is scheduled to begin no earlier than August 15, 1997.

II. GENERAL AREA DESCRIPTION - BACKGROUND DATA

A. Location

The McGee Mountain HMA is located 15 air miles SW of Denio, Nevada. The Burros have never occupied the HMA except for the fringes on the lower slopes of McGee Mountain. Essentially all the Burros are located outside official HMA boundaries. It appears that the data available at the time the HMA boundaries were established was either inadequate or in error. (See Appendix 1.)

B. Final Multiple Use Decision (FMUD)

The FMUD for the Alder Creek Allotment states in part "Adjust the HMA boundary during the Resource Management Plan (RMP) Process to include Bog Hot and Gridley Lake pastures within the Alder Creek Allotment. Delete those portions of the HMA within the Wilder-Quinn and Knott Creek allotments. Set the initial AML at 41 burros as per the Paradise-Denio Resource Area Management Framework Plan." An RMP has not been instituted so boundary adjustments have not been accomplished to date. Until such time as the adjustments are final, the Gridley Lake and Bog Hot Pastures of the Alder Creek Allotment will be treated as if they were within the HMA and burros will be managed within these boundaries.

C. Sheldon Antelope Refuge/BLM burro distribution

The area inhabited by burros within the Sheldon Refuge is adjacent to the McGee HMA and the area inhabited by burros outside HMA boundaries. Movement of burros between administrative jurisdictions has been primarily along the north boundary south of highway 140, and the east boundary north of highway 140. (see appendix 1 and 2) During the summer/fall of 1996 Sheldon Refuge completed their boundary fence along the east and south boundary in question. This fence will limit burro movement between administrative boundaries but has left approximately 25 burros outside Sheldon Refuge and outside the areas identified in the Alder Creek FMUD as a burro management area.

A 1980 Sheldon Management Plan/EIS identified that they would manage "approximately 75-125 animals(wild horses) and between 30 and 60 individuals (wild burros)", within the refuge. The Bureau of Land Management has never gathered the McGee Mountain Burros. The Sheldon Refuge has at times gathered both burros and wild horses in the Refuge. Given that the two agencies operate under different laws and regulations, it is important to manage the herds separately. The Alder Creek/Wilder-Quinn Allotment boundary fence did separate the use areas to an extent, but the recent boundary fence constructed by the Sheldon Refuge should be more effective.

The present distribution of burros inside and outside management areas are identified on appendix 1.

D. Population Management

Existing numbers of wild burros are 65 within the management area and 25 outside the prescribed management area. This proposed action would remove

all 25 burros outside the management area and would remove approximately 25 within the management area to reduce the population to the AML. The numbers gathered will approximate the numbers removed. A "gate cut" selective removal will be the removal strategy. If in the last numbers of burros captured the total capture exceeds the estimated removal number then the number of burros above 25 within the management area will be released. Blood samples will be taken from all release burros to develop baseline genetic data. In addition, all release burros will be freeze marked on the left hip with a (10) which corresponds to the last two digits of the HMA number of 210. This will enable BLM to determine the extent of movement of burros outside the prescribed management area.

D. Justification

The Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971 (Public Law 92-195) as amended, Section 3(b)(1), states that the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture shall "determine appropriate management levels of wild free-roaming horses and burros on areas of public lands; and determine whether appropriate management levels should be achieved by the removal or destruction of excess animals, or other options (such as sterilization or natural controls on population levels)." Section 3(b)(2) states, "that if an overpopulation exists on a given area of the public lands and that action is necessary to remove excess animals, he shall immediately remove excess animals from the range so as to achieve appropriate management levels. Such action shall be taken, until all excess animals have been removed so as to restore a thriving natural ecological balance to the range, and protect the range from the deterioration associated with overpopulation."

E. Wilderness Study Areas

There are no wilderness study areas within the proposed management area or within the existing HMA boundary.

D. Reference to Environmental Assessment (EA)

An Environmental Assessment has been prepared addressing impacts of this gather and removal.

A Programmatic EA (No. NV-020-7-24) analyzing the environmental consequences and mitigating measures for the use of helicopters during gather operations was prepared and distributed for public comment in May 1987. After the incorporation of public comments, a Record of Decision and Finding of No Significant Impact was approved on August 4, 1987.

A Plan Conformance Record for the Alder Creek Allotment was completed on 1/21/94.

These documents are available for review at the Winnemucca District Office.

III. Methods For Removal And Safety

The methods employed during this capture operation will be herding burros with a helicopter to a trap built with portable panels, or herding animals with a helicopter to ropers. Roping will be a last resort and will only be used after trapping has proven unsuccessful. Burros are at times more difficult to trap than wild horses and typically a larger percentage of burros end up having to be roped. Every effort will be made to minimize roping as a gather tool. Circumstances where roping may be necessary include but are not limited to: 1. when wild burros cannot be captured by helicopter or bait trapping methods in areas which require complete removal, 2. when it is necessary to capture an orphaned foal or a suspected wet jenny. In all cases, when it is determined by the on-site Contracting Officer's Representative that animals must be roped, the roping will only proceed after consultation with the District Manager. The Bureau of Land Management will

contract with a private party for this operation. The following stipulations and procedures will be followed during the contract to ensure the welfare, safety and humane treatment of the wild burros

A. Trapping and Care of Animals

1. All capture attempts will be accomplished by the utilization of a helicopter. A minimum of one saddle horse shall be immediately available at the trap site to accomplish roping only if necessary. Under no circumstances shall animals be tied down for more than one hour.
2. The helicopter shall be used in such a manner that bands will remain together. Foals shall not be left behind. The project helicopter actions may occasionally be observed by a Government controlled helicopter. All actions of the Government helicopter will be coordinated with the Contractor to prevent interference with the project helicopter and contract operations.

In the event an additional helicopter is not available to observe the project helicopter, other methods will be utilized to observe the removal operations such as using observers on horseback, in vehicles and/or placing stationary observers in strategic locations.

Capture operations shall be monitored to ensure foals are not orphaned and left on the range. It will be standard practice to check for wet jennies without foals or foals coming into the trap without a jenny. Field personnel should provide additional on-the-ground monitoring of capture operations where possible. Additional personnel may be requested through the National Program Office (NPO) to assist with capture operations during periods when young foals are expected. If it appears that foals are being separated during the capture operations and ground monitoring will not provide adequate information to develop a solution, a monitoring helicopter may be used to determine the cause of the separations and to assist in reaching a resolution to the situation. The health and well being of the captured animals are paramount and responsibility for meeting this objective lies with the district office and COR (Contracting Officers Representative).

3. The rate of movement and distance that animals travel shall not exceed limitations set by the COR who will consider terrain, physical barriers, weather, condition of the animals and other factors.

Temperature limitations are 0°F as a minimum and 95°F as a maximum.

The terrain in the removal areas is primarily flat valley bottoms and lower mountainous slopes.

Prior to any gathering operation, BLM will provide for a pre-capture evaluation of existing conditions in the gather areas. The evaluation will include animal condition, prevailing temperatures, soil conditions, topography, road conditions, location of fences and other physical barriers, and animal distribution in relation to potential trap locations. The evaluation will also arrive at a conclusion as to whether the level of activity is likely to cause undue stress to the animals, and whether such stress would be acceptable or whether a delay in the capture activity is warranted. If it is determined that the capture efforts necessitate the services of a veterinarian, one will be obtained before the capture will proceed.

The Contractor will be provided with a topographic map of the removal area which shows acceptable trap locations and existing fences and/or physical barriers, and distribution of the burros.

The Contractor will also be appraised of the above conditions and will be given direction regarding the capture and handling of animals to ensure their health and welfare is protected.

4. It is estimated that a minimum of two trap site will be required. Trap locations and holding facilities must be approved by a BLM employee prior to construction. The Contractor may also be required to change or move trap locations as determined by the BLM. All traps and holding facilities not located on public land must have prior written approval of the landowner.

Each general site will be selected by a BLM employee after determining the habits of the animals and observing the topography of the area. Site specific locations may be selected by the Contractor with the BLM's approval within this general preselected area. Trap sites will be located to cause as little injury and stress to the animals and as little damage to the natural resources of the area as possible. Sites will be located on or near existing roads and will receive cultural, and threatened/endangered plant and animal clearances prior to construction. Additional trap sites may be required, as determined by the BLM, to relieve stress caused by certain conditions at the time of the gather (i.e. dust, rocky terrain, temperatures, etc.).

Due to the many variables affecting the distribution of animals such as weather, health and condition, and time of year, it is not possible to identify specific locations at this time. They will be determined at the time of the removal operation.

5. All traps, wings, and holding facilities shall be constructed, maintained and operated to handle the animals in a safe and humane manner and be in accordance with the following:
- a. Traps and holding facilities shall be constructed of portable panels, the top of which shall not be less than 72 inches high, and the bottom rail of which shall not be more than 12 inches from the ground level. All traps and holding facilities shall be oval or round in design.
 - b. All loading chute sides shall be fully covered with plywood without holes or separation of plies, or like material. The loading chute shall also be a minimum of 6 feet high.
 - c. All runways shall be a minimum of 30 feet long and a minimum of 6 feet high, and shall be covered with plywood without holes or separation of plies, or like material a minimum of 1 foot to 6 feet above ground.
 - d. Wings shall not be constructed out of barbed wire or other material injurious to animals and must be approved by a BLM employee.
 - e. All crowding pens, including the gates leading to the runways, shall be covered with a material which prevents the animals from seeing out (plywood without holes or separation of plies, burlap, jute, snow fence etc.) and shall be covered a minimum of 2 feet to 6 feet above ground level. Eight linear feet of this material shall be capable of being removed or let down to provide a viewing window for brand inspection.
 - f. All pens and runways used for the movement and handling of shall be connected with hinged self-locking gates.
6. No fence modifications will be made without authorization from the BLM. The Contractor shall be responsible for restoration of any fence modifications which he has made.

If the route the Contractor proposes to herd animals passes through a fence, the Contractor shall be required to roll up the fence material and pull up the posts to provide at least a 50 yard gap. The standing fence on each side of the gap will be well flagged or covered with jute or like material for a distance of 50 yards from the gap on each side.

7. When excessively muddy conditions occur within or adjacent to the trap or holding facility, the Contractor shall be required to scatter wood shavings or straw to alleviate the problem.
- When excessively dusty conditions occur within or adjacent to the trap or holding facility, the Contractor shall be required to water down the area to alleviate the problem.
8. Alternate pens within the holding facility shall be furnished by the Contractor to separate animals with small foals, sick and injured animals, and stray animals from the other animals. Animals shall be sorted as to age, number, size, temperament, sex, and condition when in the holding facility so as to minimize, to the extent possible, injury due to fighting and trampling.
9. Animals shall be transported to final destination from temporary holding facilities within 24 hours after capture unless prior approval is granted by the BLM for unusual circumstances. Animals shall not be held in traps and/or temporary holding facilities on days when there is no work being conducted except as specified by the BLM. The Contractor shall schedule to arrive at the final destination between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.. No shipments shall be scheduled to arrive at final destination on Sundays or Federal holidays. Animals shall not be allowed to remain standing in trucks while not in transport for a combined period of greater than 3 hours.
10. The Contractor shall provide animals held in the traps and/or holding facilities with a continuous supply of fresh clean water at a minimum rate of 10 gallons per animal per day. Animals held for 10 hours or more in the traps or holding facilities shall be provided good quality hay at the rate of not less than two pounds of hay per 100 pounds of estimated body weight per day.
- Separate water troughs shall be provided at each pen where animals are being held. Water troughs shall be constructed of such material (e.g. rubber, rubber over metal) so as to avoid injury to animals.
11. It is the responsibility of the contractor to provide security to prevent loss, injury or death of captured animals until delivery to final destination.
12. The Contractor shall restrain sick or injured animals if treatment by the Government is necessary. The BLM will determine if injured animals must be destroyed and provide for destruction of such animals. The Contractor may be required to dispose of the carcasses as directed by the BLM.

Any severely injured or seriously sick animal shall be destroyed in accordance with 43 CFR Subpart 4730.1. Animals shall be destroyed only when a definite act of mercy is needed to alleviate pain and suffering. The COR will have the primary responsibility for determining when an animal will be destroyed and will perform the actual destruction. When a BLM employee is unsure as to the severity of an injury or sickness, a veterinarian will be called to make a diagnosis and final determination. Destruction shall be done in the most humane method available. A veterinarian can be called, if necessary, to care for any injured animal.

The carcasses of the animals which die or must be destroyed as a result of any infectious, contagious, or parasitic disease will be disposed of by burial to a depth of at least 3 feet.

The carcasses of the animals which must be destroyed as a result of age, injury, lameness, or noncontagious disease or illness will be disposed of by removing them from the capture site or holding corral and placing them in an inconspicuous location to minimize the visual impacts. Carcasses will not be placed in drainages regardless of drainage size or downstream destination.

13. Branded or privately owned animals whose owners are known will be impounded by BLM, and if not redeemed by payment of trespass and capture fees, will be sold at public auction. If owners are not known, the private animals will be turned over to the State for processing under Nevada estray laws.
14. When holding the animals at the capture site, every attempt will be made to pair animals at the trap site and ensure they remain paired. Although it is standard practice for the contractor to construct separate pens for holding pairs, should the COR determine it is necessary to construct special facilities beyond the contractor's capability additional portable panels are available at several districts and at PVC.
15. Following release from the trap site, the area surrounding the trap will be monitored to determine the success of the releases prior to the contractor moving to another trap site or termination of the task order.

B. Motorized Equipment

1. All motorized equipment employed in the transportation of captured animals shall be in compliance with appropriate State and Federal laws and regulations applicable to the humane transportation of animals.
2. Vehicles shall be in good repair, of adequate rated capacity, and operated so as to ensure that captured animals are transported without undue risk or injury.
3. Only stock trailers with a covered top shall be allowed for transporting animals from traps to temporary holding facilities. Only bobtail trucks, stock trailers, or single deck trucks shall be used to haul animals from temporary holding facilities to final destination. Sides or stock racks of transporting vehicles shall be a minimum height of 6 feet 6 inches from vehicle floor. Single deck trucks with trailers 40 feet or longer shall have two partition gates providing three compartments within the trailer to separate animals. Trailers less than 40 feet shall have at least one partition gate providing two compartments within the trailer to separate animals. The compartments shall be of equal size plus or minus 10 percent. Each partition shall be a minimum of 6 feet high and shall have a minimum 5 foot wide swinging gate. The use of double deck trailers is unacceptable and shall not be allowed.
4. All vehicles used to transport animals to the final destination shall be equipped with at least one door at the rear end of the vehicle, which is capable of sliding either horizontally or vertically. The rear door must be capable of opening the full width of the trailer. All panels facing the inside of all trailers must be free of sharp edges or holes that could cause injury to the animals. The material facing the inside of the trailer must be strong enough, so that the animals cannot push their hooves through the sides.

The Contractor will not be allowed to begin work on the contract until all vehicles and equipment are in compliance with these stipulations.
5. Floors of vehicles and the loading chute shall be covered and maintained with wood shavings to prevent the animals from slipping.

The adequacy of this material will be confirmed prior to every load by a BLM employee.
6. Animals to be loaded and transported in any vehicle shall be as directed by a BLM employee and may include limitations on numbers according to age, size, temperament and animal condition. The following minimum linear feet per animal shall be allowed per

standard 8 foot wide stock trailer/truck:

8 square feet per adult burro (1.0 linear foot in 8 foot wide trailer).
4 square feet per burro foal (.50 linear foot in an 8 foot wide trailer).

The BLM employee supervising the loading of the animals to be transported from the trap to the temporary holding corral will require separation of small foals and/or weak animals from the rest should he/she feel that they may be injured during the trip. He/she will consider the distance and condition of the road in making this determination. Jennies with foals will be marked and hauled separately with their foal or with other jennies with foals.

The BLM employee supervising the loading will exercise his/her authority to off load burros should he/she feel there are too many animals in any compartment.

7. The BLM shall consider the condition of the animals, weather conditions, type of vehicles, distance to be transported, or other factors when planning for the movement of captured animals. The BLM shall provide for any brand and/or inspection services required for the captured animals.

It is currently planned to ship all animals to the Palomino Valley facility. Communication lines have been established with the Palomino Valley personnel involved in off-loading the animals, to receive feedback on how the animals arrive. Should problems arise, gathering methods, shipping methods and/or separation of the animals will be changed in an attempt to alleviate the problems.

8. If a BLM employee determines that road conditions are such that animals could be endangered during transportation, the Contractor will be instructed to adjust speed. The maximum distance over which animals may have to be transported on dirt roads is approximately 3 miles per load.

In general, roads in the capture areas are in good condition. If a problem develops, speed restrictions shall be set or alternate routes used.

Periodic checks by BLM employees will be made as the animals are transported. If speed restrictions are in effect, then BLM employees will, at times, follow and/or time trips to ensure compliance.

C. Helicopter, Pilot and Communications

1. The Contractor must operate in compliance with Federal Aviation Regulations, Part 91. Pilots provided by the Contractor shall comply with the Contractor's Federal Aviation Certificates, applicable regulations of the State of Nevada and shall follow what are recognized as safe flying practices.
2. When refueling, the helicopter shall remain a distance of at least 1,000 feet or more from animals, vehicles (other than the fuel truck), and personnel not involved in refueling.
3. The BLM shall have the means to communicate with the Contractor's pilot and be able to direct the use of the gather helicopter at all times. If communications cannot be established, the Government will take steps as necessary to protect the welfare of the animals.
4. The proper operation, service and maintenance of all Contractor furnished helicopters is the responsibility of the Contractor. The BLM reserves the right to remove from service, pilots and helicopters which, in the opinion of the BLM violate contract rules, are unsafe or otherwise unsatisfactory. In this event, the Contractor will be notified in writing to furnish replacement pilots or helicopters

within 48 hours of notification. All such replacements must be approved in advance of operation by the BLM.

IV. Responsibility and Lines of Communication

The Contracting Officer's Representative, Ron Hall and Project Inspector Dave Stockdale, or other individuals selected at the time of preparation of the task orders, have the direct responsibility to ensure the Contractor's compliance with the contract stipulations. However, the ADM Renewable Resources and the Winnemucca District Manager will take an active role to ensure that appropriate lines of communication are established between the field, District, State, and Palomino Valley offices. All employees involved in the gathering operations will keep the best interests of the animals at the forefront at all times.

All publicity, formal public contact and inquiries will be handled through the ADM/Renewable Resources. This individual will be the primary contact and will coordinate the contact with the Palomino Valley Corrals to ensure animals are being transported from the capture site in a safe and humane manner and are arriving in good condition.

The contract specifications require humane treatment and care of the animals during removal operations. These specifications are designed to minimize the risk of injury and death during and after capture of the animals. The specifications will be enforced.

Should the Contractor show negligence and not perform according to contract stipulations, he will be issued written instructions, stop work orders, or defaulted.

VI. Signatures:

Prepared by: Ron Hall
Wild Horse and Burro Specialist

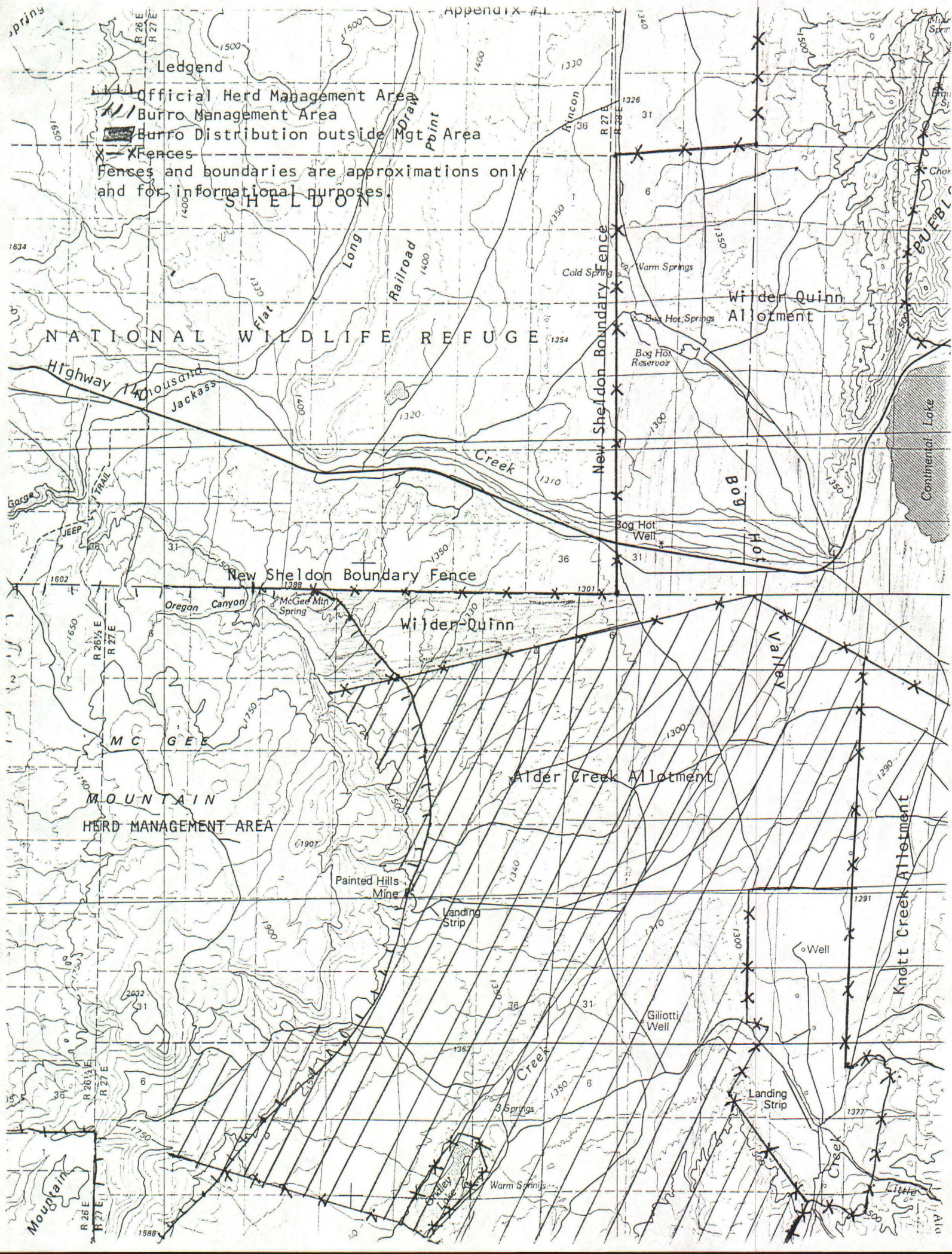
Date 5-28-97

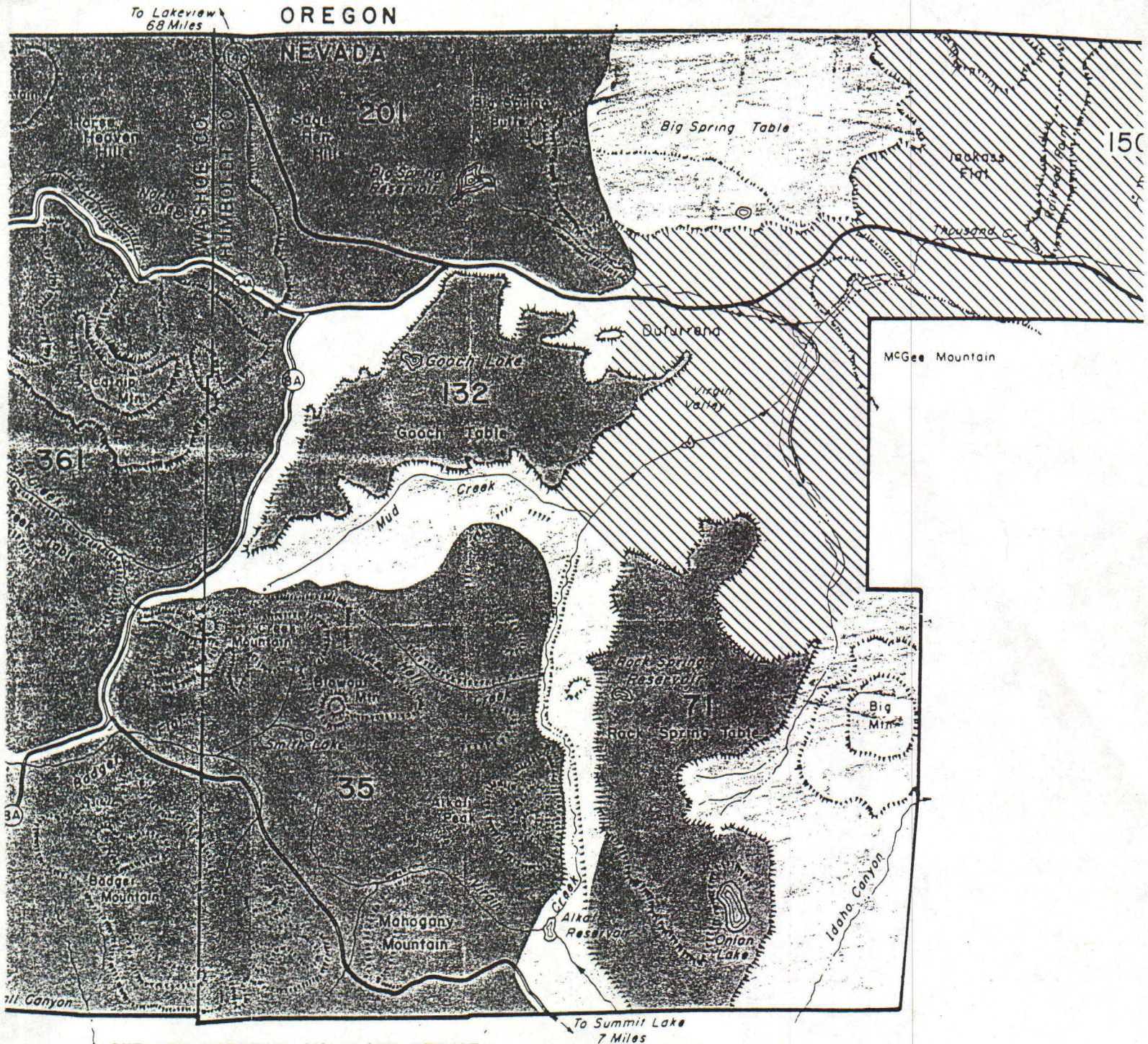
Recommended by: Colin P. Chitt
Associate District Manager
Renewable Resources

Date 5/28/97

-  Official Herd Management Area
-  Burro Management Area
-  Burro Distribution outside Mgt Area
-  Fences

Fences and boundaries are approximations only and for informational purposes.





SHELDON NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

LEGEND



Horse Populations

est. # 350



Burro Population

est. # 150

MAR 08 1998

NATIONAL OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C.



COMMISSION FOR THE
PRESERVATION OF WILD HORSES

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June 4, 1997

Mr. Colin P. Christensen
Renewable Resources
Winnemucca District
Bureau of Land Management
5100 East Winnemucca Boulevard
Winnemucca, Nevada 89445

Subject: Draft Gather Plan - McGee Mountain Burro Herd

Dear Mr. Christensen:

Thank you for consulting the Nevada Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses concerning this pending gather. The appropriate management level for this herd was determined in the Alder Creek Final Multiple Use Decision. We hope the gather will be a joint effort with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

We wish to encourage the District to carry out the necessary measures to adjust herd management boundaries. As mention in previous comments to allotment evaluations, the need to adjust boundaries can better serve wild horse and burro management within the Winnemucca District.

Please proceed with your decision making processes for this gather.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Catherine Barcomb".

CATHERINE BARCOMB
Executive Director