

m 12/29/92

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
Winnemucca District Office  
705 East Fourth Street  
Winnemucca, Nevada 89445

In reply refer to:  
NV023.6  
12-29-92

Memorandum

To: Chief Div. Res., D.M. Winnemucca  
From: Ron Hall, WH&B Specialist  
Subject: Wild Horse Condition-Fox Mountain Range

As you may recall, an earlier memo on the wild horses on the Fox Mt. Range dated 11-4-92, predicted mortality of the horse population at 30% (Thirty-Percent) over the winter of 92-93, if action was not taken. If the observations that I made (12-15-92 through 12-18-92) are representative of the entire population, then I revise the earlier estimate to 75% (Seventy-Five-Percent).

Access to this area is limited, however; through the use of vehicle, hiking, spotting scope and binoculars adequate coverage was obtained of the foothills and flats on the following areas:

1. The west side of the Fox Range to and partially up Wild Horse Canyon.
2. Along the Powerline Road on the east side of the Fox Range to Empire Farms.
3. Rodeo Ck. to San Emidio Canyon.  
(Map and field notes are available for review)

All the wild horses observed on the west side of the mountain (49) were extremely thin and lethargic. Hip bones, spinal column and ribs were evident even under their coat of winter hair. When approached these horses would walk off with heads down or would trot slowly away. One horse was observed laying down twice within a thirty minute time period. (As you are probably aware it is very unusual to see wild horses lying down.)

On the east side of the mountain the horses were in better shape, although not substantially better. Of the 120 horses that were classified (Adult/Colt and Condition Classification) 12 were classified in fair condition. This means that 90% (Ninety-percent) were classified as being in poor condition. All of the horses observed foraging were utilizing browse (Greasewood, Sagebrush,

Rabbit Brush, etc) exclusively. What this means to me is there isn't anything else left to eat.

In addition to the horses, 17 (Seventeen) cows were observed. In checking with Tom Seley (12-28-92) he indicated that these cows were permitted. I guess my question is: Why? Granted, Seventeen is not a large number, but given the condition of the range and the horses, I question the advisability of having any livestock on this area in the foreseeable future.

Tom also indicated to me at this same time that he had basically been aware of this situation for four or five years. Tom said-and please check with him- "This population of horses has remained stable due to mortality and that he feels when the snow softens the brush that these horses will bloom." Maybe?, But I don't think so!

The situation on the Fox Range brings questions to mind.

1. What criteria do we use to set our gather schedule? (Animal number, Political pressure, Resource condition, Animal condition, or some other factors.)
2. How can we consider Full Force and Effect on the Buffalo Hills and Granite gathers where-in my opinion- we do not have adequate resource data. At this same point in time we have wild horses starving just across the road.

### **Ecosystem Management**

The case can, and has been made, that these horses are wild and therefore this is nature taking its course. In fact, I have heard it speculated that this would save the taxpayers money. I guess I don't agree with this philosophy. We are charged under PL 92-195 to "Manage" wild horses. The "ecosystem philosophy" of management-or allowing nature to take its course- has been tried for years in the National Park System-in particular Yellowstone National Park. I have observed the resultant denuded winter ranges and the rivers running thick with silt in the spring. Our basic charge is the protection of the soil and vegetation. If we do this then animal condition will pretty much take care of itself.

### **Emergency**

A term I need defined for me is "emergency". On the Owyhee we declared a state of emergency and took action. We then took credit for taking action and averting a crisis situation. Rightfully so. However, animal and range condition on the Fox Range are many times worse than the Owyhee situation yet we do not seem concerned. I guess I don't understand.

I realize we do have many areas that are overpopulated with wild horses and a crisis situation is eminent in the future. We also cannot be everywhere at once. However, non-action over a period of years when we have knowledge of the situation leaves us extremely vulnerable.

### Isolation

The Fox Range is a relatively isolated area with fairly poor access. One justification I have heard is that due to this isolation no one will be aware of what is going on. I guess I won't bother attempting to refute this logic.

### Summary

I have enclosed a few photos that do not adequately depict the situation. I had some problems with the camera and ruined two excellent rolls of film. I have described the situation to the best of my ability. If we choose to take action at this time, we may be too late to avert significant mortality on the Fox Range. The horses on the west side of the range will have to be moved 15-20 miles to a feasible trap site and I am not convinced that they can make it. If they do, the probability that the additional stress and change in diet will kill them is very high. However, if left on the range there is no doubt as to their fate.

Ron Hall