

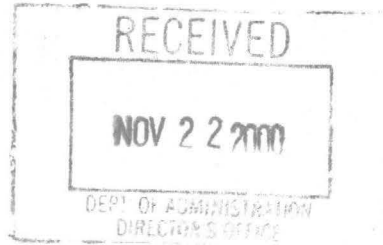


Buffalo Hills HMA G 11-22-00
United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Winnemucca Field Office
5100 East Winnemucca Boulevard
Winnemucca, Nevada 89445
<http://www.nv.blm.gov/winnemucca>



In Reply Refer To:
4700 (NV022-42)



November 22, 2000

Dear Interested Party:

There was one response received during the comment period for the draft Buffalo Hills Complex Capture Plan Environmental Assessment. These comments were considered in the preparation of the final Buffalo Hills Complex Capture Plan Environmental Assessment, and incorporated as appropriate. In addition, there were internal comments on wilderness that were incorporated into the final document. The items incorporated into the final document are in bold, and shown by section.

Alternatives Including the Proposed Action

Proposed Action

In the **Buffalo Hills HMA** it is highly probable that one trap site (constructed of portable panels) within the Poodle Mountain Wilderness Study Area (WSA) will be required to implement population level management. The proposed site would be no more than $\frac{1}{4}$ acre in size, located at T. 34 N., R. 20 E., section 32 NWSESW. Access is from an existing road approximately 1200 feet north of the proposed site. The road was in existence prior to passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, however it was not identified on the intensive WSA inventory map as a way.

Determination of which horses would be returned to the range would be based on an analysis of existing and past population characteristics and post gather data for age, sex ratio, and colors. **A balanced representation of age classes would be returned to the range.**

Alternative 2 (Continue Selective Removal with the use of Immunocontraceptives)

Issues which may be addressed with selective removal strategies include: correction of unusual population variables (**skewed sex ratio, unbalanced age structure**), maintenance of herd structure and composition, and maintenance of long term herd viability.

Affected Environment

Herd Management Areas

Buffalo Hills HMA (NV-220)

Vegetation at the proposed trap site in the Poodle Mountain WSA (T. 34 N., R. 20 E., section 32 NWSESW) is composed of Sandbergs bluegrass, squirrel tail, Thurbers needlegrass, scattered low sagebrush, and Utah juniper. Soils are predominately a clay-loam, with a heavy concentration of basalt rock on the surface. Access to the proposed site is across churning clay soils interspersed with basalt rock, vegetated by creeping wildrye and scattered Wyoming sagebrush.

Environmental Consequences (Proposed Action and Alternatives)

Wilderness

No impacts to wilderness values are anticipated to occur in the Fox & Lake Range HMA since all trap sites and holding facilities would be located outside of the Pole Creek (NV-020-14A) and Fox Range (NV-020-14) WSA's. If animal locations within the Buffalo Hills HMA require using the proposed trap site in the Poodle Mountain WSA (T. 34 N., R. 20 E., section 32 NWSESW) to implement population level management, the proposed action or alternatives can be implemented in conformance with BLM Manual H-8550-1 - INTERIM MANAGEMENT POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR LANDS UNDER WILDERNESS REVIEW. Restoration of the proposed trap site would be accomplished through natural processes since the site would be located on clay-loam soils with a heavy concentration of basalt rock, and used during the winter when the ground is frozen.

Mitigating Measures

The following mitigating measures would be adhered to in the Buffalo Hills HMA at the proposed trap site in the Poodle Mountain WSA, if it is utilized to capture wild horses:

1. Access would be by existing roads and across rocky surfaces only.
2. At completion of the capture of wild horses at this site all portable panels, posts, and other material (i.e. jute, plastic snow fence) used to capture wild horses would be removed.

Attached is a copy of the Finding Of No Significant Impact and Decision Record. Copies of the final Buffalo Hills Complex Capture Plan Environmental Assessment are available from the Winnemucca Field Office. If you have any questions, please contact Tom Seley or Rodger Bryan at 775-623-1500.

Sincerely,



Acting For
Jerry A. Reed
Field Manager
Winnemucca Field Office

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT AND DECISION RECORD

Buffalo Hills Complex Capture Plan Environmental Assessment

Decision

It is my decision to select the Proposed Action as described in the Buffalo Hills Complex Capture Plan Environmental Assessment, EA NV-020-00-50. The Proposed Action is based on the BLM's 2001 Wild Horse Strategy where all HMA's will be gathered over a 10 year period to reach AML. This action for the Buffalo Hills Complex would be to capture approximately 2,327 wild horses and remove 1,862 wild horses, determine sex, age, and color, acquire blood samples, assess herd health (pregnancy/parasites loading/physical condition/etc.) conduct immunocontraceptive research and monitor results as appropriate, and sort individuals as to age, sex, temperament and/or physical condition, and to return selected animals to the range.

Implementation of the Proposed Action is contingent upon the allocation of additional funding in the FY- 2001 Budget. If these additional funds are not available, Alternative 2 will be implemented as described in the Buffalo Hills Complex Capture Plan Environmental Assessment, EA NV-020-00-50.

Alternative 2 would be to remove all excess animals utilizing a Selective Removal Strategy in the Buffalo Hills Complex. The Selective Removal Strategy would be developed for the 2001 fiscal year based on previously established "selective removal" objectives (i.e. 0-5 year olds or 0-9 year olds). Selective removal objectives target removal efforts for excess animals, based on specific segments of a given wild horse population and availability of space in BLM processing and long term holding facilities. Past selective removals have been age based. Alternative 2 includes the treatment of released mares with a revised immunocontraceptive vaccine, PZP. The immunocontraceptive vaccine would inhibit reproduction for two breeding seasons.

This decision incorporates the Mitigating Measures and Standard Operating Procedures (Appendix II) identified in the Buffalo Hills Complex Capture Plan Environmental Assessment, EA NV-020-00-50, as stipulations. The Winnemucca Field Office archeologist will review all proposed and previously used trap site and facility locations to determine if these have had a cultural resources inventory, and/or if a new inventory is required.

This decision is placed in Full Force and Effect in accordance with Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations at 4770.3c.

Rationale

This document has been prepared to assess the environmental impacts of adjusting the number of wild horses within the Buffalo Hills, Fox & Lake Range, and Granite Range Herd Management Areas. The emphasis of this integrated management program will be to achieve and maintain wild horse AML's, collect information on herd characteristics, determine herd health, maintain sustainable rangelands, maintain a healthy and viable wild horse population, and conduct fertility research.

The proposed action is in conformance with the wild horse objectives in the Sonoma-Gerlach Resource Area Management Framework Plan.

Selection and immediate implementation of the proposed actions is necessary to protect the health and welfare of wild horses, and to restore the range to a thriving natural ecological balance within the Buffalo Hills Complex. The existing wild horse population in the three Herd Management Areas (HMA's) comprising the Buffalo Hills Complex exceeds the appropriate management level by 107 % in the Buffalo Hills HMA, 218 % in the Fox & Lake Range HMA, and 298 % in the Granite Range HMA. If the area receives normal winter precipitation, it is highly likely that there is insufficient winter habitat to support the current population of wild horses, and there is a high potential for a winter death loss similar to that experienced during the winter of 1992/1993.

The current wild horses population is nearly identical to the 1992 population that was found in the Buffalo Hills, Fox & Lake Range, and Granite Range HMA's. During the winter of 1992/1993 these HMA's were gathered, yet there was a 11.3 % winter death loss in the Buffalo Hills HMA, a 15.2 % winter death loss in the Fox & Lake Range HMA, and a 21 % winter death loss in the Granite Range HMA. In the HMA's adjacent to the Buffalo Hills Complex that were not gathered during the winter of 1992/1993, there was a winter death loss of 22.8 % in the Black Rock Range-East & West HMA's, 42.7 % winter death loss in the Calico Mountains HMA, and 46.2 % in Warm Springs Canyon HMA. This death loss occurred during a winter with normal precipitation. The winter death loss was determined through an analysis of helicopter census data collected in 1992 and 1993.

Based on monitoring, the current population of wild horses in the Buffalo Hills and Granite Range HMA's are negatively impacting some springs and associated riparian habitat. There is occupied sage grouse habitat in the Buffalo Hills and Granite Range HMA's, and there are four streams in the Granite Range HMA that are identified for the reintroduction of Lahontan Cutthroat Trout, a federally listed species. In addition, BLM has a commitment with the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe to gather wild horses from the Fox & Lake Range HMA this year to reduce overuse on reservation lands associated with wild horses from the HMA.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in EA NV-020-00-50, I have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, in accordance with Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act, the preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required.