



United States Department of the Interior

11/29/79
IN REPLY REFER TO
1790/4700(N-011)

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
ELKO DISTRICT OFFICE
P.O. Box 831
Elko, Nevada 89801

NOV 21 1979

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

Dear Sir/Madam:

Attached is a draft environmental assessment analyzing a proposal to gather 500-800 wild horses which presently range on lands administered by both the Elko and Ely Bureau of Land Management districts. Please review the analysis and submit your suggestions and/or comments to this office by December 20, 1979. We hope that through your assistance in this effort that BLM will be able to more effectively maintain wild horse numbers at manageable levels, and also be certain that a sufficient number of animals remain for public and educational purposes.

We are also taking this opportunity to encourage a representative from your group to attend one or both of two scheduled public meetings to discuss the proposal. Time and locations of the meetings are:

Elko District Office, Elko, Nevada	December 10, 1979	7:30 p.m.
White Pine County Library, Ely, Nevada	December 11, 1979	7:30 p.m.

Sincerely yours,


RODNEY HARRIS
District Manager

Enclosure

cc:
N-040
N-912, 921, 930



Save Energy and You Serve America!

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT NO.
Chin Creek-Ferber Flat Horse Gather

I. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

The Wells Resource Area, Elko District, and the Schell Resource Area, Ely, District, Bureau of Land Management, propose to remove 500 to 800 excess wild horses which is part of a population of approximately 1,200 horses, beginning about January 1, 1980.

A. Background

The subject area involves lands administered by both districts with wild horses moving freely across administrative boundaries. The area has historically provided important wildlife habitat and been subjected to heavy livestock and wild horse use. Observations over recent years by qualified Bureau of Land Management field personnel have resulted in growing concerns surrounding recurring shortages of water and general range deterioration. One of the significant contributing factors is believed to be the result of steadily increasing and unmanaged wild horse populations which reside in the subject area on a yearlong basis.

In addition to population increases herds appear to be expanding their habitat into areas not formerly occupied.

Fund restrictions and wide-spread controversy regarding wild horse manipulation have generally complicated this aspect of habitat management. The proposed project area has regularly been focused on by Nevada State agencies and area news media who echo the Bureau of Land Management's concern that vegetation and short supplies of surface water (needed by horses, wildlife, and livestock) are being stressed beyond acceptable management limits.

An emergency removal of 41 wild horses was conducted in August, 1978, following Nevada Department of Wildlife reports that approximately 150 wild horses and pronghorn antelope were declining in condition due to inadequate supplies of water. This proved to be an unsuccessful attempt because it simply reduced pressure on critically short water supplies for a temporary period of time.





Heavy utilization of forage in conjunction with excessive trailing back and forth to water. Domestic livestock are only licensed for winter use and are gone from the area prior to April 1 of each year.



B. Proposed Action

The proposed gathering operation would be conducted within a 25 mile radius of where Alternate Highway 50 crosses the Elko-White Pine County line (see attached map). A temporary trap with deflector wings encompassing less than one acre would be constructed. The use of a contracted helicopter and horse riders would be necessary to drive and direct horses in an efficient and careful manner. Hazards such as cliffs and fences would be scouted in advance and existing roads and trails would be used. Horses would be truck hauled to temporary holding facilities in Delta, Utah, or Palomino Valley, Nevada, for processing, then shipped to distribution centers in the midwest for adoption. Horses that might be held at the trap site in excess of 24 hours would have food and water provided. Inadvertently collected horses which are branded or privately owned would be treated under Nevada estray laws.

The proposed action is considered an "interim measure" to assist in the control of habitat overuse pending completion of court mandated Environmental Impact Statements and formal vegetation allocations which will not be fully implemented until after 1983.

C. Alternatives

Current economic and political constraints limit "technically feasible and reasonably available" alternatives which could be expected to attain the objectives of the proposed action. Removal of 500 to 800 wild horses (proposed action) would leave a sufficient population of horses to maintain a viable herd. Remaining horses would be at or in excess of estimated 1971 population levels. Pending vegetation allocation, herd reductions of less than the proposed action would not significantly reduce habitat competition and would reduce economic efficiency. Horses would continue to reproduce at a natural rate (estimated 15% per year).

Alternative: No Action

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

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

A. Proposed Action and No Action Alternative

1. Non-living Components

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° 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>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, and intermittent streams provide a sparse 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 and seeps.

2. Living Components

Major plant associations may be characterized as big sagebrush-grass, low sagebrush-grass, and winterfat-saltbush flats.

The dominant shrub in the sagebrush-grass community is big sagebrush (Artemisia tridentata), low sagebrush (Artemisia arbuscula), and/or black sagebrush (Artemisia nova). Common grasses include bluebunch wheatgrass (Agropyron spicatum), Indian ricegrass (Oryzopsis hymenoides), Idaho fescue (Festuca idahoensis) and Sandberg bluegrass (Poa secunda). Forbs include arrowleaf balsamroot (Balsamorhiza sagittata) and lupine (Lupinus spp.). Utah juniper (Juniperus osteosperma) is associated with an understory made of sagebrush and grass. In addition, widespread patches of aspen (Populus tremuloides), - bitterbrush (Purshia tridentata), and curlleaf mountain mahogany (Cercocarpus ledifolius) are found at the higher elevations.

The valley floor is dominated by shadscale (Atriplex confertifolia), winterfat (Ceritoidies lanata), sweetsage (Atriplex nuttallii), cheatgrass (Bromus tectorum), Indian ricegrass (Oryzopsis hymemoides) and Russian thistle (Salsola kali). There are also extensive areas of greasewood (Sarcobatus vermiculatus) in the saline bottoms. Invasions of (halogeton glomeratus) are common on disturbed areas. There are also extensive areas of little rabbitbrush (Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus).

The threatened plant Thelypodium saggittatum var. ovalifolium is known to grow near Becky Spring in sections 12 and 13, T. 25 N., R. 65 E.

Vegetative condition is generally poor in the subject area. Desirable grasses such as Indian rice grass and bluebunch wheatgrass have decreased in response to heavy grazing to the extent where remaining plants have low vigor or are protected by shrubs. Browse species such as bitterbrush and winterfat are severely hedged and vigor is poor due to continued overuse. Therefore, there are many dead and decadent plants as a result. Undesirable and unpalatable species such as halogeton and little rabbitbrush are increasing.

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 and increase. 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 1979 and BLM estimates indicate approximately 1,200 horses presently reside in the gathering area on a yearlong basis.

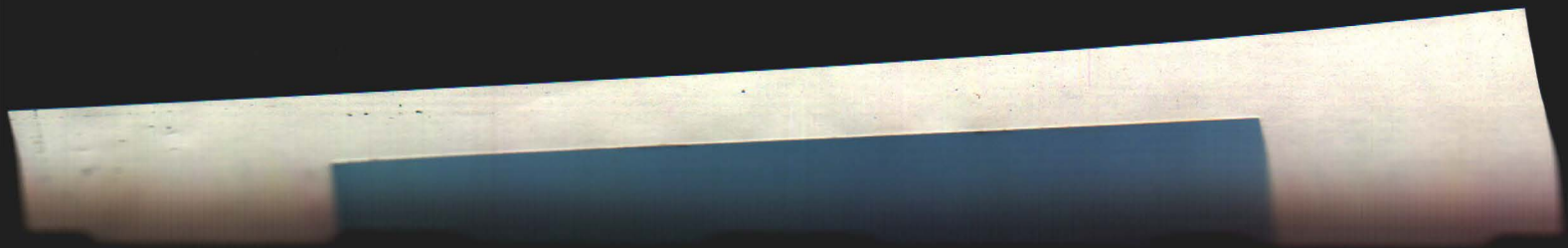
Horses prefer grasses and grasslike species but they also will utilize shrubs and forbs when necessary. In the subject area heavy use by horses and other grazing animals has reduced desirable grasses to the point that only shrubs and less available grasses remain. Shrubs are severely hedged and are being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

Mule deer and pronghorn antelope are highly important species. Presently there are an estimated 600 pronghorn in the proposed gather area. Pronghorn food consumption is influenced by seasonal preference, availability and quality of forage. Shrubs such as sagebrush (ssp.) provide crucial food and cover requirements for pronghorn winter survival. Forbs and grasses are more important as food items in spring and summer, but shrubs remain important for cover in fawning areas.

During late summer, available supplies of water are believed to be the major environmental factor determining the distribution and well-being of pronghorn.

Mule deer concentrations are greatest in portions of the proposed gather area with mountain shrub and sagebrush-grass vegetation types. Shrubs, especially big sagebrush, antelope bitterbrush, and curlleaf mountain mahogany 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. In the gather area, water on summer range is also a limiting factor to deer and other species of wildlife. 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.





Extremely heavy utilization of riparian habitat by wild horses.
Livestock use occurs here during winter season only.



An estimated 3,300 deer winter in the subject area, there is a summer population of approximately 2,014 deer.

An estimated 106 deer inhabit the Dolly Varden range on a year long basis.

Livestock (cattle and sheep) use portions of 12 allotments within the gathering area primarily during winter periods although a level of spring-summer-fall use also occurs. Use by livestock has traditionally been heavy. Use by allotment is shown as follows:

<u>Allotment Name</u>	<u>Range User(s)</u>	<u>Preference AUM's</u>
Sugar Loaf	Lee Pritchett	3105
Bad Lands	Ray Staley	1407
Goshute Mountain	Ray Staley	465
West White Horse	Ray Staley	670
Boone Springs	Heguy Brothers	3199
Ferber Flat	Martin Ithurbide	2735
Spruce	Von Sorensen & Ken Jones	*14974
	Von Sorensen & Marion	* 6083
	Loyd Sorensen	*14974
Currie	Louise Lear	3777
South	Charles Kippen	*13766
Chin Creek	Reed Robison	22510
Deep Creek	Reed Robison	410
	Rae Bateman	986
	Mable Bates	345
	Gerald Cook	679

Use by Allotment, continued

<u>Allotment Name</u>	<u>Range User(s)</u>	<u>Preference AUM's</u>
Becky Spring	Ray Staley	513
	Louise Lear	930
	Clarence Bundy	<u>2399</u>
	Total	<u>9327</u>

* Includes areas outside the gathering area.

It should be noted that actual use by livestock has steadily declined since 1977 as the result of increasing horse populations and associated declining vegetative condition. Non-use taken by livestock operators has continued to increase from 44,222 AUM's in 1976 to 50,320 AUM's in 1978. This means that livestock operators are only using 47% of their qualifications.

In the absence of horse population control, the effect of the nonuse by livestock is being negated.

3. 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. That is they tend 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.



Allotment has not been grazed by livestock for the past three years.
Heavy utilization being made by horses.



Competition for space, forage and water between livestock, wildlife and wild horses affects survival, and reproductive rates of each. Pronghorn are particularly susceptible to these ecological limits as they do not compete well for limited water supplies.

4. 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 Wendover, Utah, which is located 35 miles to the northeast.

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 Salt Lake City area, 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 on the eastern perimeter of the proposed gathering area which pre-date present civilization by 10,000 years. 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).

III. ANALYSIS OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action: Remove 500 to 800 Wild Horses

1. Environmental Impacts

a. Anticipated Impacts

(1) Non-living 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 limited 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.

(2) 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. A trap site location on known threatened plant locations near Becky Spring would severely damage or eliminate these plants.

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.

A high positive impact would be expected to result from reduced competition between wildlife, livestock and horses for limited water sources in the area.

No impact on water quality would result from the horse gathering operation or the handling of horses which would be conducted away from water.

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 high negative impact on horses would be expected during gathering and handling. This would result from traumatic effects of capturing, trapping, loading and hauling 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.

(3) Ecological Interrelationships

A decrease in the horse population would result in a high 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.

(4) 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.

Visual quality would not be significantly affected (see II. A. 1,a. (1) and attached clearance).

b. 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 after March 1, 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.
- (4) A veterinarian will be on call during gathering operations.
- (5) Helicopters will be used with caution. A qualified district BLM representative should 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 resources investigation by an archaeologist or D.A.T. should be made prior to any trap construction. If a significant find was discovered, an alternate trap site should be selected.
- (9) Trap locations should not be placed on the known threatened plant (Thelypodium sagittatum Var. ovalifolium) location near Becky Springs.

c. 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.

2. Relationships Between Short-term Use and Long-term Productivity

The impacts of this proposed action would enhance the environment for a short period to time. Overutilization 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 15% per year.)

3. Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources

None.

B. Alternative: No Action

1. Environmental Impacts

a. Anticipated Impacts

(1) Non-Living Components

Uncontrolled horse populations combined with wildlife and livestock use would have a negative impact on soils susceptible to erosion. Competition for water would continue to increase. This could result in various adverse impacts including direct loss of animals dying of thirst during drought conditions as happened in the summer of 1978.

(2) Living Components

A high negative impact on vegetation and animals is anticipated under this alternative. Uncontrolled horse numbers would increase to the point that most available forage would be utilized to the increasing detriment of livestock, wildlife, and the horses themselves. Horses utilize the area on a yearlong basis. Available remaining forage for seasonal use by wildlife and livestock would be reduced to an unacceptable level.

(3) Ecological Interrelationships

A high negative impact surrounding vegetative succession should be anticipated from this alternative. 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.

(4) 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.

b. Recommended Mitigating Measures

None.

c. Residual Impacts

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

2. 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.

3. 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.

IV. PERSONS, GROUPS, AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES CONSULTED

Nevada State Grazing Board #1 - Elko, Nevada
Nevada State Grazing Board #4 - Ely, Nevada
Nevada State Department of Wildlife - Ely, Nevada
Nevada State Department of Wildlife - Elko, Nevada
International Society for the Protection of Wild Horses and Burros -
Reno, Nevada
Wild Horse Organized Assistance, Reno, Nevada

Horse protection groups consulted expressed support for the proposed action as long as the Bureau recognizes that simple reductions in horse numbers is no substitute for management of all grazing animals.

Groups and agencies consulted expressed concern and support for the proposed action. Concern was expressed that if the current situations is allowed to continue, cumulative impacts affecting all species of vegetation and animals (including horses) would result in severe deterioration of habitat and increased loss of animals.

V. INTENSITY OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Locally, the area of this proposed removal came before the public when the Nevada Department of Wildlife found horses and antelope in a very stressed condition in July of 1978 at Ayarbe Spring. Interest was generated by word of mouth and by Bureau of Land Management news releases explaining their plans for hauling water and subsequent emergency removal of 70 horses.

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 the subject 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.

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.

VI. PARTICIPATING STAFF

Bruce Portwood, Range and Wild Horse Specialist, Elko District
George Cropper, Chief, Division of Resource Management,
Ely District
Richard Howard, Wild Horse and Burro Specialist, Ely District
Bob Haburchak, Planning/Environmental Specialist, Elko District

VII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

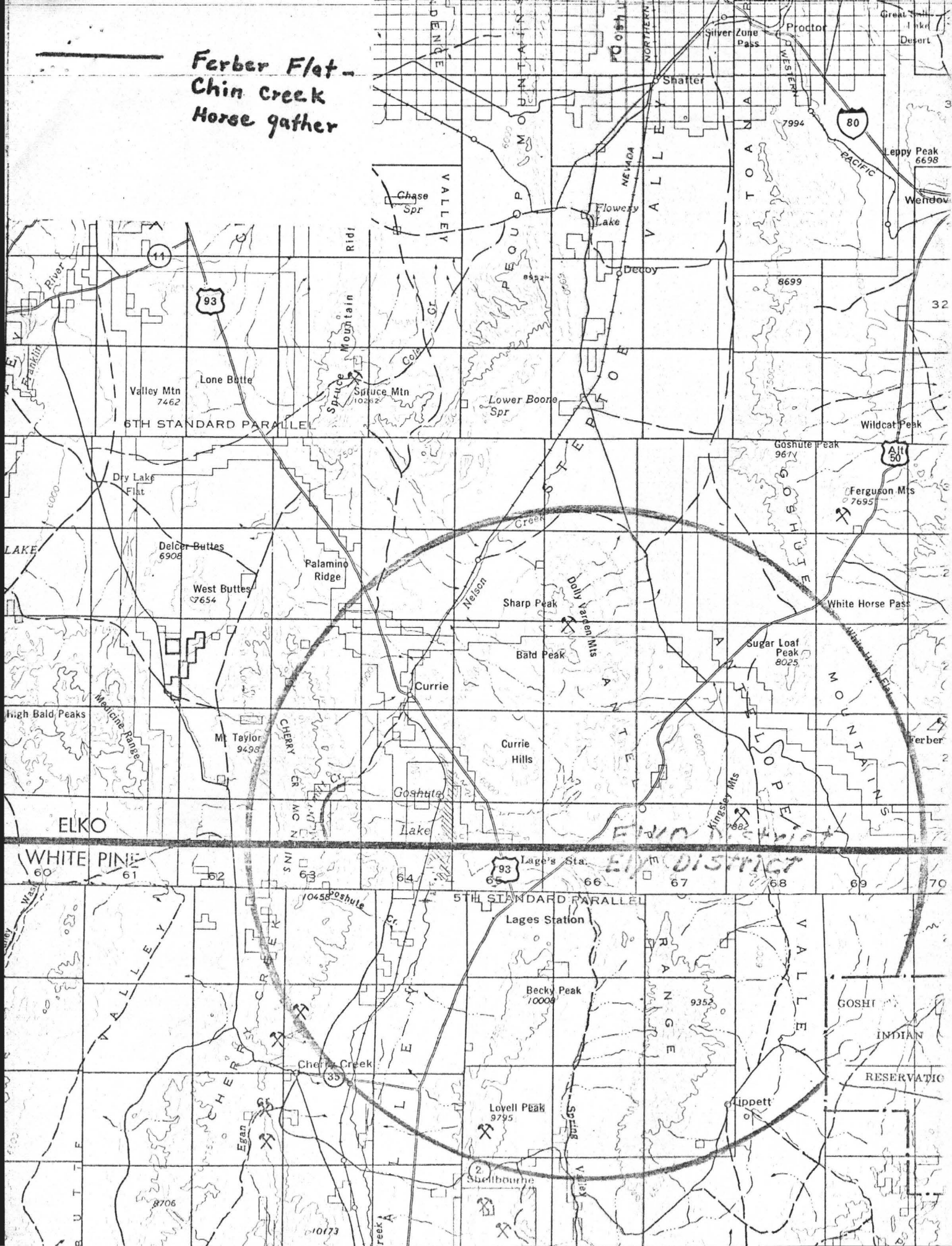
In many portions of the proposed gather area there is clear evidence of declining or deteriorated habitat condition. Excessive use by grazing animals, principally horses and livestock, is the primary causal factor. The subject area also provides key seasonal and yearlong habitat for many species of wildlife, notably mule deer and pronghorn antelope. Livestock use has traditionally been heavy; however, livestock use has been declining significantly over the past several years, while horse populations have been increasing steadily.

Removal of 500 to 800 wild horses as proposed would be highly beneficial from the habitat management viewpoint. This would constitute removal of approximately 50% to 75% 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" alternative would result in a continuing acceleration of habitat damage. Under this alternative there is a significant potential for eventual direct loss of wildlife and horses.

Ferber Flat -
Chin Creek
Horse gather



UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

ELKO DISTRICT OFFICE

P.O. BOX 831
Elko, Nevada 89801

TO : Manager, Wells Resource Area

DATE: 11-2-79

FROM : Gene L. Drais

SUBJECT: Proposed Chin Creek - Ferber Flat Wild Horse Gathering

The proposed action includes land contained in the following Intensive Wilderness Inventory Units:

Antelope	NV-010-044
Currie Hills	NV-010-045
Kingsley	NV-010-047
Sugarloaf	NV-010-049
Deadhorse	NV-010-058
White Sage Flat	NV-010-060

Any traps placed in these units should be of a temporary nature as the proposed action states. These should also be placed by utilizing vehicles on existing roads and ways only. No new roads should be cut in these units.

If the above stipulations are complied with there will be no detrimental effect on the wilderness characteristics of these units. Under these conditions I recommend that a wilderness clearance be granted.

Gene L. Drais

1340:G.Drais:bgm:11/01/79

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

8500
(16-043)

TO : Manager, Schell Resource Area

DATE: November 21, 1979

FROM : Wilderness Specialist

SUBJECT: Proposed Chin Creek-Ferber Flat Wild Horse Gathering

The proposed Chin Creek-Ferber Flat horse gathering involves an area which includes several review units presently in the intensive inventory phase of the wilderness program in the Ely District. These are: NV-040-003, NV-040-004, NV-040-007, NV-040-007A, NV-040-008, NV-040-009, NV-040-065, and possibly NV-040-015.

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.

Samuel J. [Signature]
Ely District Wilderness Specialist

A Visual Resources Management Contrast Rating Report will not be necessary for Chin Creek - Berber Flat Horse Gather (project) for the reason(s) indicated below:

- Project activities will result in no alteration of the characteristic landscape, or introduce modified elements or features.
- Due to prior surface disturbances the present project will have no adverse impacts to increase the degree of contrast.
- Project activities involve maintenance/modification of an existing project which will not alter the characteristic landscape.
- VRM Contrast Rating has already been completed for the project's impact area.

Other: Project will introduce for short duration portable horse traps into the areas. These will be taken out when the project complete. No long lasting impacts of visual nature will result. Given the above reason(s) the project design meets the VRM requirements.

Signed: _____

Lee L. Davis

Date: 10-26-79

~~42/12/79~~

December 13, 1979

Mr. Rodney Harris, District Manager
Bureau of Land Management
Post Office Box 831
Elko, Nevada 89801

Dear Mr. Harris:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to comment upon the draft environmental assessment for the wild horse reduction, jointly with the Ely District. We are sorry we were unable to attend the public meetings on December 10th and 11th.

The assessment reflects a more positive attitude as to the Bureau's responsibility to the animals as a whole. As I stated in our meeting of November 14th, we concur that reductions are in order, but reiterate that reductions of all grazing animals is necessary if the decline of the resource is to be reduced.

While population estimates, at first glance would appear to explain the expansion of the horse habitat, certainly other factors have contributed. 1) water 2) climatic changes 3) actual authorized use 4) estimated carrying capacity and 5) trespass. We believe the Bureau shares in the controversies due to its unwillingness to implement the law. Had the Bureau started in 1971 to collect data, assert a more positive position; much of the court litigation today would not have occurred.

At the meeting I had requested the actual authorized use and due to the fact that preferred includes areas outside the gathering area, we are unable to compute the use as we prefer. Hence, I request: the actual authorized use, the suspended non-use, and the carrying capacity for the past three years. We would also like to know the trespass (if any) in this particular area. Also how many wildlife AUM's are provided in the gathering area? There were no tables showing inventories or dates.

The foregoing are our statements pertaining to the draft assessment.

Pictures on page 2 and 7 both state: "winter use only" which would give the impression that is fact...since the two pictures are not titled as to location, we assume this to be the entire area in question in the proposal. However, page 8, paragraph 3 states "primary during winter although a level of spring-summer-fall use also occurs!"

Since I have visted a good portion of the areas, I am aware of the range condition and believe that I understand the need for reductions; however to the casual observor or opposition to any management, the statements are contradicting themselves. If the pictures had been titled, then one would not get the impression that winter use ~~by~~ livestock was a fact area-wide. Since generally spring thaws would bring about riparian destruction, damage to that resource entirely by horses is questionable.

B. We assume that a Bureau Wild Horse Specialist will accompany the contracted pilot or would control operations by radio from the ground. (We would prefer W/H specialist inside) Is Delta, Utah set up to handle 500-800 horses? Unless it is the size of Palomino or larger we would question this large number of animals during a period of the year when weather slows the adoption process. We also would be concerned somewhat of temperatures during capture times especially in light that the proposal could bring them ten or more miles, heated up and suddenly cooled down could bring on pnemonia.

II. A-2 It is not that we question the integrity of Mr. Amaral, but more than we suspect that no stratigrapher has studied the area (in light that some is not even mapped) in order to verffy that claim. Further a Dr. Martin, a geoscientist, has discovered burro fossils in what was an area thought to parallel Mr. Amaral's position. I believe that Dr. Leachy more than proved this point in Africa and early man. Until there is evideanceewe consider Mr. Amaral's theories to be just that. See attached.

I would like to comment upon ~~shveral pices~~ ~~re~~ statements in the proposed action that require some explanation.

Page 8-"Use by livbstock has been traditionally heavy."

Page 9-"It should be noted that actual use by livvstock has declined since 1977 as the result of increasing horse populations and declining vegetative condition."

Comment-(page 8) actually not reflective of carrying capacities but more from historical use.

Comment-)page 9) several other critical factors, not mentioned, were also contributors to the decline in livestock numbers, one-- the MARKET; two, the drought; and three the economic instabil-ity of grazing permits.

HOWEVER, (III-A,2 page 12) "it is expected that livestock grazing would remain at approximately the same level".....We asked for some statement of "actual use" from the State Office meeting which was not included in this proposal. If the decline in the resource is to be reversed, simple reduction of horses will not reslove the problem, but the reduction of "actual horses and livestock."

III b-3 Dependant upon snow cover and temperature; specialist on board;

Pg three

VII. We agree and refer you back to page two (HOWEVER.

Without analyzing the age and sex ratios of the population, we question the useage of "viable" as I don't believe that this has been determined yet due to the fact that no overall impact analysis has been done, nor is there enough data from past gatherings to determine this. This has always been our concern for the catch as catch can policy, for it is not possible to know what is left out there.

We believe this proposal has been more open than any previous, with the exception of Monte Cristo in Ely; and although some criticism may be forthcoming, I believe that it is the first step in a better understanding of each others position. None of the foregoing comments are meant to question either the professionalism or the individual, but an attempt to show where our concerns lie so that a better understanding will result. The proposal indicates a desire to learn more (collars) and hopefully this data will prove more useful the next time around.

Again, thank you. If I can clarify any points of the foregoing please feel free to contact me.

Most sincerely,

Dawn Y. Lappan (Mrs.)
Director

cc: Board of Trustees

12/21/79

*Wells RA
allotment
Ferber flats
& Elko
Chin Creek is fly*

IN REPLY REFER TO
1790/4700
(N-013.50)



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

ELKO DISTRICT OFFICE
P.O. Box 831
Elko, Nevada 89801

DEC 21 1979

WHOA!
Wild Horse Organized Assistance
P.O. Box 555
Reno, Nevada 89504

Dear Ms. Lappin:

We have received your comments concerning the proposed Chin Creek - Ferber Flat wild horse roundup. I appreciate your comments and will take this opportunity to try to clarify some of your concerns.

First, in response to your request for information on Livestock and Wildlife use, the following information is presented:

None of the allotments in the gathering area are fenced, except for an occasional drift fence, and since the gathering area includes portions of several allotments it is not possible to accurately depict the exact AUM's of livestock grazing occurring in the gathering area. As shown in the Environmental Assessment, there are 93,927 AUM's that are adjudicated for livestock use in and adjacent to the gathering area. However, in 1976, 49,705 AUM's were licensed for active use; in 1977, 46,119 AUM's were licensed; and in 1978, 43,607 AUM's were licensed. This means that livestock operators are using less than one half of their qualifications.

In regard to trespass, no livestock trespass has been detected in the gathering area over the last three years with the exception of several horse claims in and adjacent to the gathering area. These claims were terminated in February 1978.

Wildlife AUM's have not been established at this time. As we progress through the planning system and EIS for the Wells Resource Area, forage allocations for all grazing animals will be made based on the total grazing capacity, which is presently being determined by an up-to-date range survey.

In regard to your specific comments on the Environmental Assessment, our response to your comments is as follows:



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The pictures on pages 2 and 7 do not purport to show the entire gathering area but are portions of allotments within the gathering area where the only livestock use is winter use.

You are correct in assuming that a Bureau Wild Horse Specialist will supervise the contract at all times and will be in charge of the contract helicopter.

Delta, Utah is only going to provide facilities to process the horses. After blood testing and freeze branding the horses will be shipped to adoption centers in Nashville, Tennessee or Austin, Texas. It is planned that individual horses will not be at Delta longer than a week to ten days.

In regard to Mr. Amaral's position on horses in the Great Basin, until evidence is presented to the contrary we will continue to use Mr. Amaral's position and book as a reference.

Your concern on livestock use levels has been covered earlier. I will only reiterate that livestock use levels have declined to the point where actual use is less than 50% of adjudicated levels in and adjacent to the gathering area.

As a general rule, 10 miles will be the limit that horses are run. However, the Wild Horse Specialist may adjust this depending on snow cover, topography, temperature, etc.

Again, I want to express my thanks and appreciation for your constructive comments.

Sincerely,

Wayne W. Wilde
acting

RODNEY HARRIS
District Manager