

10-9-97



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT



Surprise Resource Area
P.O. Box 460
Cedarville, CA 96104

October 9, 1997

In Reply Refer To:
4700 (CA-370) P

Cathy Barcomb
Wild Horse Commission
1105 Terminal Way, STE 209
Reno, Nevada 89502-2162

Re: Administrative Determination - Buckhorn and Coppersmith HMA's

Dear Cathy:

Enclosed for your information and review is my administrative determination for removal of about 110 excess wild horses from the Coppersmith and ~~Buckhorn HMA's~~, beginning on or after October 14, 1997.

I appreciated the opportunity to visit with you last week regarding your concerns about our proposal to remove the excess wild horses from the two HMAs in order to maintain wild horse herds at the AMLs established through monitoring, Environmental Assessment and Decision Record in 1995. The areas have been monitored extensively during 1996 and 1997. Monitoring results are briefly summarized in the enclosed Plan Conformance/NEPA Compliance Record (administrative determination). I regret that I did not have the monitoring data at my fingertips when we spoke by telephone. I would be happy to meet with both you and Dawn Lappin in Reno to review the more detailed monitoring data. Please let me know if that would be of interest.

This removal does not require a new decision, since current monitoring data show the established AMLs are valid and the capture methods will remain the same.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Susan T. Stokke
Surprise Resource Area Manager

Enclosure

SURPRISE RESOURCE AREA
Plan Conformance/NEPA Compliance Record

NEPA Control No.: CA-370-97-22
(CA-028-95-08)

Lease/Serial/Case File No.: 4700

Proposed Action Title/Type: *Coppersmith and Buckhorn HMA - Removal of Excess Wild Horses to AML*

Location of Proposed Action: *Tuledad Grazing Allotment*

Description of Proposed Action: *Proposed is removing about 50 excess wild horses from the Coppersmith HMA and about 60 wild horses from the Buckhorn HMA, on or after October 13, 1997, in order to maintain wild horse herds at the AML's established through monitoring, EA and Decision Record in November 1995.*

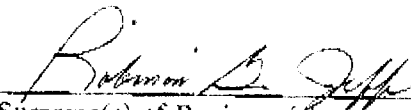
Applicant (if any): N/A

PART I: PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW

The Proposed Action is subject to the:

- Tuledad/Home Camp Mangement Framework Plan*
- Cowhead/Massacre Mangement Framework Plan.*

The Proposed Action has been reviewed for conformance with the checked plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM MS 1617.3).


 Surname(s) of Reviewer(s) Date 10/09/97

Remarks:

PART II NEPA REVIEW

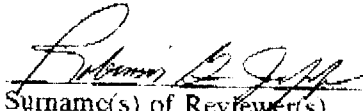
- A. Categorical Exclusion Review. This proposed action qualifies as a categorical exclusion under 516 DM 2, Appendix 1.[CX #]
 516 DM 6, Appendix 5.4.[CX #].
 It has been reviewed to determine if any of the exceptions described in 516 DM 2, Appendix 2, apply.

 Surname(s) of Reviewer(s) Date

Remarks:

- B. Existing EA/EIS Review. This proposed action is addressed in the following existing BLM EA/EIS:
Environmental Assessment CA-028-95-08, dated November 11, 1995
Decision Record dated November 13, 1995
Gathering Plan - FY 1996

The Proposed Action has been reviewed to determine if the previously prepared NEPA documentation fully covers the proposal.


 Surname(s) of Reviewer(s) _____ Date 10/07/97

Remarks: The Surprise Resource Area began working to establish appropriate management levels for the Coppersmith and Buckhorn wild horse herds in 1994. A draft environmental assessment was issued September 12, 1994, summarizing monitoring data collected for the two HMA's. Public comments on the draft EA requested additional monitoring data. Therefore, the SRA chose to collect additional data during the 1995 field season prior to issuing a final decision. Based on the additional monitoring data, a final EA was issued November 11, 1995, and the Decision Record was signed on November 13, 1995, establishing an AML of 59-85 head for the Buckhorn and 50-75 head for the Coppersmith HMAs. No protests or appeals were received.

Late in November 1995, 246 excess wild horses were removed from the two HMA's. Subsequently, after the return of older animals, it is estimated 64 horses remained in the Buckhorn HMA and 72 horses remained in the Coppersmith HMA. This removal brought both herds to within the established AML range.

Aerial census conducted in September, 1997 showed that the populations have increased by 49% on the Buckhorn and 29% on the Coppersmith HMA, with numbers estimated at 125 and 101, respectively. Currently, about 110 wild horses are proposed for removal from the two HMA's. Following the removal, it is estimated that 116 horses will remain in the two HMA's which is within the range identified in the 1995 Decision Record.

The area has been monitored extensively in both 1996 and 1997. In 1996, utilization monitoring concluded that utilization criteria were met on all but one key riparian area, indicating that the AMLs established in late 1995 are appropriate and effective in achieving desired resource conditions. In 1997, use levels have increased noticeably over 1996, but utilization criteria have been met on all but 3 key riparian areas.

During this same period, livestock use in 1996 and 1997 was at 64% and an estimated 74% of total permitted use, respectively. In both years, about half of the permitted livestock have been removed from the allotment on July 15th and a rider has been employed to herd the remaining livestock out of key areas.

Key publics were notified of this proposed action on September 5, 1997. Two groups responded: Nevada Wild Horse Commission and WHOA!. Both asked if BLM had monitoring data to support the proposed removal.

Summary: Monitoring indicates that horse numbers have increased by 49% on the Buckhorn and 29% on the Coppersmiths since 1995. While utilization criteria are currently being met on most of the key riparian areas, utilization has increased noticeably over 1996 levels. During this same period, livestock use has been about 30% below permitted and have been managed in a manner to minimize impacts to key riparian areas. With the wild horse population increases demonstrated in the past two years, it is anticipated that utilization of key riparian areas will increase substantially. Removal of the excess horses to established AMLs is proposed to prevent over-utilization of key riparian areas and resource damage from occurring, as well as to maintain the range in a thriving natural ecological balance. This proposal does not require a new NEPA decision since current monitoring data show the established AMLs are valid and the capture methods will remain the same.

PART III DECISION

I have reviewed this plan conformance and NEPA compliance record and have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the approved land use plan, that existing NEPA documentation previously prepared by the BLM fully covers the proposal, and that no further environmental analysis is required. It is my decision to implement the project, as described, with the stipulations/mitigation measures identified below.

Stipulations/ Mitigation Measures: Monitoring data will continue to be collected on the wild horse populations and vegetative resources in the two HMAs to determine if established appropriate management levels remain valid.

Alan W. Kehida Acting
Environmental Coordinator:

10/09/97
Date:

Roxie J. Stehler
Authorized Official:

10/9/97
Date: