United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Elko Field Office
3900 East Idaho Street
Elko, Nevada 89801-4611
http://www.nv.blm.gov

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In Reply Refer To:
4700 (NV-012)

July 5, 2006

Dear Interested Party:

The Elko and Ely Field Offices (BLM) have determined a follow-up gather to remove approximately 1,700 excess wild horses from the Buck and Bald Herd Management Complex during summer 2006 is necessary in accordance with the Decision Record/Finding of No Significant Impact dated July 13, 2005. This decision anticipated the need to conduct a follow-up gather based on the June 2005 census data as well as the funding and contractor availability limitations which existed at the time. Refer to Page 4 of the Decision Record which states: "During the gather operation, BLM will also be evaluating whether to return to the Complex later in the year to conduct a follow-up gather. Additional census may be scheduled after the July gather to determine distribution and numbers of the remaining animals, and if a follow-up gather is necessary."

BLM's determination to conduct a follow-up gather is based on a careful review of the summer 2005 gather operation and additional census completed in March 2006, confirming that the current estimated population for the Complex is 2,200 animals, substantially above the appropriate management level (AML), of 862-732 wild horses. Due to the effects of prolonged drought, including limited water supply and the need to facilitate vegetation recovery, as well as the need to protect emergency stabilization and rehabilitation efforts on the 5,164 acre Chrome Fire, BLM plans to remove excess wild horses to a level of about 525 animals (refer to Buck and Bald Complex Environmental Assessment (EA) No. EK-2005-013/NV040-04-017, Pages 4, 7 and 8). The post-gather population of approximately 525 animals would represent the lower level of the AML for the Maverick Medicine HMA and Cherry Springs Territory, while the populations for the remaining HMAs would be reduced to the number shown through population modeling that would allow the population to increase during the four year gather cycle to high end of the AML range (862 head) without exceeding a thriving natural ecological balance (refer to EA, page 7 and 13).

Additionally, monitoring data continues to indicate vegetation use levels are not being met due to excess use by wild horses. This data indicates that a follow-up gather is needed at this time to protect the range from the deterioration associated with overpopulation of wild horses as authorized under Section 3 (b) (2) of the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act and Section 302 (b) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976.

The environmental impacts analysis documented in Environmental Assessment (EA) No. EK-2005-013/NV040-04-017 was also carefully reviewed. As a part of this review, a letter was sent to interested publics on May 19, 2006 to request any new information, data or analysis which BLM
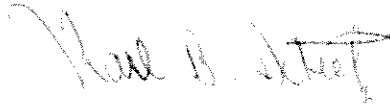
should consider in evaluating the adequacy of the existing impacts analysis. Sixteen letters were received comprising 75 individual questions and comments, many of which contain common or overlapping themes or duplicate those made during the public's review of the preliminary EA in May 2005 (refer to EA, Pages 33-36). The 75 individual comments received were consolidated into a total of 11 general comments for BLM's response. No new data, information or analysis was provided which would suggest a new EA is needed. The general comments and BLM's responses can be viewed at www.nv.blm.gov/elko/wildhorses.htm.

Based on this review, the BLM has concluded the existing environmental impacts analysis is adequate and a new EA need not be prepared for this follow-up gather as outlined in the Decision Record. Gather operations will begin on/after July 6, 2006.

Thank you for your continued interest in the management of Nevada's wild horses and burros.

Sincerely,

Shane DeForest,
Assistant Field Manager
Renewable Resources