



# United States Department of the Interior

## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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



*In Reply Refer To:*

4700 (CA-370) P

October 2, 1997

Wild Horse Organized Assistance (WHOA!)  
c/o Dawn Lappin  
PO Box 555  
Reno, NV 89504

Dear Dawn:

Thank you for your letter concerning the Coppersmith and Buckhorn wild horse herds. Based on concerns you voiced, I thought it might be helpful to review the current status of the Coppersmith and Buckhorn HMA's and our proposal to re-gather those herds to established AML's starting next week.

The Surprise Resource Area (SRA) began working to establish appropriate management levels for the two herds in 1993. 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 I signed the Decision Record on November 13, 1995, establishing an AML of 59-85 head for the Buckhorn and 50-75 head for the Coppersmith HMA's. No protests or appeals were received.

At the time, both the Wild Horse Commission and Nevada Division of Wildlife had concerns about our monitoring data, our compliance with the Stipulated Agreement for the Tuledad Allotment, and providing less than 30 days for comment prior to initiating a gather. Accordingly, Tara deValois and I met with the Commission and NDOW in Reno on December 7, 1997 to discuss their concerns.

At that meeting, we provided the following information:

1. A summary of actions taken on the Tuledad Allotment during 1993-95 in response to the Stipulated Agreement.
2. A summary of our 1995 monitoring data.
3. Also included were data tables summarizing actual use by livestock and wild horses from 1989 through 1995, a summary of actual forage utilization by class during 1992-95, data on bitterbrush utilization, utilization maps, etc.

NDOW and the Commission wrote a letter dated December 19, 1995 summarizing our discussion of December 7, 1995 and making the following recommendations:

- ◆ Issuance of all 10-year livestock permits require an environmental assessment.
- ◆ In the absence of a completed integrated management plan, annual grazing authorizations will be reviewed by affected interests.
- ◆ In the absence of standards and guidelines, annual grazing authorizations will have utilization limits for riparian and bitterbrush key management areas.
- ◆ Any new land use planning will be consistent with existing Wildlife MFP III decisions.
- ◆ Wild horse population models for Buckhorn and Coppersmith herds will be completed.
- ◆ A remedial plan to address compliance deficiencies with the items of Stipulated Agreement will be presented to affected interests.
- ◆ Planning will consider elk introductions in Nevada.

During 1996 and 1997, the SRA has completed NEPA documentation for any 10 year permits being reissued. We have also asked the affected interests to review the annual grazing authorizations (which include the year's plan for livestock use and utilization criteria for key areas).

During those years, we have also worked closely with a Stewardship Technical Review Team to make recommendations about desired future vegetation, specific management actions and projects, and are now working in close consultation, coordination and cooperation with the permittees (as required by PRIA) to finalize the details of a proposed grazing strategy that will help us to reach the recommended desired future condition. A briefing paper describing the current status of our planning effort is enclosed for information.

We have been assembling the data to complete accurate population models for the Buckhorn and Coppersmith herds. We plan to use the data collected during our gather next week to supplement our existing data. We have also been in touch with other area offices to learn more about modeling and their experience.

Utilization data gathered in 1996 support our AML decision. In 1996, following the November 1995 gather, we met utilization criteria in all but one key riparian area. Horses were healthy, and remaining within their herd territory. Our census in 1997, indicated that we were above AML's in both HMA's. Therefore, we notified affected interests on September 5, 1997 of our intention to re-gather to established AML.

When I met with NDOW and the Comission on December 7, 1995, I promised that I would issue a multiple-use decision when we establish an AML for the Fox Hog and High Rock HMA's and that we would try very hard to do that with sufficient lead time for the affected interests. We have collected extensive utilization data for Fox-Hog and hope to issue a multiple-use decision next spring. A gather would then be scheduled for next fall. We will also be collecting monitoring data for the High Rock HMA during the 1998 field season, for a possible gather in Fall 1999.

I hope this information clarifies the situation. Please let me know if you have additional concerns.

Sincerely,



Susan T. Stokke

Surprise Resource Area Manager

## ALLOTMENT PLANNING UPDATE

### Surprise Resource Area

9/97

#### *Tuledad Planning Area*

A Stewardship TRT is addressing issues of concern for the roughly 170,000 acre Tuledad Planning Area (the Tuledad, Red Rock Lake and Selic-Alaska allotments). The planning area provides spring-fall transition forage for the East Lassen deer herd. Deer winter on Twin Peaks (Eagle Lake Resource Area) and summer on the Modoc National Forest. A key issue for Tuledad is the poor condition of browse plants such as bitterbrush for deer.

The TRT includes representatives from the environmental community, State Fish and Game, Agricultural Research Service, Cooperative Extension, permittees, and wild horse and sportsmen interests. The main issues of concern are:

- Mostly, mature brush stands.
- Decadent, dying or dead bitterbrush.
- Riparian area condition.
- Aspen stand condition.
- Potential social and economic impacts.

The TRT has reached consensus about recommended landscape goals, management actions and specific range improvements. The next step is to identify a grazing strategy that will achieve desired vegetation conditions.

Rather than managing for a more shrubby or more herbaceous vegetation landscape, the TRT recommends managing for diverse vegetation and uses. Special emphasis is on improving age class diversity of upland shrub communities, achieving desired riparian plant communities, and ensuring the long-term health of special habitats like aspen communities and the Red Rock Marsh.

Recommended management actions are:

- Creating a Duck Flat Field to establish Great Basin wildrye and limit early spring use.

- Prescribed fire treatments for some mature brush stands to create mixed-age brush stands.
- Juniper removal in and around riparian areas and sites with desirable brush, grass and forb understories through fuelwood, cutting or prescribed fire.
- Conducting experimental treatments, including seeding forage kochia (an introduced palatable shrub) to determine the best practices for establishing and managing palatable shrubs in the Buckhorn, Cottonwood Mountain and Coppersmith Hills areas.
- Managing aspen to prevent stand loss and improve age class diversity through prescribed fire, cutting and/or fencing.
- Managing for healthy riparian areas and increased woody vegetation (where potential exists) through grazing management, headcut repair, or road relocation where needed.
- Managing Red Rock Marsh for waterfowl nesting and brood rearing.
- Maintaining aggressive wildfire suppression to protect existing resource values.
- Continuing to manage wild horses to appropriate management levels.

Two grazing management options are currently being considered. Both would designate areas for livestock use after July 15th when conflicts with special habitats (aspen, riparian, bitterbrush) can result. One would designate Boot's Hole and Burnt Lake for hot-season use. Herding and a Buckhorn field would protect the key bitterbrush area, provide for experimental treatments, and facilitate livestock management. The second alternative would remove some existing fences, fence some lakebeds for hot-season use, and use the remainder of the area early. Permittees will be meeting with TRT representatives in October to develop a recommended grazing strategy.

BLM hopes to begin public scoping of a final proposal this fall, with an environmental document available for review this winter/spring. Project implementation should begin in 1998.

*For more information, contact Susie Stokke, Area Manager, at (916) 279-6101.*