

5-15-09



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Surprise Field Office
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Cedarville, CA 96104
www.ca.blm.gov/surprise

In Reply Refer To:
4700 (LLCAN0700) (P)

May 15, 2009

Notice of Proposed Action and Initiation of Public Scoping For Wild Horse Gather and Removal Plans

Dear Interested Party,

The Surprise Field Office is re-initiating public scoping for wild horse management activities within several herd management areas (HMA) managed by the Surprise Field Office. Wild horse management activities to be included in this environmental review process include population census prior to capture operations, capture and removal of horses and participation in field research trials for population-level fertility control. Census would be completed using a helicopter, and capture and removal could utilize a combination of helicopters, bait trapping, and horseback techniques. Trap sites would be selected and temporarily constructed. For one HMA (Massacre Lakes), in addition to the above management activities, the appropriate management level (AML) will be reviewed and updated. The Surprise Field Office will be preparing two environmental assessments (EA) discussing the impacts of wild horse management activities within the subject HMAs. The BLM expects to issue the EAs, and decision records this summer, and the proposed action could be implemented starting in September 2009, or FY 2010 (October 1, 2009) depending on funding or other constraints.

The purpose of the actions is to achieve a thriving natural ecological balance, and ensure that wild horse populations allow for attainment of Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines for Northeast California and Northwestern Nevada.

The need for the action is to continue management of wild horse herds within the subject HMAs in accordance with the Surprise RMP Record of Decision.

Interested parties were first notified of this proposal through a scoping letter dated September 27, 2007. The herd management areas affected by the proposed action are Massacre Lakes, Carter Reservoir, Coppersmith, and Buckhorn. Coppersmith HMA was not included in the September 27, 2007 scoping letter.

Enclosed with this letter is summary information about the proposal for each herd management area. Previously submitted comments do not need to be resubmitted. These previous comments, along with any new comments will be used to determine issues to be considered and analyzed in the EAs. Your comments should be submitted by June 17, 2009 to insure consideration and sent to Steve Surian, at the above address.

Issue Scoping Information Wild Horse Management

Massacre Lakes Herd Management Area

The HMA is located 25 miles east of Cedarville CA, in north central Washoe County Nevada, and consist of approximately 39,890 acres. The HMA overlaps with the Massacre Lakes Allotment, Massacre Rim Wilderness Study Area, Massacre Rim Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), and the Black Rock High Rock Emigrant Trail National Conservation Area.

The current Appropriate Management Level (AML) has been established at 25-35 wild horses in Surprise RMP (2008). In March 2008, a helicopter census of the HMA counted 108 horses. The Massacre Lakes HMA population is now estimated at 156 horses based on 20% estimated population increase since the March 2008 helicopter census.

Carter Reservoir, Buckhorn, and Coppersmith Herd Management Areas

The Appropriate Management Level for these HMAs is as follows: 35 wild horses for the Carter Reservoir HMA; 85 wild horses for the Buckhorn HMA, and 75 wild horses for the Coppersmith HMA. The AML for Carter Reservoir HMA was established in 2003. The AML for the Buckhorn and Coppersmith Herd Management Areas AML were established in 1995.

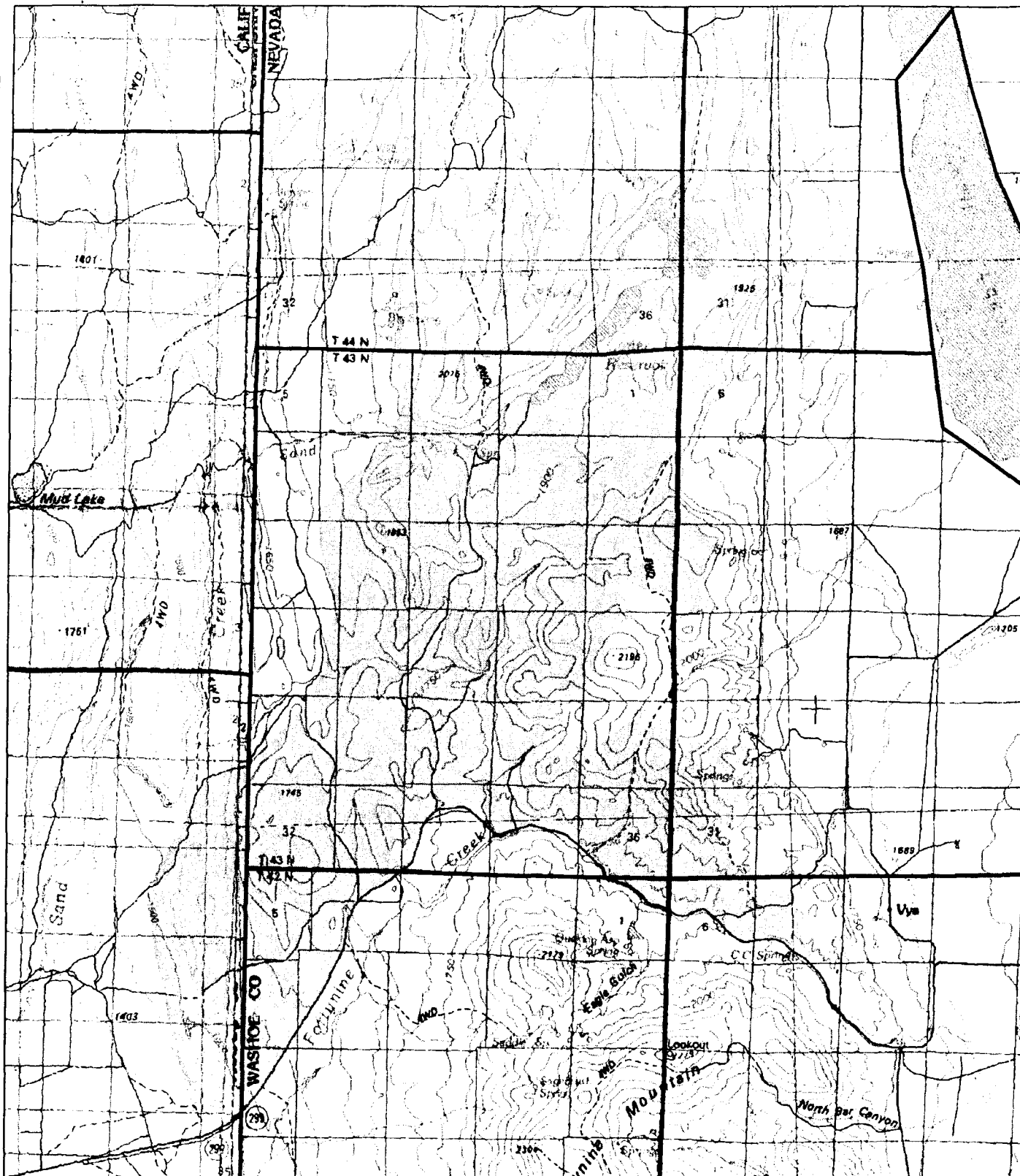
The Carter Reservoir HMA is Located 10 miles east of Cedarville CA, in northern Washoe County Nevada, and along the California Stateline, and consists of approximately 23,423 acres. In September 2007, 104 horses were counted in Carter Reservoir HMA (30 horses in Sand Creek Allotment, and 74 horses in Crooks Lake Allotment). The Carter Reservoir HMA population is estimated at 150 horses based on a 2007 helicopter census and 20% estimated population increase since the census. The HMA overlaps the North Hays Range Cultural Resource Management Area (CRMA) and the Sand Creek Allotment.

The Coppersmith HMA is located in Lassen County, California and Washoe County, Nevada on the slopes and tables from Duck Lake west to the Warner Mountains. The HMA consists of approximately 75,547 acres. This herd was last gathered in July 2005. Following the gather, 65 horses were counted in the Coppersmith HMA. The Coppersmith HMA current population is estimated at 136 horses based on the 2005 helicopter census and 20% estimated population increase since the census. The HMA overlaps the Tuledad/Duck Flat Cultural Resource Management Area (CRMA) and the Tuledad Allotment.

The Buckhorn HMA is located about 40 miles south of Cedarville CA, in northern Washoe County Nevada, and in Lassen County California, and consists of approximately 76,780 acres. The Buckhorn HMA population is estimated at 496 horses based on a 2005 helicopter

Herd Management Area Information


Herd Management Area	Acres Public/ other	AML		AML		Current population (estimated)	Year helicopter census	Other Management Areas Affected	
		low	high	Year established	Last gather			Grazing Allotments	Designated Boundaries
Buckhorn (CA-262)	76,780	59	85	1995	2003	496	July 2005	Tuledad	Buffalo Hills WSA, CRMA
Massacre Lakes (CA-268)	39,890	25	35	2008	1988	156	March 2008	Massacre Lakes	Massacre Rim WSA & ACEC, & NCA
Carter Reservoir (CA-269)	23,423	25	35	2003	2003	150	September 2007	Sand Creek; Crooks Lake	CRMA
Coppersmith (CA-261)	75,547	50	75	1995	2005	136	July 2005	Tuledad	CRMA

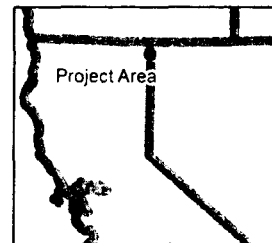
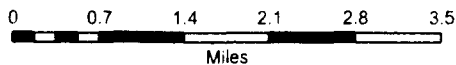


BLM Surprise Field Office - Carter Reservoir HMA

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 Herd Management Area

 Townships



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T35N

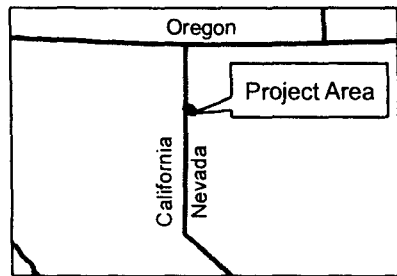
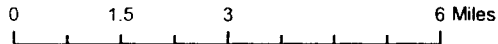
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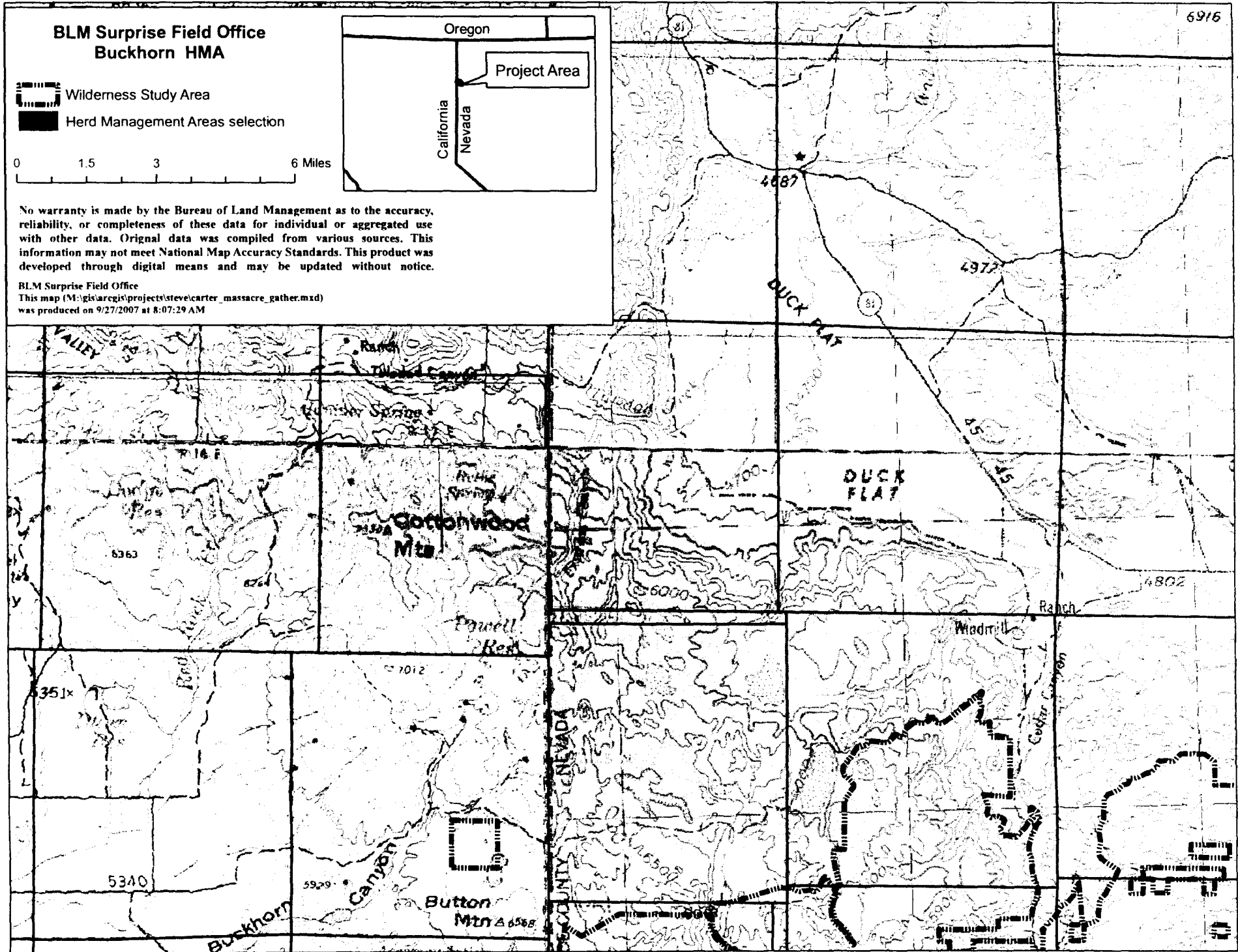
BLM Surprise Field Office Buckhorn HMA

-  Wilderness Study Area
-  Herd Management Areas selection



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BLM Surprise Field Office
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DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES
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June 3, 2009

Mr. Shane DeForest, Field Manager
Bureau of Land Management
Surprise Field Office
P.O. Box 460
Cedarville, California 96104-0460

RE: Scoping – Wild Horse Gathers

Dear Shane:

The Nevada Wild Horse Commission appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the "Notice of Proposed Action and Initiation of Public Scoping for the Wild Horse Gather and Removal Plans", managed by the Surprise Field Office.

I recently had a conversation with Steve Surian regarding wild horse management and current issues facing the HMA's in your area. I was unable to attend the recent field tours but have discussed the tour and associated habitat issues with Roy Leach with the Nevada Department of Wildlife, a sister agency.

The Commission is very concerned with the management of wild horses within the influence of the Surprise Field Office. Appropriate Management Levels are critical to achieving a thriving natural ecological balance for all users. Constant evaluation and assessments are necessary as environmental conditions change, to assess habitat production and carrying capacity to ensure proper utilization standards and goals are achieved. While I realize it is not possible to fully

Shane DeForest , Field Manager
June 3, 2009
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analyze areas each grazing year; it is unacceptable to have AML's that are 14 years old and no attempt by your Field Office to re-evaluate those AML's. Especially since you are in the process of issuing new 10 year grazing permits and are required to meet.

To issue those permits, the American public expects that they are being issued with full disclosure and evaluation of the habitats to ensure that established standards and guidelines are being met and/or making significant progress towards repairing areas of concern.

In your document you state "The purpose of the actions is to achieve a thriving natural ecological balance, and ensure that wild horse populations allow for attainment of Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines for Northeast California and Northwestern Nevada. " How can you possibly meet those goals when all you reference is gathers? No evaluations, no carrying capacity or assurances that the AML's are appropriate in conjunction with intended livestock permits and other uses of the habitat.

The HMA's addressed have a multitude of issues.

- 1) Herd Management Areas have outdated appropriate management levels (AML's) affecting the HMA's and associated allotments.
- 2) HMA suitability assessments were not conducted in the Surprise Field Office Resource Management Environmental Impact Statement.
- 3) Presently, the private land holdings may compromise the herd's ability to sustain themselves.
- 4) AML's suggest that a viable genetic pool to sustain these herds is inadequate and the herd's genetic needs must be addressed to insure long term sustainability of the individual herds.
- 5) Old AML's for these herds were determined by use pattern mapping of specific riparian habitats recognized as Key Areas used only by horses. This allotment has always been jointly used by wild horses and livestock. While the strategy to determine AML may be accurate, the past decision is seriously flawed and not supported with rangeland health or rangeland monitoring data.
- 6) I am assuming that you are re-addressing the Massacre Lakes AML, which was stated as established in March of 2008 in the RMP. You cannot establish AML's in a RMP. Land Use Plans set objectives, they do not analyze the allotments or carrying capacity and then issue legally binding decision documents setting AML and livestock permits. You do not have a current AML for Massacre Lakes HMA therefore cannot gather those horses. In 1989 the IBLA decision threw out land

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use plan numbers and required BLM to establish numbers based on evaluation of monitoring and in public consultation decision documents.

- 7) Throughout your references to various HMA's you refer to using a "20% estimated populations increase since the census". Can you please provide us with the historical data showing recruitment to justify using a 20% figure vs any other. Recruitment estimates were to be justified with data which should be readily available using past gather and census comparisons.

This document is scoping for multiple gather plans in Surprise but they make no mention of new AML's, assessing for genetic viability of the herds and herd area suitability, you stayed with the grossly outdated AML's and are intending to issue a 10 year permit based on what? We cannot accept that.

The BLM has a responsibility entrusted to you by the public to ensure that the public lands are managed in a responsible manner as their caretaker.

We have seen comments submitted by NDOW and echo those sentiments: "Previous land use plans allocated forage from a one time rangeland inventory, which established population goals for wild horses. These forage allocations were abandoned by the BLM and replaced with the ongoing rangeland monitoring studies required to validate stocking rates and wild horse numbers. Several of these wild horse herds have appropriate management levels established through various environmental assessments and several of these wild horse herds carry population goals without the benefit of rangeland monitoring data. These matters require immediate attention.

During the scoping phase of the Surprise Resource Management Plan, the issue of herd management area suitability was identified to the pending plan. This issue was not addressed in the RMP, but left to future assessments. We suggest that the present environmental assessment conduct the appropriate habitat assessments and genetic viability tests affect these limited herds.

The Surprise Resource Management Plan provides the guidance for the above actions to fully address wild horses.

In light that many of the allotments are under 10 year review and issuance, BLM has monitored for over 24 years and the validation or adjustment of wild horses is over due."

Shane DeForest
July 3, 2009
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In closing, we would urge the Surprise Resource Area to evaluate and update the AML's in these HMA's prior to any unjustified gathers, to establish herd management area plans (HMAP's) to include herd management objectives, sustainability/genetic diversity, suitability, and habitat assurances for a properly managed herd.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Catherine Barcomb
Administrator