

BOB MILLER
Governor

STATE OF NEVADA

11-15-93
CATHERINE BARCOMB
Executive Director



**COMMISSION FOR THE
PRESERVATION OF WILD HORSES**

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November 15, 1993

Mr. Tony Danna
Surprise Resource Area Manager
BLM-Surprise Resource Area
Box 460
Cedarville, California 96104-0460

RE: - Record of Decision for Wild Horse Gathering and Removal:
Bitner, High Rock, Nut Mountain, and Wall Canyon

Dear Mr. Danna,

The Nevada Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses has great interest in the long term management of wild horse herds within the Surprise Resource Area of Washoe County. Issues raised in the Commission's protest of the proposed decision and draft environmental assessment were not adequately considered in the Record of Decision. We appeal this decision based upon the following errors:

The environmental assessment is inadequate.

The environmental assessment did not consider the gather of only adoptable animals and re-structuring of the affected herds. The removal of young age classes (less than nine years), will increase the mortality rates and decrease recruitment in the surviving herds. Releasing unadoptable animals above carrying capacity will continue to degrade riparian habitat and range conditions.

The Record of Decision is biased and arbitrary against wild horses.

Bureau of Land Management policy and the land use plan require that monitoring data be assessed and decisions made to establish carrying capacities for the affected allotments. Allotment evaluations and multiple use decisions are being made in Nevada to establish a thriving natural ecological balance. Elements of this Record of Decision specifically adjust wild horses on allotments that are used by wildlife and livestock. Failure to address and adjust other users to protect or restore natural resources is biased against wild horses.

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Carrying capacities were not established.

Failure to include livestock actual use and use pattern mapping data in the environmental assessment prevented carrying capacity determination for wild horses, wildlife, and livestock. The land use plan limited annual utilization to the "moderate range" (40 - 61%). Selection of a carrying capacity computation from the Bureau's Technical Manual 4400-7, based upon non-uniform utilization, would result in the following:

$$\frac{\text{livestock and wild horse AUM's}}{80 \text{ percent actual utilization}} = \frac{\text{desired stocking level}}{40 \text{ percent desired}}$$

Allocation of the available forage to the proportion of wild horses and livestock on the allotment during years of monitoring would result in significant differences that the Record of Decision.

Wild horse herds are below thresholds and in jeopardy.

Wild horse research indicates that herds less than 50 are at risk of the loss of genetic diversity after as few as five generations. The Record of Decision allows for adjustments as low as 15 wild horses per herd. There are no data or analysis in the environmental assessment to support the Record of Decision's rationale. The Record of Decision provides no assurances that the surviving herds can sustain their genetic integrity.

Implementation of the "Strategic Plan for the Management of Wild Horses and Burros on Public Lands" will arbitrarily re-structure the herds affected by the Record of Decision. Plan Assumption E. states: "Only adoptable animals will be removed from public lands." Corresponding internal policy has resulted in the release of only animals in excess of nine years. These older age class animals are less productive and subject to winter kill.

APPEAL SUMMARY

The Commission is devoted to the Bureau of Land Management's land use plan and decision making processes to balance livestock and wild horses to a thriving natural ecological balance within the capacity of Nevada's public lands. Subjective decisions to adjust wild horse herds to levels that threaten their viability is contrary to law.

We encourage the District to reconsider the Record of Decision. Multiple use decisions, supported by an environmental assessment

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that evaluates all data, land use plan objectives and issues of this appeal, must adjust all ungulate use to levels necessary to protect and restore all natural resources.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Catherine Barcomb". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

CATHERINE BARCOMB
Executive Director