

11-29-07

Finding of No Significant Impact and Decision Record

EA # CA-350-2007-35

United States
Department of
the Interior



Bureau of Land
Management

**Eagle Lake
Field Office**

**Susanville,
CA 96130**

(11/29/07)

Ravendale Wild Horse Gather Rave Herd Management Area

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Ravendale Wild Horse Gather
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INTRODUCTION:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has conducted an environmental analysis (EA No. CA-350-2007-35) analyzing the impacts of authorizing a wild horse gather of approximately 55 wild horses from the Ravendale Herd Management area in the Ravendale Allotment. The reduction of wild horses will bring the total number of wild horses down to management levels of 15 to 25.

The EA analyzes two alternatives from which I have selected Alternative 1, Proposed Action.

1. Alternative 1, the selected alternative, is described in Chapter 2 of the attached EA on page 7 and consists of:

The proposed action is to gather and reduce the herd to 15 to 25 horses or the Appropriate Management Levels (AML) identified for this herd. The proposed action is conformance with BLM's 2001 Wild Horse Strategy, which is to implement population management for each HMA.

The removal of excess wild horses would be accomplished by the use of a helicopter herding the horses into traps constructed of portable panels. The proposed capture site is entirely on private land near Ravendale, Ca. This operation would be accomplished either by BLM employees, contract, or a combination of both and the wild horses will be herded from public and private lands to the trap site. All capture logistics including temporary corrals, transportation, and holding areas will be on private land.

All capture and handling activities would be conducted in accordance with the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) described in Appendix 1. Selection of capture techniques would be based on several factors such as the season of removal, condition of animals, herd health, and environmental considerations. The excess horses removed from the area will be processed and those that meet the criteria will be put up for public adoption.

The actual gathering process is estimated to be completed in about 2-3 days. It is expected that the Proposed Action would be initiated between October and November 2007. If the gather does not occur during this time it will be rescheduled for 2008.

1. PLAN CONFORMANCE AND CONSISTENCY:

The proposed action is subject to and conforms to the Willow Creek Management Framework Plan (MFP)/Final Grazing Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) 1983, and Record of Decision, as amended by the Rangeland (Land) Health Standards and Guidelines for California and Northwestern Nevada (2000). The Proposed Action is in conformance with these plans and consistent with federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and plans to the maximum extent possible.

The MFP Objectives common to all HMAs include:

Maintain a healthy, viable wild and free-roaming horse herds.

Strive to achieve 100% adoptability of all horses that are removed from the herds through the regular adoption program.

Prevent inbreed problems from occurring in the HMAs.

The MFP states in the Range Management section on page 7. E. Wild Horses, Maintain a viable herd of 10-25 wild horses and on page 12. Item 9., Maintain the New Ravendale Wild Horse Herd population of 15 horses plus or minus 50 %.

Alternative 1 or the proposed action is authorized under Section 3(b) (2) of the 1971 Free-Roaming Wild Horses and Burros Act and Section 302(b) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976.

The Herd Management Area Plan (HMAP) for this herd affected by the Proposed Action was signed in 1989. The Management Framework Plan provides general management direction, the 1983 decision established the AML, and the HMAP provides management parameters.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT DETERMINATION:

Based upon a review of the attached EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that Alternative 1, which I have selected, is not a major federal action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. For this reason no environmental impact statement needs to be prepared. This finding is based on the following rationale and discussion of context and intensity of the action.

Rationale:

Following is the rationale for why the identified issues discussed in the EA will not be significantly affected or affect the action.

Wild Horse Management

Increases in the wild horse numbers above the AML or management number can have serious impacts to land health by concentrating use in small areas which do not receive any rest due to year long use by horses.

The EA addresses the impacts wild horses under sub-heading 3.1 Wild Horse Management starting on page 9 to 12.

Based on the analysis provided in the EA, I have determined alternative 1 will not significantly affect wild horses in the Ravendale Herd. The reduction of horses down to Appropriate Management Levels (AMLs) will improve the health of the herd and forage base by increasing available forage and reducing impacts to vegetation, private land and water sources thereby reducing requests for herd reductions from the private land owner, and riparian areas in the herd area.

Livestock Grazing

Current livestock use is in balance with long term sustainable forage. Intensive grazing management has proved beneficial as indicated by land health standards being met in this area. However, if wild horses are not maintained at management numbers they may exceed the carrying capacity and begin to negatively impact existing native vegetation, especially riparian areas.

The primary reasons for additional impacts occur because wild horses tend to concentrate in small areas year long as compared to livestock that are moved through the area which provides for rest and regrowth. The extended use without any rest or deferment increases utilization and trampling of riparian areas and may affect land health in the herd area.

The removal of horses down to AML would reduce utilization of riparian and upland vegetation. This management coupled with a progressive livestock grazing program which manages for long term sustainability of vegetation would result in improved rangeland health. Management adjustments to the grazing strategy and the maintenance wild horse numbers at or near management levels have resulted in improved range condition as indicated by standards for land health being met and maintained in this allotment.

The EA addresses the impacts livestock grazing under sub-heading 3.2 Livestock Grazing starting on page 12 to 14.

Based on the analysis provided in the EA I have determined that alternative 1 will enhance livestock grazing in the Ravendale Herd by stabilizing and ensuring long term sustainable forage for wildlife, wild horses, and livestock.

Riparian Management

Traditional riparian management in this area is accomplished through rest and deferment of livestock and maintaining wild horses at or near the AML. Most of the permanent water is on private land in the herd area and as horse numbers increase, additional impacts to riparian by trampling and over use occur. Past observations indicate when horse numbers are maintained at management levels and the livestock grazing strategy is followed, recovery and improvement occurs.

The EA addresses the impacts to riparian areas under sub-heading 3.3 Riparian Management begins on page 14 to 16. Based on the analysis provided in the EA I have determined that alternative 1 will enhance riparian areas in the herd area by stabilizing ground cover and water availability on public and private land for wildlife, wild horses, and livestock.

Intensity: (*Intensity refers to the severity of the impact.*) The following discussion is based on the relevant factors that should be considered in evaluating intensity as described in 40 CFR 1508.27:

1. Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.

I have determined that none of the direct, indirect or cumulative impacts associated with reducing wild horses to management levels as stated in Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) are significant individually or combined.

2. The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety.

The proposed action is located within a rural setting. Wild horse and livestock management as described in alternative 1 have occurred in the same location for over 20 years. Since wild horse reductions to AMLs have been authorized several times within the affected area there have been no instances where public health or safety has been affected.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

Several riparian areas (springs and seeps) have been identified in the wild horse herd area. These occur on both public and private land and are important because they provide wildlife habitat and are the only dependable water sources in the area. Impacts to riparian vegetation and water production can occur when year long horse use concentrate at the spring source especially if horse numbers exceed AMLs.

However, if horse numbers are at or near AMLs I have determined that none of the direct, indirect or cumulative impacts associated with reducing wild horses to management levels as stated in Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) are significant individually or combined.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

Scoping for proposed action was sent out prior to the development of the EA to all of the known affected and interested publics. No written comments were received and only one telephone conversation was documented. Concern was voiced by a wild horse advocate that the proposed action was really intended as a reason to eliminate the wild horse in the Ravendale Herd Area. This was not the case. In fact the horse herd has been reduced to management levels several times during the last 20 years and there are no plans to eliminate this small herd.

After review of the comments received I have determined that the effects described in the EA are not highly controversial.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

Management of wild horse numbers is a common action authorized by the BLM, the effects from which have been thoroughly analyzed in NEPA documents and scientific publications. The analysis provided in the attached EA does not indicate that this action would involve any unique or unknown risks.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The reduction of wild horse numbers to management levels has occurred several times in the past and is not precedent setting. Wild Horse management has been authorized in the land use plan and the Herd Management Area (HMA) and is provided for in the selected alternative.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts – which include connected actions regardless of land ownership.

There are no related or connected actions associated with alternative 1.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

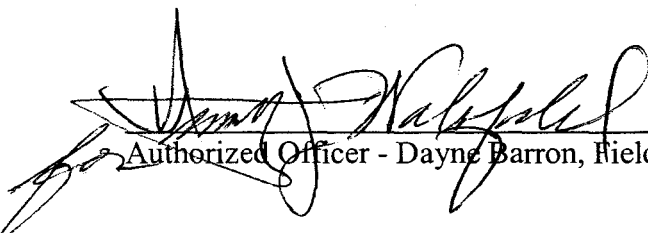
There are no known sites near the trap site which is entirely on private land. The horse gather usually takes one day to set up and one day to complete. Because the herd is relatively small very little surface disturbance is anticipated when the horses are brought to the trap site. No loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources is expected with this action.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

There are no threatened or endangered plants or animals known to occur within the project or the surrounding area

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of a federal, state, local, or tribal law, regulation or policy imposed for the protection of the environment, where nonfederal requirements are consistent with federal requirements.

The action does not violate any known federal, state, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.


Authorized Officer - Dayne Barron, Field Manager

1/2/08
Date