

W H O A

WILD HORSE ORGANIZED ASSISTANCE
P.O. BOX 555
RENO, NEVADA 89504

7-26-93



... a note from

Dawn Y. Lappin

July 26, 1993

J. Anthony Dana
Surprise Resource Area Manager
BLM-Susanville District
Box 460
Cedarville, California 96104-0460

Dear Mr. Dana,

WHOA has received and reviewed the Wild Horse Gathering and Removal for Bitner, High Rock and Wall Canyon Herd Management Areas Environmental Assessment. Setting appropriate management levels for wild horses is a Bureau of Land Management priority for FY 94 and this document represents a proposed manager's decision to adjust wild horse numbers to meet a thriving natural ecological balance.

In our previous discussions concerning the management of wild horses and burros within the Susanville District of Nevada, we have attempted to set specific guidelines that assure that wild horses are adjusted within the laws established for wild horse management and in concert to other ungulates with the end result of improved range conditions. In our view the environmental assessment must address specific land use objectives for key vegetation, critical habitat, multiple use and sustain yield mandates affecting all ungulates dependant on our public lands. In Nevada, as required by law which applies to California as well, wild horse appropriate management levels are established with the use of monitoring data in the allotment evaluation process. Wild horse decisions are issued as a part of Multiple Use Decisions per allotment. In this way, wild horses are adjusted in balance with livestock and wildlife on equal terms and assumptions within the Bureau's consistent format and methodology.

Due to inconsistencies and errors of this proposed decision and draft environmental assessment, we protest based upon the following errors:

Wild horse appropriate management levels are not in balance with active livestock preference of affected allotments.

The land use plan limited the utilization of key riparian species to the moderate range (40 to 60 percent). Use pattern J.

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mapping data in the appendix indicates the allotments were used by livestock, wild horses and wildlife. Wild horse appropriate management levels were set independent of any other adjustment to ungulates that affect riparian habitats.

For example, use pattern mapping for the Nut Mountain Allotment indicated heavy and severe use of riparian habitat when wild horses and livestock used the allotment in common. Wild horses are proposed to be reduced to meet the land use plan's moderate utilization limitation for riparian habitat. Livestock grazing permits are for active preference levels set in the land use plan. It would appear that the Susanville District has the same obligation to adjust livestock to meet the moderate utilization limitation of the land use plan.

Also, we are confused with your computations regarding AUM's. An AUM as we understand it equates to 1 AUM = 1 cow/calf, 1 horse, and 5 sheep or deer. How then can you calculate forage demand differently, i.e., for a cow 1 AUM = 800 lbs of forage, whereas 1 AUM for a horse = 1,000 lbs of forage (page 41). You reference on page 31, that "In the 1977 inventory and the MFP and AUM was 800 pounds for useable forage." Why then do your calculations differ just for wild horses?

Wild horse population data was not fully analyzed to determine current population estimates or projected recruitment rates for the proposed appropriate management levels.

Nevada witnessed winter losses of entire bands of wild horses in 1993. We have personally found and documented the loss bands up to 40 head on the Susanville District with reports from permittees totally approximately 100 dead horses. Suffering wild horse bands were shot by the Winnemucca District adjacent to these wild horse management areas in 1993. We have no reason to believe that the general lack of wild horses within these management areas in the spring of 1993 are because of delayed migration from other areas. A population survey should be conducted to verify the population estimates.

Recruitment rates are essential to population estimates, appropriate management and restructuring of the herd. Actual counts of wild horses vary due to habitat, season and methodology. The percent of foals in the population is an index as to the health and viability of the herd. These data must be collected analyzed to determine proper management of the herds.

Age and sex data collected in previous gathers should be expressed in the document. This data must be analyzed to determine how the herd is to be re-structured.

Utilization rates for key riparian species of key riparian habitat are not consistent with other federal land management agencies.

The land use plan MFP III decision limits utilization of key

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forage to moderate or 40 to 60 percent. Specific Standard and Guidelines of the U.S. Forest Service does not allow over 50% utilization on riparian habitats. On degraded riparian habitats in need of improvement, the Service has implemented utilization limits that will not exceed 25% of the annual growth. In allotments with livestock, wild horses and wildlife, the allowable use level or utilization limit is proportionally distributed between user. For example, the utilization limit is 50% for upland wetland riparian habitat.

Monitoring data indicates that all key riparian habitats within these herd management areas are degraded. We suggest the District implement the lower limit of 40% utilization to restore these riparian areas. Computations for livestock and wild horses carrying capacities should use proportions that maintain a viable wild horse herd.

Wild horse appropriate management levels are below the threshold for a viable population.

In a recent Multiple Use Decision for wild horse appropriate management levels within the Black Rock Range of Nevada, the Bureau of Land Management could not reduce the herds below 50 individuals. The Bureau's rationale was based upon research that found that herds less than 50 risks the loss of it's genetic diversity after as few as five generations.

Violations in setting Wild horse Appropriate Management Levels

In 1989, IBLA ruled that wild horse appropriate management levels **must** be established according to monitoring data. This was established nation wide not just for Nevada. We are disappointed that after all the meetings on this issue between ourselves and your District that this legal requirement is still not being followed. In this document you have shown what the AML "would be" if you used your monitoring data, however you refer to your old MFP numbers which are no longer viable and use those numbers to set your AML. This is not allowed for by law. As an example, using your own data on Nut Mountain, your data shows that the AML should be 69 wild horses, that number is the AML. To conduct a gather you would set a lower amount to be released allowing the herd to grow to the AML, keeping in mind minimum numbers necessary for genetic diversity.

PROTEST SUMMARY

The issues of this protest are to elevate previous concerns of WHOA to the Susanville District. We view these issues and concerns as constructive input to assure the preservation of these herds and that wild horses are treated fairly and consistently. We encourage the District to provide additional

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data, expand the scope of this decision and provide sound rationale to support a Multiple Use Decision that will protect our state's natural resources.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you prior to your issuance of a final.

Sincerely,

Dawn Y. Lappin
by eb

DAWN Y. LAPPIN
Director