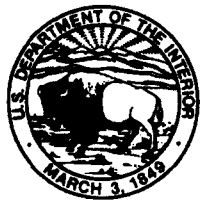


11-24-95



# United States Department of the Interior

## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Ridgecrest Resource Area  
300 South Richmond Road  
Ridgecrest, CA 93555-4436



IN REPLY REFER TO:  
4720  
(CA-065.34)

NOV 24 1995

CERTIFIED MAIL NO. Z 729 796 969  
RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

Humane Equine Rescue and Development Society  
Attn: Cathy Barcomb  
Dawn Lappin  
15640 Sylvester Road  
Reno, NV. 89511

Dear Cathy and Dawn:

Enclosed for your review, please find a **DRAFT** copy of Ridgecrest Resource Area's Capture Plan for the removal of wild burros from the Centennial and Slate Herd Management Areas scheduled to begin in February, 1996.

The BLM provides for a thirty (30) day review and comment period, in which individuals and organizations, affected by the proposed action, can submit their input to be considered in our planning and decision making process.

Therefore, I would appreciate it if you would review the document and provide me comments to the above address. If you have any questions concerning this document, or need further clarification concerning the capture, please don't hesitate to contact David Sjaastad, Wild Horse and Burro Program Lead, at (619) 384-5434.

Thank you for your prompt attention in this matter.

Sincerely,

*Grant Mueswanger Acting AM*

Lee Delaney  
Area Manager

Enclosure

DRAFT

**Ridgecrest Resource Area  
Capture Plan for Wild Burros  
for the  
Centennial and Slate Herd Management Areas  
Fiscal Year 1996**

**I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

The purpose of this capture plan is to outline the objectives, methods and procedures for the removal of up to 150 burros from the Centennial/Slate Herd Management Areas (HMAs) and adjacent areas outside the HMAs. The majority of the land base for both HMAs (60-70%) are with in the China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station (NAWS) lands administered by the Navy, however, the wild horse and burros are managed cooperatively by the Navy and Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Certain logistical and procedural requirements are essential in implementing a wild horse and burro management program on NAWS. A Interagency Agreement, No. B-060-A2-0002, signed June 1992, between the BLM and NAWS prescribes the responsibilities of the two agencies for managing wild horses and burros. To protect classified national security information and also to insure the safety of personnel, the NAWS Commander must, at all times, exercise complete control of all personnel and operations on NAWS range areas. All removal operations will be carefully scheduled to minimize potential conflict with range operations. Security clearances will be obtained through the Navy for the helicopter and gather crew when the gather operations involve the NAWS.

The proposed reductions are in accordance with goals identified in the California Desert Conservation Area Plan 1981 Amendment (NO. 24).

**II. AREA DESCRIPTION**

The Centennial and Slate HMAs are located in the upper Western Mojave Desert of Southern California. The town of Ridgecrest borders the south end of the Centennial HMA and is approximately 21 miles from the upper western boundary of the Slate HMA.

In October 1994, Congress passed and the President signed into law the California Desert Protection Act (CDPA). Within the Centennial HMA, the Act designated 3 wilderness areas encompassing 134,010 acres (approximately 125,410 acres actually within the HMA); 1 Wilderness Study Area (WSA) encompassing 8,800 acres; and 2 Death Valley Wilderness Units of approximately 5,440 acres. The Act also designated a Death Valley Wilderness, a BLM WSA in the Owlshhead Mountains and the Grass Valley Wilderness; approximately 22,620 combined acres of these three areas are within the Slate HMA.

**A. SLATE HMA**

The Slate HMA is located ~~within~~ San Bernardino County. There are approximately 520,320 acres in the HMA which includes approximately: 70,880 acres of BLM lands; 17,440 acres Death Valley National Park Lands; 1,920 acres state lands; 8,320 acres private lands; 49,920 acres within the Fort Irwin Military Reservation; and 371,840 acres within the China Lake NAWS.

The Slate Mountain Range is located in the northwest quarter of this HMA. Two major valleys run parallel to the mountain range. Panamint Valley to the east and Searles Valley to the west. The elevation ranges from 1900 feet up to 5,578 feet at Straw Peak on the southern tip of the range. The western boundary extends south of the NAWS boundary near Slocum Mountain (elevation 5,124) about 5 miles before heading east towards Superior Lake. In the southern portion of the HMA is the Eagle Crags. This is a small range of volcanic mountains ranging in elevation from 3,000 feet to 4,835 feet. From Superior Lake the HMA boundary heads northeastwardly to Goldstone Lake which is 2 miles east of the China Lake NAWS-Fort Irwin Military Reservation boundary. From Goldstone Lake, the eastern boundary of the HMA extends past the northern boundary of the Fort Irwin Military Reservation at the Quail Mountains up through the BLM WSA and the Death Valley National Park Service Wilderness Unit up to the Owlshhead Mountains, just before long valley. The HMA boundary then runs down to the south end of Brown Mountain within the China Lake NAWS and then runs northwestwardly up through Panamint Valley, terminating at the northern slopes of the Slate Mountain Range.

#### B. CENTENNIAL HMA

The upper two-thirds of the HMA is within Inyo County. The southern one-third is divided between two counties. The west half is located in Kern County and the eastern half is in San Bernardino County. There are approximately 996,735 acres in the HMA which includes approximately: 331,520 acres BLM lands; 7,360 acres Death Valley National Park Service lands; 15,680 acres state lands; 36,480 acres private lands; and 605,695 acres within the China Lake NAWS.

The northern boundary of the HMA is Highway 190. The upper western boundary follows close to Highway 395. The lower western boundary follows the western boundary of the China Lake NAWS down to Highway 178 and beyond about 3 miles. The southern boundary parallels Highway 178 up to Poison Canyon where it follows Highway 178 up through Trona to the northern tip of Searles Lake. The HMA boundary follows the shoreline to the southwest where it ties into the west boundary of the Slate HMA. The eastern boundary of the HMA follows the western boundary of the Slate HMA northward up Searles Valley to the northern slopes of the Slate Mountain Range. The Boundary then deviates away from the Slate HMA northward up Panamint Valley, tying into Highway 190 about 2 miles west of Panamint Springs.

In the northwest quarter of the HMA is the Coso Mountain Range which includes the Coso Range Wilderness. The Coso Mountain Range is primarily volcanic in origin, with deeply cut steep faults in basalt forming a series of mesas on the western side. The elevation ranges from 4,000 feet near the Haiwee Reservoir to 8,160 feet at Coso Peak, where a small forest of pinyon pine and juniper is found. Freshwater springs are few. Along the western edge of the Cosos is a geothermal area with active hot springs and live fumaroles, known as the Coso Hot Springs/Devil Kitchen region. This area has been developed for energy production and currently generates approximately 240 mega watts of electric power.

Coso Basin and Indian Wells Valley makes up the majority of the southwest quarter of this HMA. This area has a interbedded strata of clay, sand and gravel.

The Argus Mountain Range makes up the majority of the eastern half of the HMA. The north end of the range extends into the Nelson Range and the south end terminates at Poison Canyon. This range primarily of volcanic origin has major faults traversing the range forming steep,

jagged ridges, sharp peaks and deep, steep-faced canyons with numerous drainages and extensive series of mesas. Elevations range from 1,847 feet in the Salt Wells Valley to 8,839 feet at the summit of Maturango Peak. The Darwin Falls Wilderness and two Death Valley National Park Wilderness Units are located at the northern end of this mountain range. This area includes the extreme southern end of Darwin Plateau and portions of the Darwin Hills area near the town of Darwin. Riparian areas are associated with China Garden Spring and Darwin Falls located in Darwin Canyon. The hills and surrounding bajadas have Joshua tree woodland and sagebrush scrub communities. Towards the southern end of the mountain range is the Great Falls Basin WSA. This area is unique with its riparian attributes. The Argus Range Wilderness extends from the Darwin Wilderness down to the Great Falls Basin WSA. Vegetation is primarily mixed creosote desert scrub on the lower elevations and sparse to non-existent (with an occasional pinyon-juniper) on the higher elevations.

### III. JUSTIFICATION

#### Appropriate Management Level

The 1981 Amendment (NO. 24) changed the Wild Horse and Burro Element for the Centennial and Slate HMAs to reflect the change in burro management policy at the Naval Weapons Center (China Lake) to reduce the burro population to zero.

The following table lists the appropriate management level, estimated existing populations and the excess above management level for burros in the two HMAs.

Herd Management Area	Appropriate Management Level	Estimated Population	Excess Above Management Level
Centennial	0	100	100
Slate	0	78	78

Under current conditions, burro populations can increase by 10% to 20% annually. Taking a conservative reproductive estimate, burro population numbers could double in seven years. Population estimates are based on aerial survey data, ground observations, removals and projected yearly increases. The following is an analysis of methods and reliability of current estimates.

Herd Management Area	Population Estimate Method and Date	Reliability High, Good, Fair, Poor
Centennial	16% Annual Increase	Fair
Slate	Air Observations 1993 16% Annual Increase	High

### IV. PROPOSED ACTION

The goal is to capture up to 150 burros from the Centennial/Slate HMAs and adjacent areas. These animals will be transported to the Ridgecrest Wild Horse and Burro Holding Facility. All removed animals will be placed into the BLM's adoption program. The health and welfare of all the animals will be given the highest priority.

The proposed action is to comply with Federal Statutes, CDCA Plan policy and the NAWS-BLM Interagency Agreement in the removal of wild burros in the Centennial and Slate HMA's. The operation is planned to begin around January 03, 1996 (pending on weather) and last for a 10 day period.

#### V. CAPTURE SITES

Several sites will be needed to gather the wild burros from the HMAs. Each site will be selected after the location of the animals and how the topography of the area can best be used to implement the gather. In general, capture sites will be located in areas that have been previously disturbed to cause as little damage to the natural resources as possible. Temporary capture corral sites will be located on and adjacent to existing roadways. No temporary corral shall be set up in a Wilderness or WSA. Boundary roads, cherry stems and areas excluded from wilderness or WSAs will be suitable to set trap sites and temporary corrals. Cherry stems are existing roads open for vehicle traffic that borders a wilderness area. Special care will be taken to minimize disturbance to resource values in gather areas.

#### CAPTURE SITES LOCATIONS (See Attached Maps)

##### Proposed Trap Sites on NAWS administered lands for the Centennial HMA

1. Sweetwater Wash. T. 24 S, R. 41 E, Sec. 10 SWSW, M.D.B.M.
2. Birchum Springs. T. 23 S, R. 42 E, Sec. 18 SENW, M.D.B.M.
3. Coso Hot Springs. T. 22 S, R. 39 E, Sec. 10 SENW, M.D.B.M.
4. Wild Horse Mesa. T. 22 S, R. 41 E, Sec. 21 SESE, M.D.B.M.
5. Big Cactus Flat. T. 21 S, R. 38 E, Sec. 12 NWNW, M.D.B.M.
6. El Conejo Mine. T. 21 S, R. 41 E, Sec. 30 NWSW, M.D.B.M.
7. Cole Spring. T. 20 S, R. 40 E, Sec. 32 SESW, M.D.B.M.
8. Darwin Wash. T. 20 S, R. 41 E, Sec. 29 SENW, M.D.B.M.

##### Proposed Trap Sites on BLM Administered Lands for the Centennial HMA

9. McCloud Mine. T. 20 S, R. 38 E, Sec. 31 SENW, M.D.B.M.
10. Lower Centennial Flat. T. 19 S, R. 39 E, Sec. 25 SENE, M.D.B.M.
11. Cactus Flat Rds. T. 20 S, R. 37 1/2 E, Sec. 13 NENE, M.D.B.M.  
T. 20 S, R. 38 E, Sec. 17, 18, 19, 20, 29 and 30, M.D.B.M.
12. Nadeau Trail. Runs in a north-south direction on the east side of the Argus Mountain Range.  
T. 22 S, R. 43 E, Sec. 28 NWNE, M.D.B.M. Intersects HWY 178

##### Proposed trap Sites on Death Valley National Park Administered Lands for the Centennial HMA

12. Nadeau Trail. Runs in a north-south direction on the east side of the Argus Mountain Range.  
T. 18 S, R. 42 E, Sec. 28 SWSW, M.D.B.M. Intersects HWY 190

##### Proposed Trap Sites on NAWS administered Lands for the Slate HMA

1. Road Ways on the east side of the Slate Mountain Range and between Wingate Pass. T. 25 S and 26 S, R. 45 E, M.D.B.M.
2. Indian Spring Road. Runs in a west-east direction south of the Eagle Crags.

T. 30 S, R. 46 E, Sec. 7, M.D.B.M. West End  
T. 30 S, R. 46 E, Sec. 1, M.D.B.M. East End

3. Searles Valley on the east side of Searles Lake playa.  
T. 26 S, R. 44 E, Sec. 33, M.D.B.M.

#### Proposed Trap Sites on BLM Administered Lands for the Slate HMA

1. Indian Ranch Road and associated exclusion areas. The road runs in a north-south direction on the east side of the Slate Mountain Range.  
T. 22 S, R. 44 E, Sec. 3 NWSW, M.D.B.M. North End at Ballarat  
T. 24 S, R. 44 E, Sec. 12 NESW, M.D.B.M. Intersects Route P170
2. Route P152. Runs in a west-east direction. West end intersects Route P170.  
T. 24 S, R. 44 E, Sec. 12 SENW, M.D.B.M. West End  
T. 24 S, R. 45 E, Sec. 7 NESW, M.D.B.M. East End
3. Route P103 and associated roads. Runs in a north-south direction on the west side of the Slate Mountain Range.  
T. 22 S, R. 43 E, Sec. 33 NENE, M.D.B.M. North End  
T. 24 S, R. 43 E, Sec. 22 NWNE, M.D.B.M. Intersects Route P130
4. Route P130. Runs in a east-west direction on the west side of the Slate Mountain Range.  
T. 24 S, R. 43 E, Sec. 22 NWNE, M.D.B.M. West End  
T. 24 S, R. 44 E, Sec. 18 SENW, M.D.B.M. East End
5. Route P168. Runs in a southeast-northeast direction on the west side of the Slate Mountain Range.  
T. 24 S, R. 43 E, Sec. 13 NWNW, M.D.B.M. Intersects Route P130  
T. 24 S, R. 43 E, Sec. 12 SENE, M.D.B.M. Northeast End

#### VI. METHODS OF CAPTURE

The proposed activities include the use of a Bell helicopter, 4 to 5 BLM wranglers on horseback, 8 to 10 saddle horses, temporary trap panels to hold the wild burros, trucks and trailers to remove the captured animals to the Ridgecrest Wild Horse and Burro Holding Facility. All work will be done by personnel experienced in gathering operations.

All capture attempts shall be accomplished utilizing either helicopter - drive trapping or helicopter - roping methods. The helicopter is used to locate and herd the targeted animals to the capture site and assist the wranglers in capturing the animals. There will be low level flying over wilderness and wilderness study areas. No helicopter landings will occur in these designated areas.

It is expected that the number of animals herded will vary from 1 to 20 head. All attempts will be made to move and keep the band together. Rate of movement and distance animals travel will be based on condition of animals, terrain, physical barriers and weather. Should any animal become fatigued or undue stress is noted, the pilot will break off pursuit, so the animal(s) may rest and recover.

Each area will be flown prior to the start of the roundup to locate the animals, study the terrain and locate any hazards to the burros while being herded (fences, cliffs, etc.). The helicopter would normally fly at heights from ground level to 500 feet. It would drop as low as 5 or 6 feet when turning the animals. Refueling would involve one fuel truck, which would be

restricted to existing roads. Refueling would occur on flat, previously disturbed areas.

Heavy trucks will be necessary to transport the captured animals to the holding facility, thus trapping locations will be limited to those areas where suitable access exists. Temporary capture corral sites will be located on and adjacent to existing roadways. No corral shall be set up in a Wilderness or WSA. Boundary roads, cherry stems and areas excluded from wilderness or WSAs will be suitable to set trap sites and temporary corrals. The trap and related structures will be installed by hand using hand tools and will be removed upon completion of the gather in the area. A new site may then be set up according to the location of any other animals. If vehicle traffic needs access through the trap when it is positioned in the road or if the trap is going to be left over night, the end panels will be removed.

All traps and wings shall be constructed, maintained and operated to handle the animals in a safe and humane manner and be in accordance with the following:

- A. Traps and holding facilities shall be constructed of portable panels, the top of which shall not be less than 60 inches and the bottom rail of which shall not be more than 12 inches from ground level. All traps and holding facilities shall be oval or round in design. The dimensions of the corral will vary with the topography and the dimensions of the road.
- B. All loading chute sides shall be fully covered with plywood (without holes) or like material. The loading chute shall also be a minimum of 6 feet high.
- C. All runways shall be a minimum of 30 feet long, a minimum of 5 feet and shall be covered with plywood, burlap, plastic snow fence or like material a minimum of 1 foot to 5 feet above ground level.
- D. Wings shall not be constructed out of barbed wire or other materials injurious to animals. Wings may be constructed along existing fencelines, only if the barbed wire or other wire fencing material is removed from the fence posts and laid on the ground for the length of the wing, or if portable panels are placed along the inside of the fence to protect the animals from injury from fence wire.
- E. All crowding pens including the gates leading to the runways shall be covered with a material which prevents the animals from seeing out (plywood, burlap, etc.) and shall be covered a minimum of 1 foot to 5 feet above ground level. Eight linear feet of this material shall be capable of being removed or let down to provide a viewing window.
- F. All pens and runways used for the movement and handling of animals shall be connected with hinged self - locking gates.

The helicopter - drive trapping method (run traps) will have two temporary wing extensions posed at 45 to 90 degree angles from two sides of the corral. A wing extension consists of 6 feet high jute netting supported by steel tee-posts spaced approximately 15 to 20 feet apart for a distance as needed. The jute provides a visible barrier that aids in herding the animals to the trap corral. Run traps are usually placed in arroyos or immediately over the crest of a hill where the corral extensions are easily disguised or not easily seen. Once a group of animals is herded into the trap corral, a gate is closed and the capture is complete.

Foals and mothers occasionally become separated or escape during capture. The escaped mother or foal would be roped to keep the foal from being orphaned.

The helicopter - roping method involves the helicopter to herd the wild animals to the wranglers on horse back. The wranglers will be positioned out of view from the on coming animals and in an area that allows the wranglers to maneuver their horses when giving chase. The helicopter will bring the main herd to a holding area and will break off a smaller set of animals that the wranglers can manage. These animals are herded to the capture area. The wranglers will give chase, rope by lassoing the animal around the neck and leading the captured animal into the corral. This is repeated until all the targeted animals are captured.

Both trapping techniques require careful consideration of potential impacts to cultural, natural and military resources. The location of the trap sites would be subject to Navy approval on the Navy lands to insure that resource degradation or interference with military operations would be avoided, minimized or mitigated.

Saddle horses not being used during the capture will be kept tied to or left inside of the horse trailer during the round-up. Stock trailers will be used to transport animals to the BLM Ridgecrest Corrals. A portable loading chute with solid sides will be used if captured animals are loaded onto semi-trailers. The captured animals would receive water and feed according to their needs. Handling of the animals would be kept to a minimum in order to avoid traumatizing the animals as much as possible.

#### **VII. SORTING**

Burros will be sorted by pairs and by sex.

#### **VI. RESPONSIBILITIES**

It will be the responsibility of the Capture Crew Leader from the Ridgecrest Resource Area Office to locate all round-up sites to assure that the capture is being conducted in accordance with applicable regulations, BLM policy, in accordance with the California Desert Plan and the interim HMAP, and NAWS requirements. The capture crew leader will also insure that the animals are humanely treated (both using the helicopter and on the ground), work in a safe manner, observe the guidelines set forth in the capture plan and to determine if destruction of any sick or injured animals is necessary during the round-up.

The Capture Crew Leader will keep the Ridgecrest Resource Area Supervisory Range Conservationist advised of progress and of any problems in implementing the capture plan. The Range Conservationist in turn will keep the Ridgecrest Resource Area Manager informed.

#### **VII. INJURIES AND DISEASE**

For injuries and disease not requiring destruction, the Capture Crew Leader will determine if the animal can be transported to the Ridgecrest Corrals without further injury, harm or undue pain to the animal. If the animal can be transported, the animal will be treated upon arrival at the Ridgecrest Corrals. If the animal cannot be transported, or if the Capture Crew Leader is uncertain, a veterinarian will examine the injured or sick animal at the capture site.



**VIII. DESTRUCTION OF INJURED OR SICK ANIMALS**

Any severely injured or sick animal shall be destroyed in accordance with 43 CFR 4740.31. Such animals shall be destroyed only when a definite act of mercy is needed to alleviate pain and suffering. When the Capture Crew Leader is unsure as to the severity of an injury or sickness, a veterinarian will be on call to make a final determination. Destruction shall be done in the most humane method available.

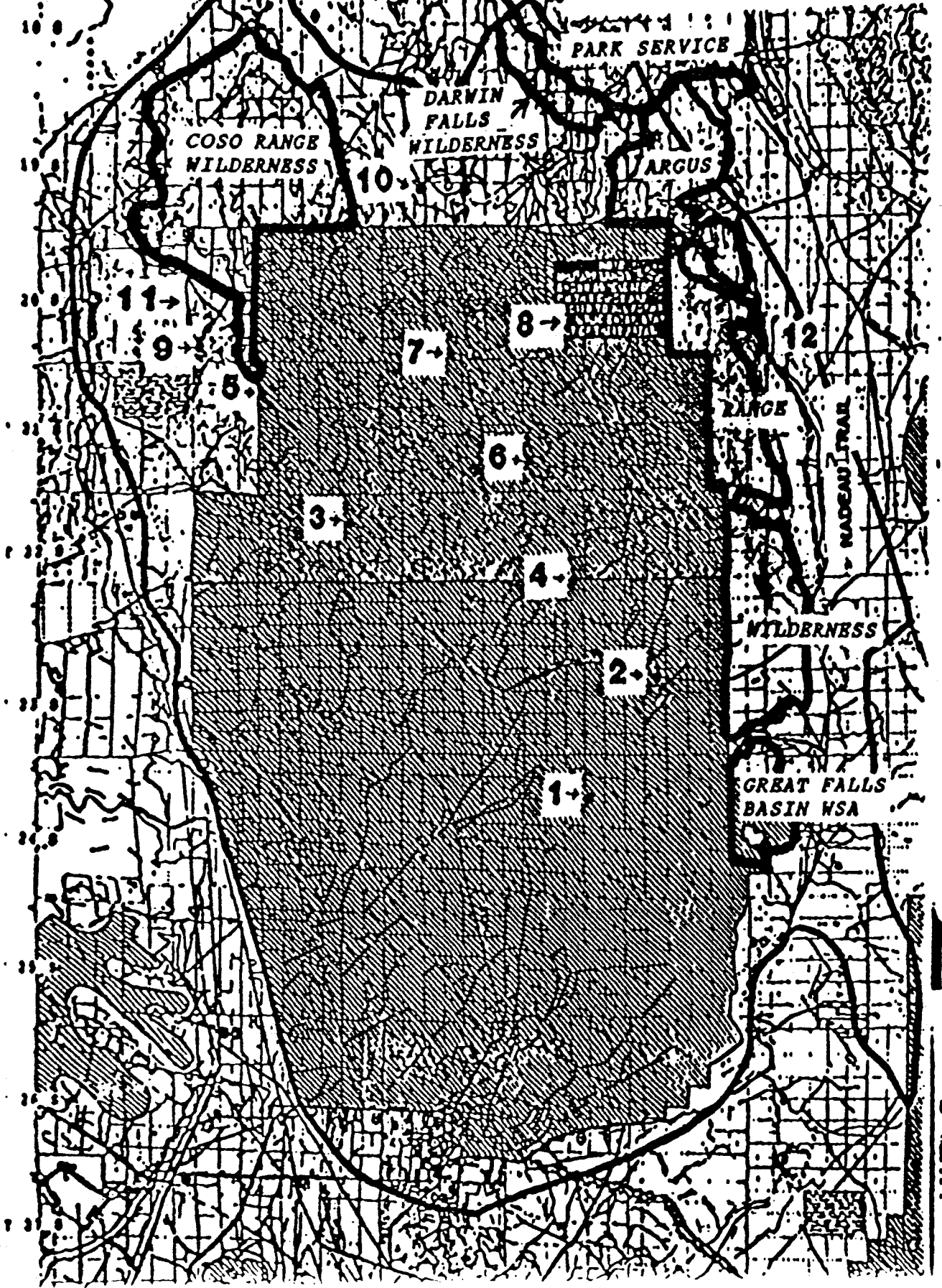
**IX. SAFETY**

All capturing and handling of the animals shall be done in the safest manner possible for the wild animal, personnel and saddle horses. Some guidance may be obtained from "Safety Guidelines for Handling Wild Horses", prepared by the BLM, Burns District Office. An Aviation Safety Plan will be completed and approved prior to initiating this action. All Aircraft Safety and CDD Communication procedures outlined in that plan will be adhered to.

# CENTENNIAL HMA

## Proposed Trap Sites

Figure 1



# Proposed Trap Sites

## Figure 2

