

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Humboldt
National
Forest

Ruby Mountains R.D.
P.O. Box 246
Wells, NV 89835

Elko Forest Service

752-3357 Elko

5/29/91

Reply To: 2260

Date: March 29, 1991

Commission for the Preservation
of Wild Horses
Attn: Cathy Barcomb
Stewart Facility
Capitol Complex
Carson City, NV 89710

Dear Cathy:

The Ruby Mountains Ranger District has completed a draft Cherry Spring Wildhorse Territory Plan which addresses future management of the Territory. This draft document is quite lengthy and would not be appropriate to send to all those on the mailing list. Therefore, I have condensed for you the proposed management actions which would affect wild horses on the territory.

I am very interested in your comments. Please review the enclosed summary and respond by April 10th. If you are interested in the complete draft plan, contact this office and I will be glad to send you a copy.

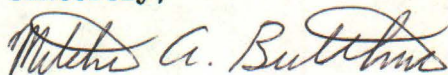
The district will be sponsoring an overnight Cherry Spring wild horse counting, improvement maintenance, utilization studies, and condition trend studies tour. This will be an excellent opportunity for you to see how the wild horses are managed and what tools are used to make management decisions. The tour will begin the evening of April 24th at Minola Guard Station. We will begin with supper and a review of the Cherry Spring Territory management. The morning of the 25th we will break up into groups with some individuals riding horse back and others driving. Groups will either be responsible for inventorying horses, conducting range evaluation studies, or maintaining existing improvements. On the morning of the 26th we will document our findings then head home. All meals will be provided.

4:pm 24th

If you are interested in this tour, please complete and return the enclosed sign up sheet prior to April 10th.

I appreciate all the assistance and involvement in completing this draft Cherry Spring Wildhorse Territory Management Plan. Your comments and suggestions have been invaluable to us. If you have any further questions, suggestions, or comments feel free to contact Mitch Bulthuis of my staff. He will be glad to assist you in any way he can.

Sincerely,



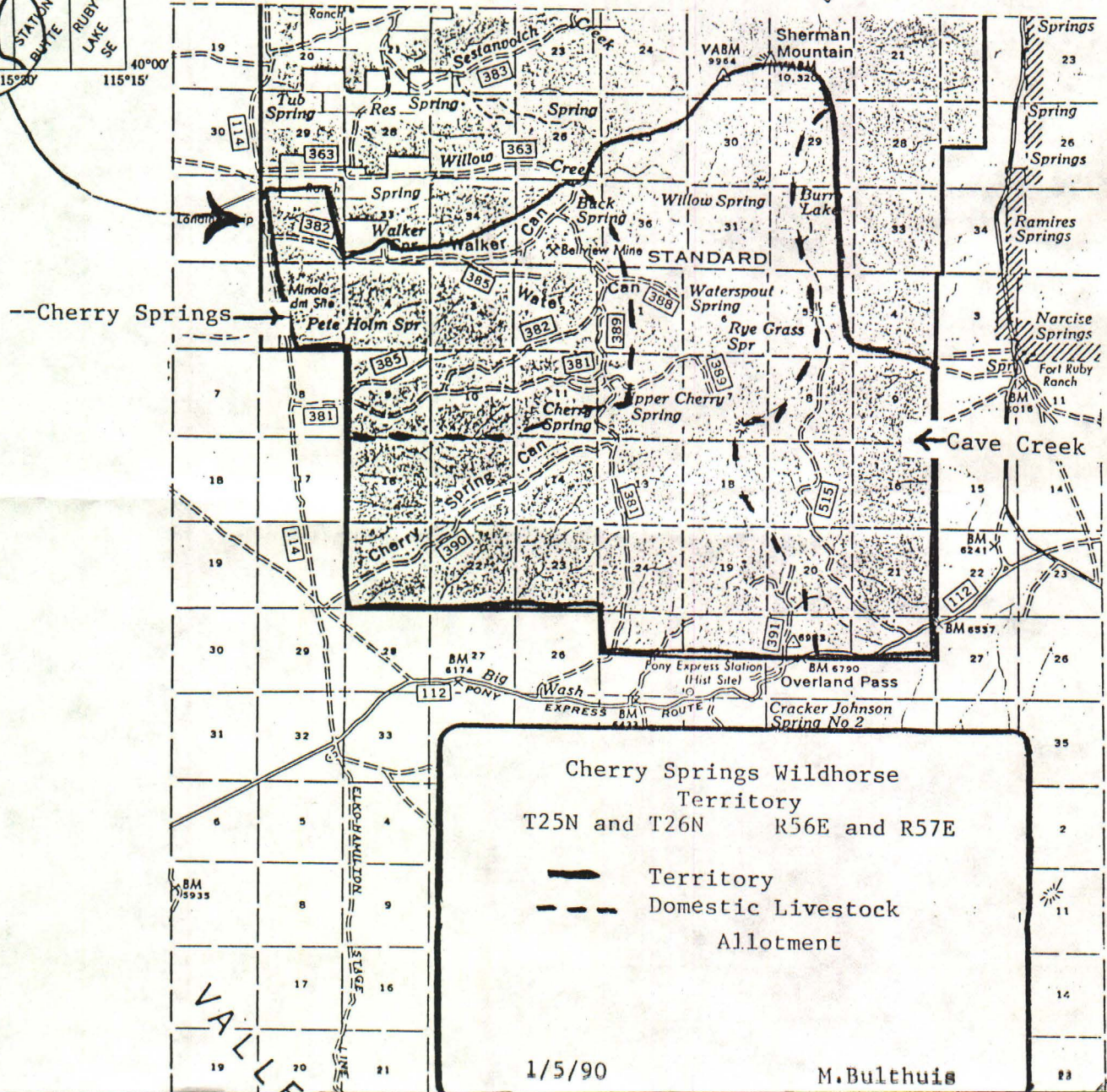
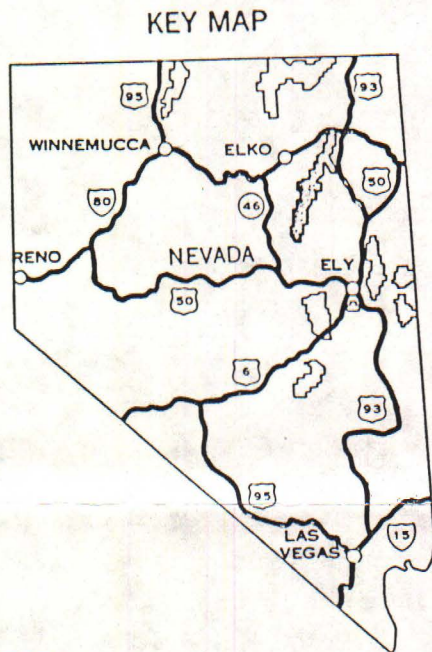
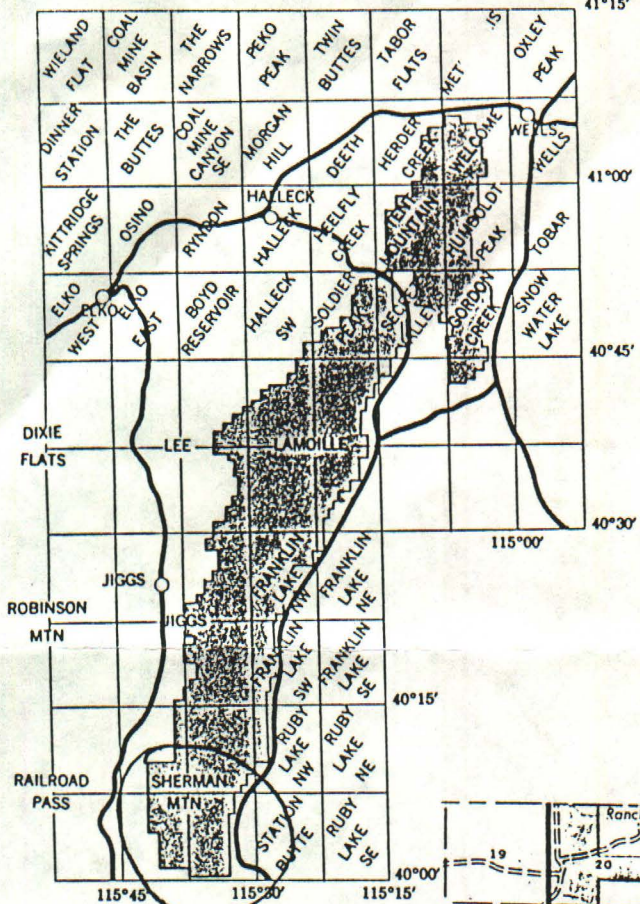
For

MONT E. LEWIS, JR.
District Ranger

CHERRY SPRINGS
WILDHORSE TERRITORY
FACT SHEET

Total area of territory 23,081 acres.

- Approximately 35 acres of territory are on private land the remaining area is on National Forest Lands.
- The territory is completely enclosed by either natural boundaries or fences.
- The territory is a key mule deer winter range.
- Adequate water does exist but more development is needed.
- The 1989 head count puts herd size at 115 horses. Approximately 23 young are born each spring. By the end of the summer herd size only increases by 7 head. Suspected attrition attributed to cougar kill.
- Capacity based in available winter range (9249 acres) sets numbers at around 60 head.
- Presently winter ranges are becoming severally depleted, range condition is poor, and range condition is in a downward trend.
- Territory is heavily accessed by geological interests and wood cutters. There is a high probability of mineral development in the future.
- Horses have excellent conformation. Before territory designation local ranchers imported quality quarter and thoroughbred horses.
- Territory is mostly grazed by wildhorses. Some seasonal cattle and sheep grazing does exist but grazing impacts can easily be separated (see map).
 - Cherry Springs Cattle Allotment is grazed by cattle late spring and summer. Horses are easily moved from the pasture prior to cattle turnout.
 - Cave Creek Cattle Allotment is located on the eastern slopes of the territory. due to lack of water permittee does not use this portion of the allotment.
 - Corta Sheep Allotment, sheep are trailed from Waterspout spring north past Sherman Mountain. Sheep are Moved every two to three days.



--Cherry Springs -->

<--Cave Creek

VALL

Summary of Draft Cherry Spring Wildhorse Territory
March 4, 1991

The following is a summary of a draft Cherry Spring Wildhorse Territory Management Plan. This plan incorporates and is fully consistent with direction from the Humboldt National Forest Land Management Plan and its Amendments I and II.

Goals and Objectives:

1. Return the territory to a thriving ecological condition. Improve poor and very poor range condition by one class within 10 years. Improve all range to fair or better with a static or upward trend within 20 years. Accomplish this by implementing the Humboldt National Forest Land Resource Management Plan standards and guidelines to set range utilization limits.
2. Maintain the integrity of the herd conformation and coloring presently on the territory.
3. Minimize stress to wild horse herd during necessary handling and movement associated with gathers. Reduce costs of gathers by reducing necessity for workers and equipment.
4. Manage herd to achieve a 100% adoptability of all removed horses. Manage for removal of horses between the ages of 1 to 4 years with good conformation.
5. Ensure equitable resource management between wild horses and permitted domestic livestock for the range resource, range structural and non structural improvements and allocated developed water.
6. Protect, maintain, or improve wildlife habitat to ensure adequate mule deer winter range and to provide for a diverse habitat for other resident wildlife species. Ensure that structural and non structural improvements compliment wildlife needs for all improvements.
7. Increase public awareness of the resident wild horse herd and local historical significance through the development of an interpretative program within 10 years.

Management Actions

- Grazing patterns of the herd have been mapped. Maximum utilization levels have been set for each of these areas to ensure horses are managed to promote a thriving ecological condition.
- A base herd size of 58 head will be established, based on current utilization studies and the 1974 range analysis. This base herd size will be responsive to winter and summer utilization studies. Base herd will not be allowed to drop below 40 head without further environmental evaluation. The base herd will not increase until a set percentage of the territory returns to fair or better condition with static or upward trend.
- 60% of the herd will be selected from the territory's dominant individuals with good conformation. These horses will remain on the territory for the rest of their natural lives.
- Historical herd conformation and coloring were defined. This information will be used when selecting which horses will remain.

- An initial gather will attempt to capture 100% of the horses on the territory for inventory. This information will be used to model herd dynamics which will be incorporated into management of these horses.
- Annual herd growth will be used in conjunction with utilization studies to ensure that removal intervals will be no sooner than 3 years nor more than 4 years.
- All foals under 1 year of age will remain with their mothers. Those remaining on the territory will not be counted against the herd size.
- When utilization studies indicate removals are necessary, excess horses will be pre-selected prior to gathers.
- Permanent facilities will be constructed so removal of excess horses can be accomplished with a minimum amount of stress.
- Man made riparian area will be built to increase habitat diversity of the territory.
- Recreational wild horse viewing will be encouraged. An interpretative pamphlet will be written. Two existing roads will be improved to facilitate two wheel drive vehicle traffic. Interpretative signs will be installed and viewing areas will be built.
- Water developments will improve wild horse distribution.
- Non structural range improvements (seedings, juniper cuttings, burn, etc.) will be completed to increase territory ecological diversity.

sleeping bags
warm clothing

CHERRY SPRINGS WILDHORSE TERRITORY
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT SCOPING TOUR

A scoping tour of the Wild Horse Territory was held July 20, 1990 with the following attendees: Dave Fallis and Gary Schaffran of the Humboldt NF S.O., Steve Foree of the Nevada Department of Wildlife in Elko, Bob Brown and Bill Lindsey of BLM in Ely, Cathy Barcomb and Dawn Lappin of the Wildhorse Commission in Reno, Fred Zaga, a permittee with his guest Anton Wehling, and Doug Sorensen, Tom Montoya, Mitch Bulthuis, Frank Stilwill and Teri Haney of the Ruby Mountains Ranger District.

STOP I

The tour began at the entrance to Willow Creek with Mitch welcoming those in attendance and giving the overall objectives of the day. He explained that the current Cherry Springs Wildhorse Management Plan was approved in 1977. This plan based range capacity at 58 head of horses using the 1974 range analysis. This plan allowed numbers to be reduced to 42 head. Then numbers would be allowed to increase to 68 head before another gather would occur.

Mitch went on to explain that the current wildhorse numbers are approximately 115 head. This is 50% over the recommended stocking levels. The common use livestock users are removing their livestock once utilization standards are reached on their allotments. The wildhorses are remaining on the allotments and reducing forage even further. This practice not only causes disparity between the livestock and wildhorse interests but also adds to the depletion of range condition.

The Forest Service has been promising to gather for the past 5 years. However due to budget or legal constraints these gathers have not occurred.

In 1988 the Forest felt it should join the Ely District of the BLM in a joint gather. Unfortunately, this gather was appealed by the Animal Protection Institute (API). Judge John Kelly, a administrative judge for the BLM, concurred with portions of API's appeal in that the Environmental Analysis for the gathers of horses did not adequately address present "ecological condition."

Doug Sorensen discussed utilization of the area and that although there is adequate summer feed, utilization in winter is presently 80-90%. The Forest's recommended standards and guidelines for utilization on year round grazing are set at 40-50%. These standards were set to maintain a thriving ecological condition under the set grazing strategy. Since most of the critical range is currently in fair or poorer condition, the Forest recommends that utilization be set at 40%. The 1989 and 1990 utilization studies were consistent with recommendations of the 1974 range analysis. This territory is overstocked by 50 to 60%.

The Forest Service proposes to return the territory to a thriving ecological condition by bringing wildhorse numbers into compliance with proper utilization standards. This will be monitored through two range trend transects and annual utilization inspections. The utilization inspections are the same used to evaluate livestock.

Frank Stilwill explained that the population and grazing habits have changed drastically. With current over crowding, larger bands are being pushed out of the territory in an effort to avoid bachelor bands. Horses are moving around more and using lower winter ranges during the summer. Normal band habits, such as setting up territories, are not occurring. To add to the overstocking problem, the 5-year drought we are experiencing has dried up many water sources. Buck Springs is dry which forces the horses into higher terrain. Cherry Springs is very low and horses are heading toward Sherman Peak and north off the territory.

There had been roundups in the mid-60's and early 70's which reduced the count to around 100 head.

The Cave Creek Cattle Allotment, located on the east side of the territory, has an 80-90% to 50-60% use rate even though there are no cattle currently using the area, reported Tom Montoya. This use is exclusively wild horse. In 1987, livestock numbers were reduced by about 50% on this allotment. However, due to lack of water livestock haven't used this part of the allotment since 1986. This area is also prime winter range for deer. There is slim potential for water in this area, therefore, wildhorses will continue to use the area only when they have access to snow. At the time of study, 46% of this allotment was in poor condition and in a downward trend.

Mitch Bulthuis talked about current conditions. He pointed out where troughs were located. He noted the the location of the pipelines, and which were operational and which were not. He then laid out a three phase plan for Cherry Springs. Phase I is the range condition phase. It involves getting stocking down to desired levels, installing 1,000 feet of pipe in lower Cherry Springs, thus connecting a presently unusable 2 miles of pipe, and installation of deer wood rail jump fences to reduce mortality. Phase II is the improvement stage. It involves fencing off a 4 section pasture, construction of a water trap, installing shutoff valves on all spring and fall water sources of on the territory, non-structural range improvements (burning, chaining, seeding, etc.), and building fenced exclosures around overflow water. Phase III is the informational phase. It involves development of a interpretive road, signs, and brochures.

Dawn Lappin pointed out that one criticism of plans is that knowledge of horse movement isn't involved or mentioned. Concerned parties want to know what these movement patterns are, the reasons for them, etc. All this information is vital to share so that concerned groups see that we recognize the situation, have studied it and have facts to support our recommendations.. She also wondered why the plan in 1989 was appealed. Mitch explained that since the Forest Service was using the BLM as a vehicle to gather horses, and the BLM was appealed, we were automatically included.

STOP II

Discussion was held on how cattle and horses interact. Horses are moved off the Cherry Springs Allotment by May 1 of each year during our annual spring counting. Cattle are permitted onto the allotment around May 15. This year cattle were held off until June 1 so seed could set prior to grazing. Due to the drought, grasses are not coming back as they have had little growth this year. Horses have been kept off the unit this growing season and little use

can be seen. Over the past few years cattle have been removed from the allotment early. In fact, current grazing has been 50% of permitted use. The Walker and Minola pastures of this allotment were seeded in the 1970's. Utilization of these pastures has been higher than other, non seeded pastures, to help keep the needed crested wheatgrass growth form.

Dawn voiced a concern over developing seeding plans that exclude horses or livestock from the seeding. If numbers are at proper levels, the horses should be allowed to be anywhere in the territory, including the seeded areas. Make sure we stress this position strategy and horse management point.

Frank continued by discussing the sheep operation within the territory. Pete Paris is the permittee on this sheep range. He runs approximately 4,800 head in the high country. He moves through this allotment to the north. Horses are getting up against his operation. This year he had to haul water to his sheep due to the drought. Conflict between sheep and horses is minimal to nonexistent.

Dawn asked how Animal Damage Control (ADC) conducted predator control in the area, specifically whether or not they used aerial shooting. ADC no longer uses aerial control in this area Frank explained. Less control work is being observed practiced due to economic concerns.

STOP III

This stop dealt with the minerals interests in the area. Mitch discussed the 5 active minerals operations within the territory. There is potential for mineral development. Last year there was some gas and oil exploratory work completed on the western boundary of the territory.

Last year with the increased minerals activity compounded with the horses social problems caused by increased wildhorse numbers, wildhorses were constantly moving. Presently the Forest Service only imposes mineral operation restrictions during foaling season. If a large scale minerals activity does occur the loss of habitat on this small territory can be a consideration.

An advantage to mineral development is the increased interest, by mining companies, to mitigate conflicting resources. Dawn stated, if a large scale operation does occur, wild horse grazing habits would change during short-term disturbance, but horses will return to old habits once they become accustomed to the new activity.

STOP IV

The intent of this stop was to discuss the interpretive phase of the plan (phase III). Mitch said this phase is designed to educate the public about wildhorses and their management along with providing recreational wildhorse viewing. The viewing area or overlook will allow the public to see the wild horses in their natural setting. Water troughs, salting, and vegetation manipulation, such as seeding and burning, may be used to attract horses into areas where they can be seen from the road. Roads will be improved to get to the viewing and interpretive areas. One consideration is to tie wildhorse information into information about the Pony Express route, aboriginal use of the area, stage route, and other historical or local points of interest. For this phase to be successful, it must be funded cooperatively with other organizations and developed with volunteer labor.

The area will be managed under a multiple use concept. Fred Zaga voiced his concern that it must be assured that horses are out of the area before the snow melts to avoid pulling up plants by the roots. He has no problem with horses being in the area in the fall. A good management plan can resolve some of these issues. Right now, numbers are a key issue.

Frank pointed out the planned location of a water trap. He noted that with a short fence we could make a four section holding pasture. Within the pasture a trough would be installed. When a gather was necessary, water outside this pasture could be shut off forcing horses to enter the pasture to drink. Riders could then enter this pasture from the north. Traditionally when these horses are disturbed in this manner they move along the southern boundary fence where a permanent trap would be installed. This method of trapping would allow us to capture small numbers of horses, while exerting minimal stress to the animals.

Tom explained that wildlife is plentiful in the area. These wildlife species must be an integral part of the planning. In Phase II, all water trough overflows will be fenced to keep wildhorses and livestock out. This will create wildlife riparian areas, which presently are non-existent. Boundary fences in the territory were constructed higher than deer can jump in order to hold horses within the territory. Unfortunately, due to fence height, we have experienced deer mortality on these fences. The Ranger District will be working with wildlife groups to install wood rail jump fences along deer migration routes. This should eliminate deer mortality. The plan must also take into account threatened, endangered, and sensitive (TES) species. The flammulated owl, peregrin falcon, bald eagle, and spotted bat are TES species that may be, or are, found in the territory.

Proposed horse management of the area includes maintaining numbers at around 45-60 head. This would mean a major gather would be required initially in the fall or winter (hopefully next year) of approximately 60 head. This would bring horse numbers into compliance with recommendations of current utilization studies. Ideally, the herd size would increase at such a rate that only a small gather would be needed every 4 years. There are two advantages to this. First, it would allow us to gather at water traps allowing us a minimal expense for gathers. Second, horses under four years of age are more adoptable, thus reducing time and expense of confinement.

During the initial gather we would like to gather all horses. This would allow us to inventory them. Lead and dominate mares and stallions that are in permanent bands, will be identified and released. If possible we would like to place a small 2 inch brand on the shoulder, for example, to identify these animals. Then if they are caught in the water traps they can be immediately released thus reducing stress to the animal.

This herd is fairly small in size. To reduce in breeding, criteria on this herd's conformation, height, breeding, and other characteristic will be developed. After a gather 2-3 mares matching this criteria will be imported from other territories.

STOP V

Steve Foree discussed wildlife, particularly big game, in the area. Several chaining areas for deer occurred in the 70's. The bulk of the resident deer herd winter in this area (population of 20,000). He explained, recently there have been only three years of complete migration from Harrison to Overland Passes. In intermediate years, the deer stay north. The mountain lion numbers vary according to the deer population. This area is known to house upland game, bobcat, and coyote. This is not considered an elk management area, but slowly more elk are appearing in the Ruby area. Major concerns to Steve are the wintering deer and upland game.

During hunting season, primarily rifle season from October 1 through November 15, approximately 1,000 animals are harvested.

Dawn was concerned about the loss of horses during hunting season. She felt that if hunting groups were to large and unmanaged they would harass horses. Frank said he had seen no harrassment of these horses. He noted that this is oovious when you look at the complacency of these horses towards our vehicles and man.

The general condition of the deer winter range is good according to Steve (this does not reflect the ecological condition). There are spots that are poorer, but the overall area covered by winter range is in pretty good condition. The future looks good for this area. A series of fires have destroyed a lot of the deer winter range which causes some concern. Steve is hoping that management of the area can make up for these losses.

Tom explained that during the spring the horses used 90-100% of the rabbitbrush leaving the bitterbrush alone. The deer used about 35-40% of the bitterbrush. If the rabbitbrush was used up, the horses would probably start on the bitterbrush which could present a conflict with the deer. Research is continuing to help educate us on needs and preferred foods of wild horses.

Bob and Bill expressed some concern over the egress and ingress with the BLM. Frank explained that we have lost some horses to the BLM. However, little travel has occurred in the opposite direction. These animals are very territorial and prefer their traditional grounds. Once herd size is brought down to where horses are not competing for food, loss of horses across the boundary should be greatly reduced.



CATHIE BARCOMB
Assistant to the Director

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COMMISSION FOR THE
PRESERVATION OF WILD HORSES

Stewart Facility
Capitol Complex
Carson City, Nevada 89710
(702) 687-5589

September 25, 1990

Mitch Bulthuis
Ruby Mountains R.D.
P.O. Box 246
Wells, Nevada 89835

Dear Mitch,

I would like to thank you for inviting me on the tour of the Cherry Springs Wild Horse Territory. I feel the tour was very productive and was an excellent exchange of ideas.

Under Section IV you mentioned that during the initial gather you would like to gather all of the horses.

I attended a seminar that the Bureau of Land Management initiated last June. The purpose of the seminar was to introduce Walt Conley's concept of "Population Dynamics." Walt Conley is from the University of New Mexico and has been working on wild horse populations for many years. He implemented his theory over 10 years ago in different Forest Service areas with success.

Basically, with structuring your herd population by sex and age you can control the growth of that herd. By adjusting the age and sex ratio's you adjust the rates of reproduction and determine your birth and death rates. By controlling your growth rate horses would not have to be removed as often or hopefully, not at all. The Bureau of Land Management will be implementing this theory on three to six herd area's this next spring. The largest part of implementing this theory is that you must do a 100% gather of the herd area.

Since you are suggesting a gather of this magnitude, you may want to consider this option.

Since there was quite a bit of interest in Mr. Conley's program at BLM, the Commission is interested in sponsoring a forum possibly in November. We would like to invite Mr. Conley back as a speaker. If you would be interested in attending, please let me know.

Mitch Bulthuis
September 25, 1990
Page 2

Again, thank you for including me on your scoping tour and giving me the opportunity to comment on the tour letter. I look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

Cathy Barcomb
CATHY BARCOMB
Acting Executive Director