



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Elko Field Office
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In Reply Refer To:
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May 19, 2006

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
BUDGET AND PLANNING DIVISION

Dear Interested Party:

The Ely and Elko Field Offices (BLM) are proposing to gather wild horses in the Buck and Bald Complex during the summer of 2006. The Complex consists of the Buck and Bald, Butte, Maverick-Medicine, and the Cherry Creek Herd Management Areas (HMA). The Complex also contains the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest's Cherry Springs Wild Horse Territory.

The Complex was gathered in part during the summer of 2005 to remove excess wild horses. A Decision Record and Finding of No Significant Impact for that gather was issued on July 14, 2005. The decision and finding was based on BLM's review of the environmental assessment (EA) prepared for the Buck and Bald Complex Wild Horse Gather Plan (Elko-BLM/EK-2005-013 and Ely EA No. NV-040-05-017). The 2005 EA and associated decision documents may be viewed on the public website for the Elko BLM at www.nv.blm.gov/elko/

Additional census of the Buck and Bald Complex was completed in March 2006. Based on the census, the current estimated population for the Complex is 2,200 animals; approximately 1,700 animals above the estimated low range Appropriate Management Level (AML) of 500 animals. Additionally, monitoring indicates vegetation use levels objectives have not been met due to excessive wild horse numbers. This data supports an overpopulation of wild horses present within the Complex and a need to remove the excess wild horses as soon as practical in order to prevent a further deterioration of the range, in accordance with Section 3 (b) (2) of the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act.

Public Involvement

Public notification and scoping of E.A. Ely NV-040-05-017 and Elko BLM/EK-2005-013 was sent to you and all interested persons, groups, and agencies on May 24, 2005, with a 30-day review and comment period.

Proposed Action

The proposed action is to continue the removal of wild horses which was analyzed and authorized in 2005 under Buck and Bald Complex EA but which was not fully completed due to funding issues. BLM has determined that there are excess wild horses present and the proposed action is needed to remove excess wild horses and to restore wild horse herd numbers to levels consistent with the AML for the Complex. The preferred alternative is to gather approximately 85% of the estimated 2006 population of 2,200 wild horses, making available for adoption approximately 1,700 head. The gather would be conducted to protect public rangeland from

undue degradation caused by excessive numbers of wild horses. The post gather population of approximately 500 wild horses would be within the AML for the Complex.

Multiple capture sites (traps) will be used during the operation. Whenever possible, capture sites will be located at previously used sites. The Elko and Ely Field Office Wild Horse Specialists would record and sort captured horses by sex, age and color. To assess herd health, factors such as pregnancy, parasite loading, physical condition, etc., will be recorded. A small number of captured animals could be returned to the HMAs based on selective age criteria.

NEPA Compliance

BLM has reviewed the 2005 EA and determined that it fully covers our proposal to gather excess horses this summer.

1. The current proposal is essentially the same as the Alternative I described in the 2005 EA the only difference is that the population of the herds was underestimated, thus more horses will be gathered.
2. There are no unresolved conflicts involving alternative uses of available resources.
3. The circumstances upon which the environmental analysis was based are still valid and germane to the new action.
4. The methodology of analytical approach used in the document is appropriate.
5. The direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of the new proposed action are the same as, those identified in the 2005 EA.

Opportunity to Provide Information

If you have any information, data, or analysis to provide please do so prior to June 15, 2006 BLM expects to issue a new decision regarding implementation of the gather in July 2006.

Please address your input to:

BLM Elko Field Office

Attn: Shane DeForest, AFM Renewable Resources

3900 East Idaho Street, Elko, NV 89801.

Input may also be submitted by facsimile (775-753-0255).

Thank you for your interest in wild horses and public land management. If you have any questions, or wish to obtain a copy of the 2005 EA for review, please contact Bryan Fuell, Wild Horse Specialist, Elko Field Office at (775) 753-0314.

Sincerely,



Shane DeForest
Assistant Field Manager
Renewable Resources