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United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Mono Lake
Ranger District

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Reply to: 2260

Date: June 24, 1991

Montgomery Pass Wild Horse Steering Committee:

Attached, find a copy of our "Action Plan" to achieve the management objectives that we established during the development of our MPWHT Coordinated Management Plan. The status of each action item, as we discussed at our May 16, 1991 meeting, is recorded and incorporated in this version of the Action Plan. This will assist us with monitoring our progress as we work through this five year plan and the 1993 plan update.

As I promised at our annual meeting in May, I prepared a letter from the Steering Committee to John Daynes supporting his proposal to provide a wildlife and wild horse conservation easement on his Benton Valley Ranch property. I feel John is to be commended for independently taking such a responsible step in order to help secure future water for wildlife and wild horses.

For those of you that missed our annual Steering Committee meeting, I wanted to pass along to you that a number of our Committee members attended the **"Wild Horse and Burro Forum"**, sponsored by the Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses. The forum was held in Reno on May 5-8th. Kathy Barkum, staff for the Wild Horse Commission, did an outstanding job of organizing this forum. **Kathy will replace Terry Jay on our Steering Committee. Dr. Turner and I presented** information at the forum on our Steering Committee's work in the Montgomery Pass Wild Horse Territory. Based upon what was presented at the forum by those involved with management of wild horses, I feel our approach to management and collective work was recognized by others to be way out in front of anything else underway. This is a real compliment to each and every member of our Steering Committee and technical staff. I personally appreciate your commitment to this project and willingness to stay with it.

That's all for now!

Bill

BILL BRAMLETTE
Chair MPWHT Steering Committee



Caring for the Land and Serving People

II. MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

A. Habitat Objectives

1. Maintain sound rangeland ecological conditions and improve where appropriate.
2. Provide water for wild horses where possible to yield a better distribution of animals utilizing the habitat.
3. Ensure water availability at existing sources for wild horses, particularly water sources on private land.
4. Consider appropriate habitat improvement from the present ecological base for horses, wildlife, and livestock within the MPWHT.
5. Manage for a balance between education/recreation/research use and the free-roaming behavior of wild horses.

B. Wild Horse Objectives

1. Maintain the free-roaming behavior and movement of wild horses.
2. Maintain a healthy horse herd consistent with the carrying capacity determined for the range.
3. Maintain demographic characteristics of the wild horse population and determine natality, mortality and rate of increase. Characteristics to determine include sex ratio, age structure, young/adult ratio and actual use patterns.
4. Strive to rely on natural predator-prey relationships as the first considered method of horse population control.
5. If population control is determined to be necessary, allow current analysis of information and research data to predict age, sex and distribution characteristics that should be favored.
6. Manage wild horses such that the objectives of the Land Management Plan are met.

III. ACTION PLAN TO ACHIEVE OBJECTIVES

(NOTE: STATUS REPORTS ON ACTION ITEMS ARE HIGHLIGHTED UNDER ACTION STATEMENTS AND UNDERLINED.)

A. Action Planning Objective to Maintain Sound Rangeland Conditions:

- | | <u>Lead
Responsibility</u> | <u>When</u> |
|---|--|-------------|
| 1. Development and implement technical monitoring plans for | | |
| a) Wild horse monitoring..... | Wild Horse Comm. | 3/1/88 |
| | <u>Completed</u> | |
| b) Range monitoring..... | Range Subcomm. | 3/1/88 |
| | <u>Completed</u> | |
| c) Monitoring report to MPWHT Steering Committee..... | Subcommittee Chairpersons | Yearly |
| | <u>Completed 5/16/91</u> | |
| d) In the event significant changes occur to the habitat, reconvene Steering Committee to recommend action..... | Steering Committee Chairperson | As Required |
| | <u>Not Required (see item F-2 Below)</u> | |
| <u>Horse numbers in 1988 were 184. The numbers have been reported between 191 - 199 for this study period. In 1990, Dr. Turner reported 192 individuals. Herd has not fluctuated 25% from 184 baseline.</u> | | |
| 2. Complete the present range analysis on the balance of the MPWHT..... | Range Subcomm. | 1991 |
| <u>On-going work. Range Subcommittee will meet with Dr. Turner and map key areas based on where the horse numbers are concentrated in May/June and re-map key areas based on this information plus the utilization inspections from 1988-90. It was felt it would not be necessary to return to light use areas but to concentrate further analysis on heavy use areas.</u> | | |
| 3. Establish sufficient trend, condition and transect studies.... | Range Subcomm. | 1991 |
| <u>Not all areas within the Territory have Condition and Trend transects (C&T's) in place. The McBride Allotment on Mono Lake Ranger District does have a C&T located near Sagehen Spring. The District will read the transect this season. The Huntoon C&T was monitored by the Tioyabe NF in 1987. When the Subcommittee convenes this summer the need for additional C&T transects will be considered by the agencies.</u> | | |
| 4. Determine utilization on an annual monitoring basis..... | Range Subcomm. | Yearly |

Utilization has been monitored each fall by the FS, BLM, and Dr. Turner's group. Utilization has been acceptable within the Territory for all years during the study period. No severe use has been recorded for any area since the implementation of the Plan in 1988. A use pattern map has been completed for each year and is on file at Mono Lake Ranger Station.

5. Wildlife study data will also be used as it becomes available, including the BLM pronghorn antelope study and the cooperative study for sage grouse. Incorporate the results of monitoring from wildlife studies into analysis of this plan's monitoring.....
- | | |
|------------------|----------|
| Forest Biologist | As |
| Inyo N.F., USFS | Approved |

No new wildlife studies are available. Ron Thomas, Dept. of Fish & Game Biologist, is concerned about the poor deer/fawn ratio on the east facing slope of Queen Valley. According to the Inyo National Forests' Land & Resource Management Plan mule deer habitat is emphasized in this area. Reports indicate 500-800 deer were sighted in the Queen Valley area this spring. Dr. Turner stated no more than 15 horses have been using the area from the Agricultural Station over Montgomery Pass at any one time. He believes the impact on the deer herd may be due to an increase in mountain lions in that area.

B. Action Planning Objective to Provide Water for Wild Horses and to improve Water Availablity:

1. Enter into negotiation for land aquisition, by agreement, purchase or exchange, with private landowners to secure water for wild horse and wildlife use.....
- | | |
|-----------------|---------|
| District Ranger | Ongoing |
| Mono Lake, USFS | |

Forest Service has been working with the landowners in the area regarding land exchanges. Forest Lands Officer (Randy Karsteadt), District Ranger (Bill Bramlette), and District Lands Officer (Rick Murray) have had various discussions with the landowners but the exchange process is relatively slow. According to Bill Bramlette, the need for making the land exchanges is not as critical as originally judged, since many of the water sources in Truman Meadows are actually located on National Forest land rather than private property. However, he said he felt they were making good progress on the potential land exchanges and would continue to make it priority work. Dr. Turner stated that many people camp in the Truman Meadows area and there seems to be more each year. The little mud hole northeast of Truman Meadows is a very critical water source for the wildhorses.

John Daynes, owner of Benton Valley Ranch, presented the Steering Committee with his proposal to provide a wildlife and wild horse conservation easement to ensure future access to water located on his property. The Steering Committee fully endorsed his plans. Bill Bramlette prepared a letter from the Steering Committee to John Daynes expressing the Committee's support.

2. Inventory, develop and map available water in the MPWHT, including existing and new sources. (This was identified by the Steering Committee as the first priority to accomplish.

Known water sources were mapped by the Mono Lake Resource Officer and Walt Svetich (White Mountain District Wild Horse Specialist). No action will be taken on water development until the management plan is updated in 1993.

	<u>Lead Responsibility</u>	<u>When</u>
The preferred areas for development are located in Adobe Hills in T2N, R30E, and are referenced on the Wild Horse Subcomm. Map)...	Resource Officer Mono Lake, USFS	1990
3. Recondition two water tanks near Huntoon Valley.....	Range Officer Bridgeport, USFS	1990

Water improvements will be delayed until Dr. Turner's study is completed and horse distribution and numbers are better understood. The Toiyabe NF mentioned reconditioning the dirt water tanks in the Huntoon Allotment. Very little horse use has been documented along the Huntoon Jeep Way due to the dry state of any playas or depressions where water could collect.

C. Action Planning Objective to Consider Habitat Improvement:

1. Develop a habitat improvement plan for the MPWHT with appropriate input from technical specialists..... Resource Officer
Mono Lake, USFS 10/88
2. Seek funding for improvement projects..... District Ranger
Mono Lake, USFS Ongoing

Same as above. This will be high priority after the 1993 plan update. Bill Bramlette has asked Kathy Barkum of the Wildhorse Commission to visit the Territory this season to familiarize her with the area and our management plan. Funding for additional studies through the Commission may be a possibility.

D. Action Planning Objective to Provide Education/Recreation/Research Use Compatible with Wild Horse Use:

1. The signing policy of roads for vehicle use within the Territory will be consistent by all agencies..... Dist. Ranger, Mono Lake, USFS (Inter-agency Motor Vehicle Use Plan Update) 1989
In progress...the interagency motor vehicle use plan is anticipated to be completed in 1993 (FS & BLM).

2. A "Code of Ethics" will be developed for all recreation users..... Craig London, with Steering Comm. review 4/88
Completed and available. Two information boxes with a "Code of Ethics" were installed in May 1990 (one just below Pizona Site and the other approximately 3.9 miles west of Hwy. 360 on the main road to Truman Meadows and Sagehen Meadow).

3. Consider seasonal closure or rerouting of the Pizona Road from April 15 to June 15 to protect wet meadows and minimize disturbance during foaling..... District Ranger, Mono Lake, USFS (Inter-agency Motor Vehicle Use Plan Update) 1989
The need for moving ahead on this action was very apparent in 1990 and 1991, as more vehicles are using the road and the damage to the meadow is unacceptable. In April and May of 1991, Mono Lake staff (DR, Resource Officer, Archaeologist, and Off-highway vehicle specialist) inventoried and evaluated various re-route options. A good re-route location has been found. The next step is to conduct an environmental analysis of the proposed action, including asking for public comment. The Forest Service expects to begin the work this field season. Dr. Turner rode the proposed re-route in May with Bill Bramlette and felt it would be a great benefit to the wild horses and meadows in Pizona.

4. Establish direction that would prohibit commercial guiding by motorized vehicle within the Territory, as it is considered to be incompatible with wild horse management..... Inyo/Toiyabe Forest Supervisors and Bakersfield/Carson BLM District Managers. District Ranger, Mono Lake to lead 1989
No permits have been issued per this direction. Given the direction in the MPWHT plan, it was felt that nothing else is needed to deny commercial guiding by motorized vehicles.

5. Do not allow outfitters to exceed current 1000 service-use days within the period of April 15 to June 15..... Inyo/Toiyabe Forest Supervisors and Bakersfield/Carson BLM District Managers. District Ranger, Mono Lake to lead 1989
Combined, Rock Creek and Frontier Pack Stations totalled 700 service days in 1989, 596 service days in 1990, and an estimated 445 service days in 1991. Hence, this direction has been fully met.

E. Action Planning Objective to Maintain Free-Roaming Characteristics of Wild Horses:

- | | <u>Lead
Responsibility</u> | <u>When</u> |
|----|---|---------------|
| 1. | Explore with permittee an alternate grazing area for a portion of the McBride Allotment in conjunction with the Marietta AMP..... BLM, Carson City | 1988 |
| | <u>McBride permittee Orin Harris has indicated he wants to use this allotment even though he hasn't grazed there in approximately 13 years. Through the Nevada Wilderness Act (BLM-FS interchange portion) the Forest Service acquired responsibility for a portion of the allotment and plans to address this issue through the allotment management plan and the MPWHT management plan processes. Marietta is part of a newly dedicated Wild Burro area. John Matthiessen, BLM Carson City, said the burro numbers will not exceed 120 animals and that BLM plans to keep the numbers around 70. He felt there is only a slim chance that the burros will overlap into the Wildhorse Territory.</u> | |
| 2. | Monitor livestock and horse use on winter and summer ranges and the range condition on the McBride Allotment. No action is to be taken to lower livestock AUM's on the winter range during the monitoring period..... All Agencies | Ongoing |
| | <u>In progress, no additional action required.</u> | |
| 3. | Recommend officially closing the Pizona Allotment..... Forest Supervisor, Inyo N.F. | 1988-
1989 |
| | <u>Completed...Pizona Allotment is closed.</u> | |

F. Action Planning Objective to Maintain a Healthy Herd Consistent with the Carrying Capacity:

- | | | |
|----|---|----------------|
| 1. | During ensuing five year period of study, manage horse population at current level of 184 horses..... Inyo/Toiyabe Forest Supervisors and Bakersfield/Carson BLM District Managers | 1988-
1993 |
| | <u>As previously noted, population of wild horses has remained 3/4% above the 184 horses (+/- 25%) identified for this study period, therefore, the management direction has been met.</u> | |
| 2. | If wild horse numbers fluctuate above or below 25% of current level of 184 horses, the Steering Committee will be reconvened to take appropriate action..... Steering Committee Chairperson | As
Required |
| | <u>No action required. Current herd population reported by Dr. Turner in 1990 was 199.</u> | |

G. Action Planning Objective to Maintain Characteristics of the Wild Horse Population:

1. Desirable herd demographics of the wild horse population will be determined through a monitoring plan..... Wild Horse Subcommittee 1988-1989

WPWHT Steering Committee has taken the position that we want to preserve the horse characteristics historically found in the territory rather than manipulating the characteristics to favor certain "desirable" traits. This appears to be in line with the current thinking within the wild horse management circle.

H. Action Planning Objective to Rely on Natural Predator-Prey Relationship:

1. Determine relationship of mountain lion as a predator on wild horses..... Dr. Turner 1992
Dr. Turner and Associate's research continues to produce valuable information on the predation of lions on wild horse foals. Their data indicates that during the study period only a small percentage of the foals survive to become yearlings. The majority of the missing foals can be attributed directly to lion predation. This situation is apparently keeping the wild horse population stable as originally hypothesized. Most foals are taken by lions in the spring and early summer. The majority are taken before 6 months of age. If the foal is born in the fall it stands a better chance of survival. Lions apparently switch to killing deer during the winter months. At this time, four lions (2 males, 2 females) reside in the Territory year-round. Lions prefer Huntoon, Jack Springs, Sagehen Meadow, Pizona and Antelope Lake areas for their range. Turner, has noted that there is more lion activity this past winter near Truman Meadows.

2. Monitor mountain lion predation and study occurrence of prey switching..... Dr. Turner 1992

Lead	When
<u>Responsibility</u>	<u>When</u>

3. Do not approve outfitter guide requests for mountain lion hunting until biological study has been completed..... Agency Officials Ongoing
None have been approved.

4. Work with the California and Nevada Fish and Game Commission to eliminate lion hunting in the MPWHT until study is completed.... Dr. Turner 1988

The Nevada F&G Commission, at the request of Dr. Turner and the MPWHT Steering Committee, did not issue lion permits for Nevada counties affecting the MPWHT for two years. It is unclear as to the current status of future permits. Committee agreed that we would continue to support recommending not taking lions for another year. Depredation permits for taking lions that kill domestic livestock of course would still be supported by the Committee. Dr. Turner would take the lead on continuing to work with the Nevada F&G on this matter.

I. Action Planning Objective to Allow Research to Predict Characteristics in Population Control:

1. Develop a monitoring plan to determine if and when horse population control is necessary... Wild Horse Comm. 1988
2. If control measures are determined to be necessary, consider all available techniques, but favor natural control measures when possible..... Steering Committee As Required

No action is required. The scheduled 1993 plan update will incorporate information collected during the five year study period.