

10/2003



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management



Elko Field Office
3900 E. Idaho Street
Elko, NV 89801

October 2003

Approved Elko Resource Management Plan

Wild Horse Amendment and Environmental Assessment



Photo by Shawna Richardson, BLM Wild Horse Specialist

MISSION STATEMENT

The Bureau of Land Management is responsible for the stewardship of our public lands. It is committed to manage, protect, and improve these lands in a manner to serve the needs of the American people for all times. Management is based upon the principles of multiple use and sustained yield of our nations resources within the framework of environmental responsibility and scientific technology. These resources include recreation, rangelands, timber, minerals, watershed, fish and wildlife, wilderness, air and scenic, scientific and cultural values.

BLM-EK-PL-03-024-1610/4710



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Elko Field Office
3900 East Idaho St.
Elko, Nevada 89801
775-753-0200

In Reply Refer To:
1610/4710 (NV-012)

October 20, 2003

Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses
885 Eastlake Boulevard
Carson City, NV 89704

Dear Ms. Barcomb:

Enclosed for your information is the "*Approved Elko Resource Management Plan Wild Horse Amendment and Decision Record.*"

The Elko Field Office appreciated receiving your letter commenting on the July 2003 proposed plan and environmental assessment (BLM-EK-PL-03-024). Also enclosed for your information are our responses to your comments.

If you have questions please call Bryan Fuell, Wild Horse and Burro Specialist, at 775-753-0200. Thank you for your interest in wild horse management on public lands in northeastern Nevada.

Sincerely,

Helen M. Hankins
Field Manager

2 Enclosures
As Stated Above

Proposed Elko RMP Wild Horse Amendment – Comments/Responses
Nevada Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses

Comment 1:

At a recent meeting held for State agency officials on August 22, 2003, in Carson City, we were supplied with maps, which showed existing fence projects affecting the proposed HMAs but were not included in the proposed RMP. Full disclosure with the public and compliance with NEPA is critical to avoid stepping backwards. I was informed yesterday that you posted one of the two maps on your website but have not formally informed the public that incomplete maps are in the proposed RMP and that more accurate maps are available. The entire mailing list for this RMP was not informed. Does this course of action comply with NEPA?

Response 1:

BLM believes the EA adequately complies with NEPA. The primary purpose of the maps in the EA was to support the description and analysis of alternatives for designation of herd management areas (HMAs) for the Little Humboldt and Rock Creek herds. An incorrect map for the Little Humboldt herd area was replaced to show the Little Humboldt HMA alternatives. A preliminary map that had been prepared for use in scoping was inadvertently used. The maps brought to the Governor's consistency review meeting showed fences to facilitate discussions. The EA discusses existence, and condition of, fences where applicable in analyzing the alternatives for the Little Humboldt and Rock Creek HMAs. It was not considered necessary for the HMA maps to show the fences to understand the analysis. During scoping, no one requested that maps be included to show the location of fences. During the public review and protest period, no requests were made for the correct Little Humboldt map, or for any maps to show the location of fences.

Comment 2:

We would recommend that BLM place more importance on managing this area as a complex to include Rock Creek, Little Humboldt, Snowstorm Mountains, Owyhee, and Little Owyhee HMA's and direct management towards one singular HMA. Monitoring in the early 70's provided the information that wild horses inhabited the entire area mentioned above. Its hard to go back to understand why six different HMAs were created instead of one, however, we assume that they were created around the various livestock grazing allotments that were in place at the time since the HMA boundaries match the livestock allotment boundaries. We don't believe that was the intention of the Wild Horse and Burro Act. The Act directed management of the horses where they were found at that time and also maintaining their free roaming ability.

Response 2:

This suggestion for management of the Rock Creek, Little Humboldt and Owyhee herds represents a new alternative from any suggested by public scoping for this wild horse amendment to the Elko RMP. BLM concurs with your assumption that the HAs were created to include consideration of grazing use at the time the 1971 Act was passed. However, we also believe that the HAs, as established, follow the intent of the Act. Managing the Little Humboldt, Rock Creek and/or Owyhee HAs as a complex was eliminated early in the process of formulating alternatives for the proposed Amendment as being both unnecessary and impractical. Long-term management of free-roaming wild horses as a complex would likely require that the grazing allotments also be managed in common, and such management would not be compatible with multiple use of the areas. The EA (page 37) recognizes that immigration from neighboring herds

Proposed Elko RMP Wild Horse Amendment – Comments/Responses
Nevada Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses

results in fluctuations in the size of the Little Humboldt herd, but this is not considered a problem. In the case of the Rock Creek and Little Humboldt HMAs, management as a complex could conflict with making changes needed to improve the condition of habitat for sensitive fish and wildlife species. A proposal for long-term management of the six wild horse herd areas as a complex would require agreement of all interested parties. It is not practical (if not impossible), nor appropriate, to develop binding agreements among current permittees for the Little Humboldt, Rock Creek and Owyhee herds. It is even less possible to develop agreements with additional permittees of allotments administered by the Winnemucca Field Office. Approval of the Amendment as proposed would not preclude coordination between the Elko and Winnemucca field offices in managing wild horses. Management of the Diamond Hills North herd is already coordinated with management of neighboring HMAs that are administered by the Battle Mountain and Ely field offices when practical.

Comment 3:

The Owyhee and Diamond Hills North HMA must have supportive documents to establish HMA's. These HA's may only be sub-herds of other complexes in other Field Offices. Data and not administrative policies should support the decisions.

Response 3:

The Owyhee and Diamond Hills North HAs were established under the 1971 Act. These HAs are designated as HMAs in their entirety by means of a maintenance action on the 1987 Elko RMP. This designation does not expand upon the scope of resource uses or restrictions, or change the terms, conditions and decisions of the approved plan. Thus, it does not require development of alternatives and impact analysis (EA, page 11).

Comment 4:

We will continue to monitor and work with BLM to insure that any new fences proposed are designed and placed to facilitate movement between within the HMA and/or to manage as a complex.

Response 4:

It is a SOP for BLM to review fences proposed within the boundaries of an HMA to facilitate movement of wild horses. However, fences at the boundary of an HMA would not be monitored to facilitate movement between HMAs, unless agreed to by affected interests as part of developing and approving a population management plan or multiple use decision.

Comment 5:

In the meeting it was mentioned that there may be fences proposed with "drop gates" or some such other means to facilitate movement. Who would maintain the timely opening and closing of gates?

Response 5:

It is a SOP for such questions to be agreed upon with affected interests as fences or other range improvements are proposed within a designated HMA.

Comment 6:

The 2001 Buffalo Fire Fence is another example of implementing range improvements that

Proposed Elko RMP Wild Horse Amendment – Comments/Responses
Nevada Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses

severely limit wild horse passage in the herd area. The cumulative impacts of fencing within HMAs should be included in this assessment.

Response 6:

The EA for this wild horse amendment discusses the cumulative effects of the alternatives for designation of the Rock Creek HMA when added to the impacts of the Buffalo Fire Fence (page 39). As for the previous comments, it is an SOP for any improvements that may be proposed in the future, including any fences that are temporarily proposed to rehabilitate burned areas or permanently proposed to protect and restore habitat for fish and wildlife species of concern, to be reviewed with affected interests. This includes consideration of cumulative impacts in completing environmental reviews for compliance with NEPA.

Comment 7:

We suggest that BLM further analyze that data, draw population conclusions, and propose management guidance for this RMP based on those conclusions, i.e.: fertility control, emergency gathers, natural selection, herd dynamics, observed/documentated recruitment rates, criteria for present and future AML's to insure viable populations, and the effects of adoption policies altering gather criteria and age compositions.

Response 7:

These management tools are mentioned within the EA as SOPs to assist in the management of wild horses (pages 14-15). The Approved Amendment should clarify that, under current Program Office direction, Population Management Plans will be written to specifically address the biology, ecology, and management of each herd, and guidance is forthcoming.

Comment 8:

Wild horse Selective Removal Criteria may have been established for adoption purposes or policies. This document admits to the lack of proper management strategies and the Field Office should have the necessary data to establish a proper strategy in this amendment.

Response 8:

The Selective Removal Criteria is one example of a policy that the Elko Field Office follows in managing wild horses. Another example is current Program Office direction for the development of Population Management Plans, as discussed above. The Elko FO will continue to follow policies and guidance as they are established for BLM's wild horse program.

Comment 9:

Please include in your Final RMP document: "Standard Operating Procedures" for determining carrying capacity and allocating forage to wild horses. How is AML going to be determined and by what criteria? Set up standards for monitoring that will protect the habitat by identifying the offending user. Establish monitoring criteria for livestock, horses and wildlife to insure that identification of the offending animal(s) will direct management towards sound range management decisions that will protect and enhance the habitat. 4) Establish in this RMP that weight averaging and yield indexing will not be used for habitat management.

Proposed Elko RMP Wild Horse Amendment – Comments/Responses
Nevada Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses

Response 9:

The Proposed Amendment for wild horses does not offer any changes SOPs and program guidance as described in the EA on pages 13-16. Such SOPs are already required by the Elko RMP (BLM, 1987) or have been required by guidance from BLM wild horse program. Tracking of progress toward meeting resource objectives and completion of actions in support of meeting resource objectives will continue to be tracked and documented on an allotment and HMA basis.

The need to establish more key areas is addressed by the proposed action, and the Elko Field Office will continue to determine carrying capacity, allocate forage, and determine AML to follow SOPs. Data will continue to be collected and evaluated to determine if area-specific objectives for rangeland health are being met and if adjustments are needed. This includes monitoring and taking action to establish and maintain AML in each wild horse HMA.

Comment 10:

Ownership of private waters is approximately 91%, which only leaves approximately 9% of water that is public which is shared by horses, wildlife and livestock. This RMP must address/assess establishing the HMA on available water for the horses. The Act requires meeting the needs for water, forage, and freedom of movement. You cannot establish a HMA where horses are dependant on private waters. BLM needs to establish what permanent waters (inventory) are available before you can determine what boundaries are to be set for the HMA. It would be advisable to include a map of permanent available waters for horses in the final RMP. Or is BLM going to pursue agreements with the permittees to accommodate the AML with water?

Response 10:

Where did you derive the 91% figure? Most water in Nevada is privately owned (95+%). If you refer to waters on private lands vs. public land, both Little Humboldt and Rock Creek HMA have considerable water available on public land. Therefore, the availability of water is not a limiting factor for consideration in designating the HMAs. While the majority of water in the Rock Creek HMA may occur on private land, landowners have never raised an issue with wild horses watering on their land.



United States Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management

Nevada State Office
P.O. Box 12000 (1340 Financial Blvd.)
Reno, Nevada 89520-0006
<http://www.nv.blm.gov/>

In Reply Refer To:
1610/4710 (NV-930)

OCT 14 2003

Dear Reader:

Enclosed is a copy of the Approved Elko Resource Management Plan (RMP) Wild Horse Amendment and Decision Record (DR). This RMP amendment outlines the level of management for wild horse management areas within the Elko RMP planning area. The document summarizes and completes the planning process for this RMP Amendment.

This document contains two parts. Part 1, RESOURCE DECISIONS FOR WILD HORSES addresses the Objective, Short- and Long-Term Management Actions, Standard Operating Procedures, Implementation, and Monitoring and Evaluation of the Amendment. Part 2, DECISION RECORD includes the Rationale for the decision, Compliance and Monitoring, Summary of Public Involvement and Approval.

Implementation of the decisions by the Elko Field Manager may begin 30 days following the date this document is available to the public.

All parties on the distribution list for this document are being mailed copies. This document may also be obtained from the Elko Field Office at 3900 East Idaho Street, Elko, NV 89801, telephone 775-753-0200. It may also be viewed or downloaded from the Elko Field Office website at www.nv.blm.gov/elko.

For additional information, please call Bryan Fuell, Wild Horse Specialist at the Elko Field Office. Thank you for your interest in wild horse management on public lands in northeastern Nevada.

Sincerely,

Robert V. Abbey
State Director, Nevada

Enclosure
As Stated Above

APPROVED

ELKO RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

WILD HORSE AMENDMENT

and

DECISION RECORD

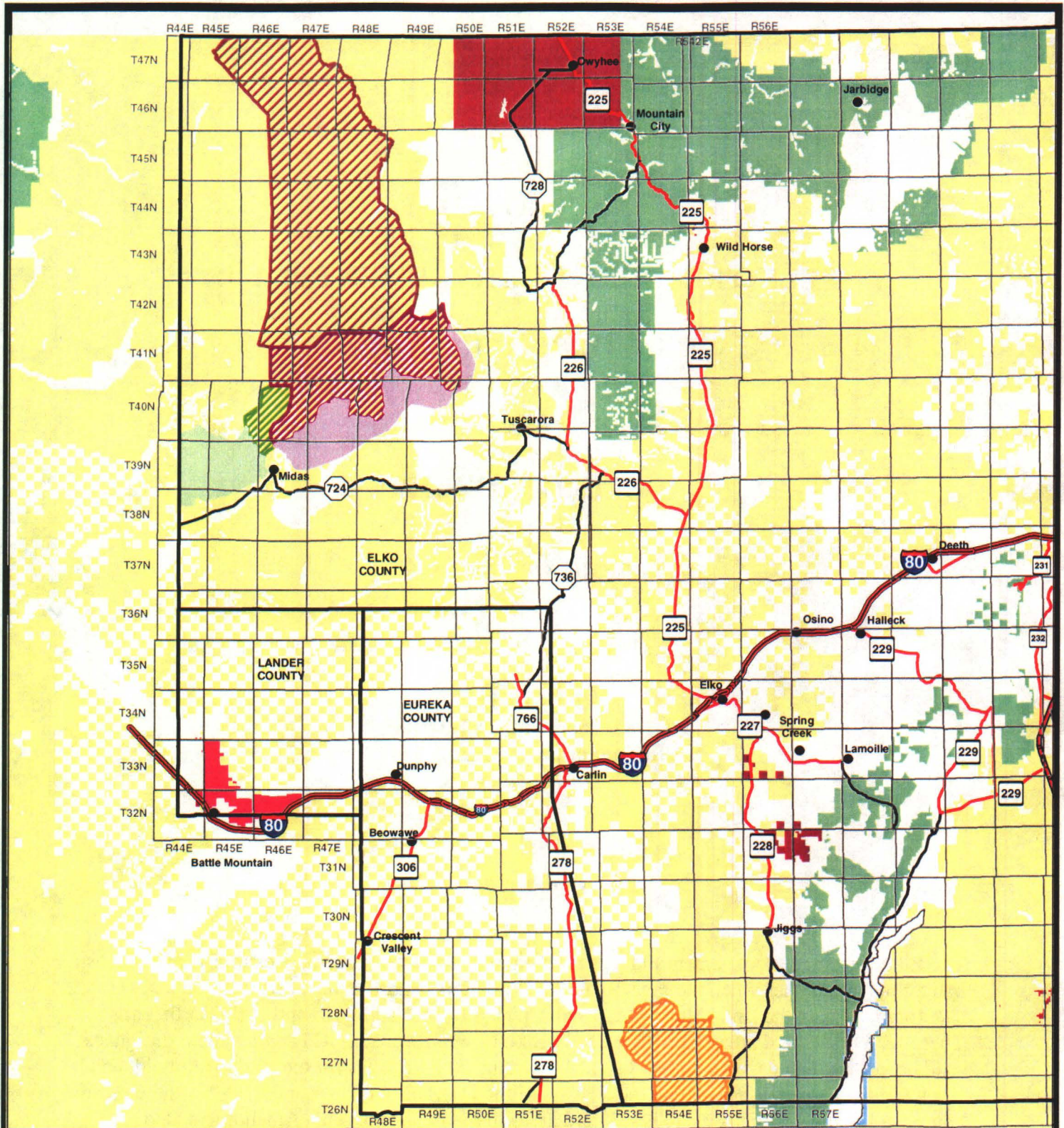
BLM/EK/PL-2003/024

**Prepared by
Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Elko Field Office**

October 2003

The Elko Resource Management Plan, as it was approved in 1987, recognizes four areas used as habitat by wild horses when the Free-Roaming Wild Horse and Burro Act was passed in 1971. The four herds are the Little Humboldt, Rock Creek, Owyhee and Diamond Hills North herds. These wild horse herd areas are all located in Elko County, Nevada. This amendment designates wild horse "herd management areas" (HMAs) within the herd areas for the Little Humboldt and Rock Creek herds. It clarifies that the HMAs for the Owyhee and Diamond Hills North herds are comprised of the originally established herd areas in their entirety. This Amendment also updates direction for the management of wild horses to reflect current policies for wild horse management, and incorporates decisions that have been made to implement the RMP since it was issued in 1987.

For further information contact Bryan Fuell, Wild Horse and Burro Specialist, Bureau of Land Management, 3900 East Idaho Street, Elko, Nevada 89801, telephone (775) 753-0200.



- Herd Management Areas**
- Diamond Hills North
 - Little Humboldt
 - Owyhee
 - Rock Creek
- Herd Areas**
- Little Humboldt
 - Rock Creek

- Landownership**
- Public (Admin by BLM)
 - Private Lands
 - US Forest Service
 - Native American Reservation
 - Bureau of Reclamation



**ELKO RMP
WILD HORSE HERD MANAGEMENT AREAS**

Data is published in the North American Datum 1983 (NAD83) UTM's, zone 11, meters
September 15, 2003



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
ELKO FIELD OFFICE



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Elko Resource Management Plan Wild Horse Amendment

INTRODUCTION

This Elko Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment and Decision Record (DR) updates direction for the management for wild horses, as approved by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Nevada State Director, on March 11, 1987. The Elko RMP planning area covers the western portion of the Elko district in northeastern Nevada. This planning area is comprised of approximately 6 million acres, of which over 3 million acres is public land that is administered by the Elko Field Office.

The BLM strives to manage wild horses only within areas designated as "Herd Management Area" (HMAs) by a RMP. This RMP Amendment has been completed to include formal designation of HMAs for each herd in the planning area of the Elko RMP. The 1987 RMP provides direction for the management of four wild horse herd areas (HAs). *HAs are limited to areas of public lands identified as being habitat used by wild horses at time of the passage of the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971, as amended (1971 Act; 16 U.S.C. 1331-1340; P.L. 92-195).* The four HAs are the Little Humboldt, Rock Creek, Owyhee and Diamond Hills (North). The HAs are all located in Elko County (see map). They total approximately 657,000 acres, of which about 92 percent are public lands. HMAs are designated only on areas within HAs where wild horses can be managed for the long term.

This Approved Amendment is in two sections to meet requirements of the Federal Land Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA, 43 U.S.C. 1711). Part 1 is the approved Resource Management Plan Amendment, and Part 2 is a Decision Record.

The BLM completed an environmental assessment (EA) on the Proposed Elko RMP Wild Horse Amendment for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA; 42 U.S.C. 4332 *et seq.*). The EA resulted in a "Finding of No Significant Impact" (FONSI), dated July 30, 2003, for implementation of the proposed action as described and analyzed by the EA. The July 2003 document, to include the EA and FONSI, is incorporated by reference, and is available from the Elko Field Office.

PART 1: ELKO RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT RESOURCE DECISIONS

Long-term management of wild horses on public lands within the planning area of the Elko RMP is to occur within designated herd management areas (HMAs) as shown the accompanying map, in accordance with the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, and regulations at 43 CFR 4700. Two of the HAs (Owyhee and Diamond Hills North) are designated in whole HMAs as established under the 1971 Act. The other two HAs (Rock Creek and Little Humboldt) are designated HMAs, as follows:

1. The HMA for the Little Humboldt herd is designated as the Castle Ridge Pasture of the HA (see also Map 2-1 of BLM/EK/PL-2003/024).

Elko Resource Management Plan Wild Horse Amendment

2. The Rock Creek HMA consists of the Burner Hills, Winters Creek, and Red Cow pastures of the northern portion of the HA of the Spanish Ranch Allotment, and extends south into Soldier Field of the Squaw Valley Allotment (see also Map 2-2 of BLM/EK/PL-2003/024).

3. The Owyhee HA and Diamond Hills North HA are designated as HMAs in their entirety.

This Amendment also updates the desired herd size that could be managed within each HMA while still preserving and maintaining a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship for the area, and provides guidelines for adjusting herd size. It allows for the removal of wild horse from portions of the Little Humboldt and Rock Creek HAs that are not designated as the HMA.

Implementation and monitoring actions for this RMP Amendment include the establishment of and maintenance of appropriate management levels (AMLs) for wild horses in each HMA.

Objective:

Manage for a wild horse herd size within a designated wild horse HMA to maintain a thriving ecological balance consistent with other multiple uses.

Short and Long Term Management Actions:

1. Manage wild horses in the four designated HMAs, as shown on the map and to include the approximate acreage of public and private lands as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1
Wild Horse Herd Areas and Herd Management Areas
(Acres)**

HERD	HA Public Land	HA Private Land	HA Total Acres	HMA Public Land	HMA Private Land	HMA Total Acres
Little Humboldt	53,377	10,560	63,937	15,734	1,417	17,151
Rock Creek	145,140	38,356	183,496	102,638	24,115	126,753
Subtotal	198,517	48,916		118,372	25,532	
Owyhee	336,262	2,842	339,104			339,104
Diamond Hills	69,056	1,423	70,479			70,479
Subtotal	405,318	4,265		405,318	4,265	
TOTAL	603,835	53,181	657,016¹	523,690	29,797	553,487

¹ Total HA acres are corrected from amount reported in the EA (BLM/EK/PL-2003/024).

2. Manage for a desired herd size as shown in Table 2. The desired herd size for a given herd is the estimated number of horses that could be sustained while preserving and maintaining a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship. It is intended as a starting point for determining appropriate wild horse numbers.

Elko Resource Management Plan Wild Horse Amendment

Table 2
Wild Horse Herd Size
(Number of Adult Wild Horses)

WILD HORSE HMA	DESIRED HERD SIZE (*see Notes)	2003 POPULATION ESTIMATE	NOTES
Little Humboldt	80	185**	*AML, based on monitoring data from the May 2002 Draft Little Humboldt Allotment Evaluation and stipulated agreement dated 6/24/02. ** 2003 Population Estimate is based on census data collected in September 03.
Rock Creek	250	1,010**	*Desired Herd Size is based on monitoring data from the 1997 Rock Creek Allotment Evaluation. AML needs to be established. ** 2003 Population Estimate is based on census data collected in September 2003.
Owyhee	231	239	*AML established by the Owyhee Allotment Final MUD dated 4/19/02.
Diamond Hills North	37	71	*AML established in 1997 through agreements with grazing permittees for the Red Rock (31 horses) and Browne (6 horses) Allotments.
Total number of wild horses	598	1,505	

3. Establish or re-evaluate the AMLs for wild horses, to include the population range within which the herd size will be allowed to fluctuate, based on monitoring and as part of completing allotment-specific evaluations and/or herd-specific Population Management Plans (PMPs).
4. Conduct gathers as necessary to reach the desired herd size and maintain the AML. Collect data for use in development of a PMP, in accordance with national program office guidance.
5. Maintain the four wild horse HAs as established under the 1971 Act. Manage portions of the Little Humboldt and Rock Creek HAs outside of the designated HMAs as horse free.
6. Construct and maintain any fences along or within the boundaries of any HMA to be highly visible to wild horses. Fences constructed within a HMA cannot impede movement of wild horses. Such fences may be constructed to manage livestock grazing if needed to protect or improve habitat conditions for fish and wildlife species of special concern, such as Lahontan cutthroat trout, Interior redband trout, or sage grouse.
 - A short-term action for the Rock Creek herd is to move the northwest portion of the Buffalo Fire Rehabilitation fence to delineate the HMA boundary. The fence would continue to be highly visible to wild horses, and generally coincide with the boundary between the Spanish Ranch and Squaw Valley allotments.
7. Monitor wild horse populations and habitat conditions. Establish long term monitoring sites in each HMA.

Elko Resource Management Plan Wild Horse Amendment

8. Manage combined use of livestock and wild horses to not exceed utilization criteria, as established or adjusted by allotment-specific evaluations/Multiple Use Decisions.

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs):

The following policies and SOPs are applicable to any plans for the management of wild horses and any actions proposed that have the potential to affect wild horses within the designated HMAs.

1. Management of wild horses will be guided by plans developed through consultation and coordination with interested parties and will be coordinated with livestock and wildlife plans and other resource plans (1987 Elko RMP ROD, page 33). Plans for wild horses will be based on population and habitat monitoring studies.
2. Write PMPs to specifically address the biology, ecology, and management of each herd. Within a PMP, the following are described: HMA description, herd history, herd genetic viability, herd social structure, herd demographics, population monitoring and evaluation, and consequences of management actions. Continue the use of a population computer model (WinEquus) to predict potential effects on population growth rates through implementation of different management strategies. Continue to use approved methods to reduce the frequency of wild horse gathers. Porcine zona pellucida (PZP) immunocontraception injections are currently given to mares during gathers to prevent pregnancy.
3. Gather wild horses as necessary to achieve and maintain an ecological balance and multiple-use relationship in a given area to meet rangeland health standards. Gathers will be scheduled when data indicates the population of an HMA is not consistent with its AML. Gathers are normally scheduled following a bureau-wide gather strategy, where all HMAs are gathered on a four-year cycle. Gathers may also be conducted when emergency situations arise from such events as wildland fire or drought.
4. Follow the *Gather Policy and Selective Removal Criteria for Wild Horses* (Washington Office IM 2002-095). This strategy is designed to achieve AML on all HMAs by fiscal year 2005, implemented with the following priorities:
 - a) *Age Class Five Years and Younger*: Wild horses five years of age and younger may be removed and placed into the national adoption program.
 - b) *Age Class Ten Years and Older*: Wild horses ten years of age and older may be removed and placed into long-term holding.
 - c) *Age Class Six to Nine Years*: Wild horses aged six to nine years old should be removed last and only if the HMA cannot achieve AML without their removal.
5. Range improvement projects in wild horse management areas shall be designed to incorporate features for the management of free-roaming wild horses.
 - a) Lay-down fences will be constructed in wild horse areas if necessary and feasible. All fences will be made visible to the animals.
 - b) Water will be made available in allotments and rested pasture for wild horses wherever feasible.

Elko Resource Management Plan Wild Horse Amendment

Implementation

1. Establish the AML for wild horses within the Rock Creek HMA, through issuance of a final multiple-use decision.
2. A gather to the AML for the Owyhee herd was completed in December 2002. The current schedule for gathering of wild horses to AML and development of PMPs is: Owyhee, Diamond Hills North, Little Humboldt and Rock Creek.
3. Prepare PMPs to ensure the wild horse herd populations maintain their free-roaming, self-sustaining, and genetically viable status. All plans would be prepared based on data collected from gathers and monitoring, and in accordance with regulations, policies, and national program office guidance.
4. Re-evaluate AMLs as determined by the collection of monitoring data.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring includes not only tracking progress toward meeting resource management objectives, but monitoring of the RMP itself, as amended. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of actions to meet rangeland health standards and guidelines for wild horses, as approved by the Nevada State Director on December 14, 2000. This is in conjunction with monitoring to meet four rangeland health standards and associated guidelines of the Northeastern Great Basin Area Resource Advisory Council for upland sites, riparian and wetland sites, habitat, and cultural resources. Monitoring also occurs to meet area-specific objectives for wild horses, wildlife and livestock determined by activity plans, such as allotment evaluations/multiple use decisions, PMPs, allotment management plans, and habitat management plans.

PART 2: DECISION RECORD

Resource Decisions

The resource decisions, as outlined by Part 1 above, include actions as described and analyzed in the *Proposed Elko Resource Management Plan Wild Horse Amendment and Environmental Assessment* (Proposed Amendment/EA; BLM/EK/PL-2003/024). This includes the description of the "Proposed Action" and "Valid Existing Management" on pages 11-13 of the EA. The Proposed Action is BLM's environmentally preferred alternative, and is selected as the Approved Elko Resource Management Wild Horse Amendment. Its implementation is subject to SOPs common to all alternatives, as also listed in Part 1 above and on pages 13-16 of the EA. Its implementation is also subject to any other applicable SOPs for resource protection from the Record of Decision for the 1987 Elko RMP, and any decisions issued for its implementation.

Elko Resource Management Plan Wild Horse Amendment

Rationale For Decision

My approval of this amendment to the Elko RMP for the management of wild horse to include the management determinations outlined in Part 1, is made for the following reasons:

1. Actions prescribed will facilitate meeting the objective of managing for a wild horse herd size within a designated wild horse HMA to maintain a thriving ecological balance consistent with other multiple uses. This includes the management of wild horses and habitat within the designated HMAs to improve rangeland conditions for wild horses and to conserve sensitive fish and wildlife species.
2. Implementation of this decision will not result in any unnecessary environmental deterioration. Upon issuing the EA on the Proposed Amendment (BLM/EK/PL-2003/024), I found that no significant impact to human environment would result from implementation of the proposed action as described and analyzed in the EA (FONSI dated July 30, 2003).
3. Efforts to recover Lahanton cutthroat trout will benefit from management of the portions of the Little Humboldt and Rock Creek HAs not designated as HMAs as horse free areas.
4. The alternative of continuing current management without amending the 1987 RMP was not selected because it has not provided, and is not expected to provide, the Elko Field Office with the means to manage for a wild horse herd size in a manner consistent with maintaining a thriving ecological balance within the HAs, as established under the 1971 Act.
5. Reasons for eliminating other alternatives from detailed consideration suggested during public scoping are discussed on pages 16 and 17 of the EA. Alternatives that would not meet the need for or purpose of this Amendment included suggestions to eliminate wild horses from the Elko RMP planning area, eliminate livestock grazing from designated HMAs, and enlarge the wild horse HMAs (to include lands outside of the HAs). Alternatives for designation of the Rock Creek HMA to exclude certain pastures of the Spanish Ranch allotment (Red Cow and Winters pastures) were eliminated because they provide crucial habitat for wild horses. New alternatives suggested in letters of comment on the Proposed Amendment and EA were considered but not selected, for reasons discussed in the following section on public involvement.
6. The determinations in this amendment do not conflict with the other resource management actions (determinations) of the Elko RMP.
7. These determinations have also been coordinated with other Federal, state, local and tribal plans concerning the management of public lands. No conflicts were identified by the Governor's Office consistency review. This plan amendment has been determined to be consistent with other Federal, state, local and tribal plans to the maximum extent possible.

Elko Resource Management Plan Wild Horse Amendment

Compliance and Monitoring

Where conflicting direction involving the management of the public lands may occur between this plan amendment and those of state and local governments, this amendment will comply with the laws and statutes enacted by Congress to protect the interests of the citizens of the United States. These management determinations will be monitored and evaluated to coincide with the implementation of the existing Elko RMP.

Public Involvement

The land use planning process for this Elko RMP Amendment began on February 10, 2003, with the publication of a Notice of Intent in the *Federal Register*. This notice also initiated a 30-day public scoping period. An invitation to participate in scoping, including public meetings in Elko, Eureka and Reno, Nevada, was mailed to everyone on the Elko FO mailing list. A news release was issued to announce the dates and locations of the public meetings and the availability of additional information, and to request receipt of written comments by March 12, 2003. The three public scoping meetings were held on February 24, 25 and 26, 2003, in Elko, Eureka and Reno, Nevada. They were attended by grazing permittees, Northeastern Nevada Stewardship Group representatives, wild horse advocates, and interested individuals. Nine letters of comment were received. A scoping results report is available from the Elko Field Office.

The Proposed Elko RMP Wild Horse Amendment and EA was mailed to all individuals, agencies, and groups who expressed an interest in this planning process on July 27, 2003. The document was available for a 60-day Governor's consistency review and 30-day public protest period. No recommendations were received from the Governor's review. Comment letters on the Proposed Amendment/EA were received from the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW), Nevada Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses (Commission), Wild Horse Organized Assistance and Ellison Ranching Company.

A report documenting BLM's consideration of the comments received on the proposed amendment and EA is also available upon request to the Elko Field Office. Most comments were addressed by the alternatives considered and/or analysis of impacts, as discussed in the EA. Some are being, or will be, addressed through the process of implementing the amendment.

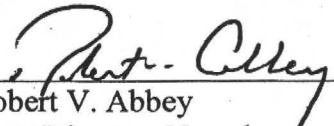
In commenting on the proposed plan, the Commission suggested a new alternative. It was to manage the Rock Creek, Little Humboldt, and Owyhee HMAs as a complex, to include the Snowstorm Mountains and Little Humboldt HMAs that are administered by the Winnemucca FO. Management as a complex had been eliminated early in the process of formulating alternatives, as being both impractical and unnecessary. The NDOW suggested an alternative to exclude Soldier Field from the Rock Creek HMA. BLM eliminated it from consideration early in the process, because its exclusion would not provide adequate summer habitat and water sources for year-round horse use. Ellison Ranching Company suggested elimination of the Red Cow and Winters Creek pastures from the Rock Creek HMA, to help meet objectives for sensitive redband trout habitat. It was eliminated because it would not provide adequate summer habitat and water for year-round horse use.

Elko Resource Management Plan Wild Horse Amendment

The Elko Field Manager will provide notice of the availability of the decision to the public. Those who submitted comments during the scoping period, and/or commented on the proposed plan and EA, will receive copies of this document.

Approval

The resource decisions for the wild horses, as outlined in Part 1, are approved. This decision is not subject to administrative appeal. In accordance with regulations at 43 CFR 1610.5-5, this approved Wild Horse Amendment for the Elko RMP may be implemented 30 days after issuance of a public notice of this action.



Robert V. Abbey
State Director, Nevada

10-14-03
Date