

1/1985

# Wild Horse & Burro Report



U.S. Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management

January 1985

BACKGROUND MATERIAL: BLM WILD HORSE AND BURRO PROGRAM, FISCAL YEAR 1985

Background: Thirteen years ago, Public Law 92-195 was enacted "to require the protection, management, and control of wild free-roaming horses and burros on public lands" under the jurisdiction of the bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Forest Service. The December 15, 1971, Act states it is the policy of Congress that wild free-roaming horses and burros "be considered in the area where presently found, as an integral part of the natural system of the public lands."

In the 1950's, the inhumane methods employed to capture and destroy wild horses and burros for commercial profit were brought to the public's attention. The Wild Horse Annie Act of 1956 prohibited the use of aircraft and motor vehicles in rounding up wild horses and burros, as well as the poisoning of waterholes. Public pressure on Congress for additional protections continued and led to passage of Public Law 92-195 (commonly known as the Wild Free-roaming Horse and Burro Act). Congress identified these animals in the Act as "living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West."

Since 1971, the situation of the wild horse and burro has changed dramatically. Under protection from mustangers and others and with few natural predators, wild horse and burro populations on BLM lands have increased to about 64,000 animals. Although wild horse and burro inventory methods used from 1971 through 1975 were not as sophisticated as today's methods, it was estimated that approximately 17,000 wild horses and burros existed on public lands in 1971.

By law, management of wild horses and burros is restricted to public lands where herds existed in 1971--a total of about 300 herd areas on BLM lands in 10 Western States. Which areas will be managed in the long term for wild horse and burro herds is determined through the agency's land use planning process. Resource management planning enables BLM to identify issues of public concern and to develop alternatives to resolve existing or potential conflicts between proposed uses of the resources. In planning for and managing wild horse and burro herds, two primary issues considered are the areas where herds will be maintained and the appropriate number of animals in those areas.

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CFR 1600*

The planning process addresses several aspects, including public interests and preferences; established uses of the area being considered and of adjacent lands, both public and private; and the manageability of the herd area itself. Currently BLM has identified approximately 180 herd management areas through resource management planning. Work on resource management planning continues, with a completion date goal of 1988. It is anticipated that many of the remaining original herd areas will be identified through the planning process as suitable for long-term herd management.

Site-specific herd management area plans (HMAP's) are developed for each area where wild horses and burros will be maintained. About 80 HMAP's have been completed, detailing range condition, current population levels, age and sex ratios, water facilities, and forage available for the herd. These plans also may identify specific improvements and facilities required to enhance range resource use by the animals and to maintain viable, thriving herds. Efforts to maintain unique herd characteristics may be outlined. Actions necessary to maintain and protect the proper number of animals are described, including population manipulation or control techniques to be used. As in all BLM planning efforts, public participation plays a key role in decisionmaking.

Wild horse and burro management numbers on each herd management area are set with an eye to habitat condition and forage utilization by all users. Typically, deviations from an area's appropriate management level are managed at about 35 percent. Thus, an area appropriate for 300 animals might support a population of up to 400 animals before being reduced by removals to 200 animals. When adjustments are needed, the Act directs and provides for removing excess animals, usually by herding or trapping. Healthy animals are then offered to qualified private individuals through the Adopt-A-Horse (or Burro) Program, which was launched nationwide by BLM in 1976. More than 51,000 horses and burros have been adopted since the program's inception.

Despite BLM's expansion of the Adopt-A-Horse Program through the use of contract adoption centers and temporary "satellite" centers, about 3,500 animals remained unadopted at the end of 1984, primarily because of their age, temperament, conformation, or condition.

Current Status: In its Fiscal Year 1985 Department of the Interior appropriation act, Congress increased BLM's wild horse and burro management budget to \$16.7 million, about a threefold increase over 1984. Prompted by concerns over the effect of inadequate wild horse and burro population control on public land resources, Congress required the removal of more than 17,000 excess animals. Roundups are scheduled in 10 States in the following approximate numbers: Nevada, 10,000 animals; Wyoming, 4,000 animals; Oregon, 1,000 animals; California, 900 animals; Arizona, 700 animals; Utah, 640 animals; Idaho, 285 animals; Colorado, 225 animals; New Mexico, 40 animals; and Montana, 35 animals.

Primarily, gatherings will take place in areas where land use planning is complete and appropriate management numbers have been established. Some gatherings will be in response to requests to remove animals from private lands. If an area has not yet undergone land use planning, but it is necessary to protect public land resources from the deterioration associated with excessive use of the habitat, roundups could occur to keep herds within manageable size until planning is completed.

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All animals gathered will undergo usual treatment--vaccinations, freeze marking, and testing for equine infectious anemia through the Coggins test. Horses and burros will be fed and cared for primarily in BLM-run adoption centers in nine Western States during the winter months. An emergency holding facility contract running through April 1985 has been procured at Fallon, Nevada, to handle the large number of horses being gathered in Nevada, Wyoming, Oregon, and California. Through the competitive contracting process, four or five major centers west of the Mississippi River will be established in the spring to care for and feed animals that are not adopted.

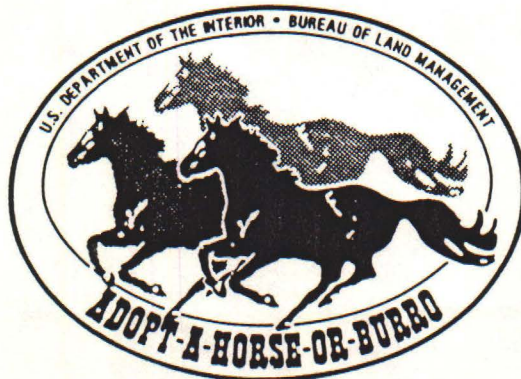
In the meantime, BLM continues in its efforts to manage America's wild horses and burros in a manner that will maintain viable populations of these animals on the public lands in harmony with the resources available to them. Qualified "foster homes" for all of the excess animals removed from the rangelands are being sought. The wild horse and burro adoption fee policy was modified in October 1984 to eliminate charges for transportation from one adoption center to another. Thus, adoption fees at all locations across the United States are now \$125 per horse and \$75 per burro. This has resulted in a substantial increase in the number of animals adopted in the Eastern and Midwestern States, where adoption fees including transportation costs ranged as high as \$215 per horse prior to October.

Although the Wild Free-Koaming Horse and burro Act directs BLM to destroy excess animals for which no adoption demand by qualified individuals exists, the agency placed a moratorium on such destruction in January 1982. At this time, there are no plans to lift the moratorium.

Congress, in recognizing that this is a controversial program and that "there is still significant disagreement concerning how many animals are excess, what historical levels were, and what is the current rate of reproduction," included in BLM's wild horse and burro appropriation \$1 million for additional research. The funding is to be committed through the National Academy of Sciences, which assisted in similar research on wild horses and burros from 1979 through 1983 in accordance with requirements in the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978. BLM and the Forest Service spent approximately \$1.6 million on that research.

Fiscal Year 1985 will be a challenging year in the wild horse and burro program. Throughout all phases of program implementation--planning, on-the-ground management, removals, and adoption--the welfare of the wild horses and burros and the land resources upon which they depend for survival will be of primary importance.

Information on how to adopt a wild horse or burro is available from your local BLM office or from the Office of Public Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Washington, D. C. 20240



WILD HORSE AND BURRO FACTS AND FIGURESEstimated Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Populations  
as of September 30, 1984<sup>a</sup>

State	Horses	Burros	Total
Arizona	130	3,620	3,750
California	3,935	6,344	10,279
Colorado	696	0	696
Idaho	630	0	630
Montana	164	0	164
Nevada	32,975	2,023	34,998
New Mexico	191	16	207
Oregon	3,745	29	3,774
Utah	1,810	58	1,868
Wyoming	<u>7,604</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>7,604</u>
Total	51,880	12,090	63,970

<sup>a</sup>Population estimates for Fiscal Year 1984 are based on censuses conducted in previous years, removals in FY 1984, and an estimated annual population growth rate of 16 percent.

Wild Horse and Burro Program Appropriations

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Appropriated Amount</u>
1972	\$ 0
1973	400,000
1974	687,000
1975	1,314,000
1976	1,272,000
1977	2,679,000
1978	4,025,000
1979	4,582,000
1980	4,250,000
1981	5,704,000
1982	5,418,000
1983	4,877,000
1984	5,766,000
1985	16,739,000

Wild Horses and Burros Placed in Private Maintenance  
as of September 30, 1984

STATE	1973-1982		1983		1984		TOTAL	
	HORSES	BURROS	HORSES	BURROS	HORSES	BURROS	HORSES	BURROS
ALABAMA	292	24	64	21	116	69	472	114
ALASKA	37	1	3	7	2	0	42	8
ARIZONA	235	426	91	67	56	6	382	499
ARKANSAS	278	34	86	2	22	3	386	39
CALIFORNIA	4,311	2,215	499	108	551	132	5,361	2,455
COLORADO	1,279	283	185	31	85	4	1,549	318
CONNECTICUT	10	7	6	2	2	2	18	11
DELAWARE	0	0	1	0	1	3	2	3
FLORIDA	199	270	15	3	10	0	224	273
GEORGIA	140	61	39	6	90	9	269	76
HAWAII	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
IDAHO	2,467	65	63	24	259	3	2,789	92
ILLINOIS	409	103	7	1	1	10	417	114
INDIANA	234	45	4	3	4	9	242	57
IOWA	679	399	50	67	18	38	747	504
KANSAS	651	36	170	20	55	16	876	72
KENTUCKY	563	168	74	15	16	12	653	195
LOUISIANA	159	6	153	17	122	0	434	23
MAINE	25	9	0	2	0	0	25	11
MARYLAND	46	16	17	17	17	17	80	50
MASSACHUSETTS	17	5	0	1	3	4	20	10
MICHIGAN	285	49	5	6	67	66	357	121
MINNESOTA	279	52	2	18	54	11	335	81
MISSISSIPPI	138	11	183	85	115	5	436	101
MISSOURI	1,060	65	12	36	67	58	1,139	159
MONTANA	366	57	23	28	208	8	597	93
NEBRASKA	514	250	121	171	28	96	663	517
NEVADA	1,171	110	86	66	150	20	1,407	196
NEW HAMPSHIRE	15	9	0	0	5	1	20	10
NEW JERSEY	15	6	5	7	0	31	20	44
NEW MEXICO	435	66	0	1	111	1	546	68

January 1985

BUKEAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
WILD HORSE AND BURRO PROGRAM  
Q & A SHEET

Q: Why is the wild horse and burro management program receiving special emphasis this year?

A: In its Fiscal Year 1985 appropriation act, Congress increased the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) wild horse and burro management budget to \$16,739,000. This is a considerable increase over the \$5 million that was budgeted nationally for the program in each of the previous two fiscal years. Because of their concern for the effects of grazing by overpopulations of wild horses and burros on public land resources, Congress further directed that BLM gather 17,142 excess animals (11,000 for Fiscal Year 1985 plus 6,142 excess animals that were not removed in Fiscal Years 1983 and 1984 because of funding limitations).

Q: How do you determine excess wild horses and burros must be removed?

A: The Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act (Public Law 92-195) signed into law on December 15, 1971, authorizes and directs the Secretary of the Interior through BLM "to protect and manage wild free-roaming horses and burros as a component of the public lands . . ." in a manner "that is designed to achieve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance on the public lands."

Following a planning process consistent with other laws that guide the administration of the public lands (notably the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976), many BLM resource areas have developed land use plans. These plans become intricate when several potential uses are involved in a particular area and require reconciliation. Once alternatives are generated and public comments are received, a land use decision is made.

At least two wild horse and burro issues are addressed in plans: where herds will be maintained and the appropriate number of animals in each area. It is in these areas where land use planning is completed that most of the gatherings will occur in Fiscal Year 1985.

Q: Is all of the money to go for gatherings?

A: No, \$1 million is to be spent on research in cooperation with the National Academy of Sciences, which previously oversaw the wild horse and burro research requirements included in the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978. Money also has been allocated to cover feeding and care of the excess animals gathered, operation of existing and new corrals, transportation of animals, personnel costs associated with the program, and costs associated with the Adopt-A-Horse (or Burro) Program.

registering organization (the United States Government), the animal's year of birth, and a registration number. Trained personnel apply the symbol by a humane freeze marking method while the animal is in a secure, stationary position.

Q: What will happen to the wild horses and burros after they are prepared for adoption?

A: The BLM has a nationwide Adopt-A-Horse (or Burro) Program whose objectives are to place healthy excess wild horses and burros with qualified individuals who are able to give them humane care and treatment. The program provides the public an opportunity to contribute to the preservation and conservation of the public lands' natural resources, as well as to obtain a symbol of the Old Wild West and a useful animal. The adoption program operates through three types of facilities: BLM-run adoption centers in nine Western States, adoption centers operated by individuals under contract to BLM in various regions of the country, and satellite or temporary facilities. Both the contract and satellite centers assure that wild horses and burros are available for adoption near population centers throughout the country rather than only in the West.

Q: What is the cost of adopting a wild horse or burro?

A: The total cost anywhere in the United States is \$125 for a horse and \$75 for a burro. This adoption fee reimburses the Federal Government for part of its costs in rounding up the animals and preparing them for adoption.

Q: Where will the animals be fed and cared for while awaiting adoption?

A: BLM has advertised for central holding facilities west of the Mississippi River. It is anticipated each facility could accommodate as many as 3,000 animals. Approximately five contracts are to be awarded, starting in March 1985. In the meantime, most animals are being maintained in BLM adoption centers and at a contract facility in Fallon, Nevada.

Q: How successful has the adoption program been?

A: Since 1973, more than 51,000 horses and burros have been placed in private maintenance. A 1978 amendment to the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act provided authority to issue titles. Thus, the animals remain the property of the United States for the first year after adoption, after which time adopters who have provided proper care may apply for title to their animals. An individual may receive title to as many as four animals per year.

Q: What happens in those areas where excess horses or burros have been removed?

A: In those areas where wild horse and burro herds are to be managed, habitat condition and forage utilization will be monitored to ensure that levels of use remain consistent with management goals and that future needed adjustments can be identified.