

Wild Horse & Burro Report



U.S. Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management

January 1986

Wild Horse and Burro Management:

A Look Back at Fiscal Year 1985 . . . and A Look Ahead to Fiscal Year 1986

Fiscal Year 1985 was a year of challenges for the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) wild horse and burro program. Prompted by concerns over the effect of inadequate wild horse and burro population control on public land resources, Congress increased the program's funding three-fold to \$16.9 million and required the removal of more than 17,000 excess animals. In response, BLM outlined an ambitious program for the year. The results of our efforts are summarized below.

In December, Congress appropriated about the same amount, \$16.9 million, for wild horse and burro management in Fiscal Year 1986. Although detailed plans have not been completed, some tentative accomplishment targets are discussed in the following.

Wild Horse and Burro Management

As BLM comes closer to achieving appropriate management population levels on the public lands, increased attention is being focused on managing wild horse and burro herds as components of the multiple-use environment. As of September 30, 1985, a total of 257 wild horse and burro herd areas have been identified on BLM-administered lands. Decisions made during land use planning indicate whether wild horses and burros will be maintained in these areas, and if so, how many. At this point in time, plans have been completed for 204 herd areas. Under these plans, wild horses and burros will be managed on 151 herd areas and removed from 53 other herd areas. Land use planning is still in progress on the remaining 53 herd areas.

For those areas where wild horses and burros will be maintained, herd management area plans are developed to specify appropriate management actions. A total of 108 herd management area plans have been completed, and an additional 10 plans are scheduled for completion during Fiscal Year 1986.

Official wild horse and burro population estimates are compiled on a biennial basis. As census techniques improve, these estimates have become more and more accurate, although they will always remain as estimates rather than actual counts. The current estimates were compiled as of September 30, 1985.

Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro
Population Estimates as of September 30, 1985

<u>State</u>	<u>Horses</u>	<u>Burros</u>	<u>Totals</u>
Arizona	115	3,625	3,740
California	2,354	2,765	5,119
Colorado	414	0	414
Idaho	706	0	706
Montana	157	0	157
Nevada	29,853	1,202	31,055
New Mexico	70	14	84
Oregon	3,149	25	3,174
Utah	1,254	34	1,288
Wyoming	4,684	0	4,684
Totals	42,756	7,665	50,421

The estimated appropriate management level on BLM-administered lands is 25,000-30,000 wild free-roaming horses and burros.

Wild Horse and Burro Research

The Fiscal Year 1985 Interior appropriations act provided that \$1 million be spent on wild horse and burro research in cooperation with the National Academy of Sciences (NAS). The BLM entered into a \$150,000 contract with NAS in February 1985 to ensure its participation in the research effort, including preparation of a final report summarizing the findings of individual studies described below. In September, three contracts were awarded.

The University of Minnesota was awarded \$711,000 to study fertility control in wild horses. Objectives of the study are:

- (1) to develop and test a compound and carrier that would cause contraception in mares for a period of at least two breeding seasons from a single application; and
- (2) to test the effect on reproduction of sterilization of the dominant stallions in free-roaming bands within multi-band herds.

Another contract was awarded to the University of California at Davis in the amount of almost \$63,000 to conduct a study of wild horse parentage and population genetics. The objective of the study is to test probable paternity by the dominant band stallion and determine the extent of genetic diversity among horses in selected herds. The herds used will be those selected for fertility control research in the University of Minnesota study.

In the third contract, the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, was awarded almost \$9,000 to conduct blood analyses to evaluate the condition of wild horses. The objective of the study is to determine whether certain characteristics of blood chemistry are related to animal condition. Aspects of condition that will be evaluated are age at capture, sex, weight, reproductive status of mares, and size.

All studies should be completed and the NAS report filed by October 1988.

Removal of Excess Animals

As directed by Congress, BLM placed primary emphasis during Fiscal Year 1985 on the removal of excess wild horses and burros. Appropriate numbers of these animals to be maintained on the public lands are determined through BLM's land use planning process, which provides several opportunities for public involvement. Fiscal Year 1985 gatherings were planned primarily to implement these plans, although some animals were removed in response to court orders or requests to remove wild horses and burros from private lands. A few roundups were designed to keep herds within a manageable size until planning is completed, thus protecting public land resources from the deterioration associated with excessive use of the habitat.

During the fiscal year, which ended September 30, 1985, a total of 18,959 excess animals were gathered as indicated below:

<u>State</u>	<u>Horses</u>	<u>Burros</u>	<u>Totals</u>
Arizona	0	841	841
California	697	397	1,094
Colorado	174	0	174
Idaho	186	0	186
Montana	0	0	0
Nevada	10,118	322	10,440
New Mexico	29	0	29
Oregon	1,310	0	1,310
Utah	616	0	616
Wyoming	4,269	0	4,269
Totals	17,399	1,560	18,959

Under the continuing resolution that funded BLM for the first quarter of Fiscal Year 1986, monies available for the wild horse and burro program were used to feed and maintain captured animals. A very limited removal program existed, resulting in the capture of approximately 700 animals in Nevada as required by court order, and 28 animals in Montana.

Under the increased funding level included in Interior's appropriations act, removals will again become a priority. During Fiscal Year 1986, BLM plans to remove approximately 12,300 excess wild horses and burros, as follows:

<u>State</u>	<u>Animals</u>
Arizona	550
California	550
Colorado	0
Idaho	90
Montana	28
Nevada	8,270
New Mexico	0
Oregon	800
Utah	180
Wyoming	1,850
Total	12,318

Disposition of Excess Animals

The Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971 (Public Law 92-195, as amended) provides BLM with three options to dispose of excess animals: (1) old, sick, or lame animals are to be destroyed as a humane measure; (2) healthy animals are to be offered for private maintenance by qualified individuals; and (3) excess animals for which private care cannot be found are to be humanely destroyed. BLM's Director placed a moratorium on the destruction of healthy animals in January 1982, and it remains in effect today. Traditionally, about 7 percent of the animals captured are destroyed as a humane measure because of age, illness, or injury from which they cannot reasonably be expected to recover.

During Fiscal Year 1985, BLM found private homes for 9,554 excess wild horses and burros--an increase of more than 70 percent over the previous year's adoptions. Animals adopted, as reported by BLM State offices, are:

<u>State</u>	<u>Horses</u>	<u>Burros</u>	<u>Totals</u>
Arizona	114	61	175
California	987	96	1,083
Colorado	167	1	168
Eastern States	2,305	808	3,113
Idaho	117	0	117
Montana	810	2	812
Nevada	376	26	402
New Mexico	1,535	438	1,973
Oregon	170	27	197
Utah	156	0	156
Wyoming	1,354	4	1,358
Totals	8,091	1,463	9,554

Fourteen permanent and seasonal adoption centers operated across the Nation, some under BLM administration and others under contract. In addition, 60 temporary "satellite" centers were opened, generally for 2 to 4 days in areas some distance from permanent centers. A large portion of the adoptions accomplished by BLM's Eastern States and New Mexico State Offices resulted from satellite centers.

The adoption of healthy excess animals will remain a priority during Fiscal Year 1986. In addition to the BLM and contracted adoption centers, more than 40 satellite centers already have been planned. A list of tentative locations and dates is attached. Targeted adoptions by State Offices are:

<u>State</u>	<u>Animals</u>
Arizona	200
California	1,000
Colorado	140
Eastern States	3,200
Idaho	0
Montana	600
Nevada	200
New Mexico	2,200
Oregon	230
Utah	180
Wyoming	1,400
Total	9,350

Compliance and Enforcement Activities

During Fiscal Year 1985, BLM visited 587 adopters to check on their animals and facilities in which they are maintained. Most of these were in reaction to complaints received by the Bureau. A total of 74 wild horses were repossessed as a result of these inspections.

A Menoken, North Dakota, man recently was sentenced to 100 hours of public service work after pleading guilty to maliciously killing a wild horse. The man also was placed on probation for one year and fined \$25. After an unsuccessful attempt to rope his mare, the adopter shot the horse repeatedly. A colt that was adopted along with the mare has been reassigned to another individual in North Dakota, and the court is considering whether charges will be filed against two other men involved in the case.

In Texas, 33 wild horses that were part of a December 1984 group adoption recently have been repossessed by BLM after local humane officials discovered the carcasses of 13 of the animals. Although the exact cause of death has not been determined yet, the two attending veterinarians indicate parasites and malnutrition as the probable causes. A Cook County, Texas, Justice of the Peace has ordered that the adopter stand trial on a cruelty to animals charge.

Maintenance of Captured Animals

At the beginning of Fiscal Year 1985, approximately 2,500 animals were being maintained in adoption centers nationwide. With the sizeable increase in the number of animals to be gathered during the year, BLM recognized that its existing facilities were inadequate to maintain captured animals. To overcome the problem, four contracts for the maintenance of excess animals were awarded to individuals in Nevada, Nebraska, and Texas. Three of the facilities opened in May and June, with the fourth contract being terminated for default.

On September 30, approximately 8,000 excess animals--the maximum capacity--were being maintained in the contracted holding facilities, with an additional 1,500 in the adoption centers. Feed, veterinary, and handling costs average about \$2.20 a day for each animal being held.

Under a contract option allowing extension of the holding facility contracts, BLM has maintained the three holding facilities for Fiscal Year 1986. Since few animals have been removed during the first three months of the fiscal year, the number of animals being maintained has decreased slightly. As removals reach a peak next summer, it may be necessary to find additional holding facilities for excess animals.

TENTATIVELY SCHEDULED SATELLITE ADOPTION CENTERS
Fiscal Year 1986

<u>Location</u>	<u>State Office</u>	<u>Date</u>
Tucson, AZ	Arizona	November 1985
Lakeside, California Victorville, California To be determined	California	October 1985 November 1985 January-September, 1986
Monroe, North Carolina Social Circle, Georgia Tampa, Florida Gainesville, Florida Louisiana Missouri Massachusetts Western Pennsylvania Rio Grande, Ohio (All-American Wild Horse and Burro Expo) Arkansas Michigan Illinois Lewisberry, Pennsylvania (Wild Horse and Burro Days)	Eastern States	October 1985 December 1985 January 1986 February 1986 March 1986 April 1986 May 1986 June 1986 July 1986 August 1986 August 1986 September 1986 September 1986
Houston, Texas San Antonio, Texas Laredo, Texas Abilene, Texas Nacogdoches, Texas Victoria, Texas San Angelo, Texas Oklahoma San Antonio, Texas Oklahoma Kansas	New Mexico	November 1985 December 1985 January 1986 January 1986 February 1986 February 1986 March 1986 March 1986 April 1986 April 1986 May 1986
Yakima, Washington Spokane, Washington Spokane, Washington Spokane, Washington	Oregon	November 1985 April 1986 August 1986 September 1986

For more information on the wild horse and burro program, contact your local BLM office or call 202/343-5717.

