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WILD HORSE AND BURRO EVALUATION

JANUARY 29, 1997

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The management of wild horses and burros presents the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) with unique and complex challenges. The Wild, Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act (1971) mandated that the BLM provide for both the health and welfare of the animals and the protection and care of the public rangelands on which they live. The BLM's responsibilities for the animals' habitat, called herd management areas, are similar to the management responsibilities for rangelands used for domestic animal grazing, wildlife habitat, and riparian area management. In fact all of these programs must be managed holistically to achieve the BLM's goal of maintaining the health of the land. On the other hand, for horses and burros, BLM's health and welfare responsibilities extend beyond traditional geographic and organizational boundaries. For example, animals that cannot be sustained on the public rangelands are removed and adopted on a nationwide basis, often in areas far removed from the animals' original habitat. Thus the Wild Horse and Burro program tends to require more extensive National coordination and planning than other programs with more defined geographic boundaries.

In the winter of 1995, a severe drought affected a wide area of Nevada, Utah and Arizona, and reduced the amount of forage and water available to wild horses and burros. In addition, large animal populations increased the stress to both the horses and their habitat. The BLM conducted emergency gathers in southern Nevada where conditions were the most severe. This action reduced stress to the horses and the range and averted large losses to horse populations.

Concerns regarding the health of the wild horses and burros and their habitat, expressed by interest groups, the public and BLM employees prompted the Director to convene an Emergency Evaluation Team of Federal and State representatives, and advisors. The Team was asked to: 1. Provide recommendations for actions in response to the immediate emergency situation; and 2. To take a long-term look at the Wild Horse and Burro program and its operation. This team met August 20-22 and September 9-13, 1996. The membership of the Team and advisors are included as Appendix 1.

The Team met first in Reno, Nevada, August 20-22, 1996. This meeting was devoted primarily to discussing the immediate emergency situation in Nevada. Data was gathered from the BLM Nevada State Director and State Office Staff; BLM field managers and staffs from Ely, Battle Mountain and Tonopah; the State of Nevada, Wild Horse and Burro Commission's biologist; the State of Nevada, Division of Wildlife's warden for Clark County;

and members of the BLM's National WH&B program staff. The report from this meeting is included as Appendix 2.

A second meeting of the Team was held in Las Vegas, Nevada, September 9-13, 1996. Information was gathered from the National staff of the WH&B program and other Nevada BLM managers and staff. In addition, a representative of Nellis Air Force Base, where some wild horses that were affected by drought live, briefed the Team on the mission and programs of the air base. A field trip was taken during this meeting to provide on-the-ground observations of conditions of horses and their habitat.

Based on the Team's work, this report contains findings and recommendations to the Director. Briefly they include:

- i Updating the BLM's 1992 *Strategic Plan for Management of Wild Horses and Burros on Public Lands*, including a review of the BLM's selective removal policy;
- i Changing the reporting relationship for the WH&B National Program Office; and
- i Reestablishing a National WH&B Advisory Board.

The Office of the Inspector General (IG) is currently conducting an audit of expenditures in the WH&B program. By agreement with the IG, the Team did not address areas being reviewed by the IG, but the IG report is included as Appendix 3.

The Team would like to thank all the BLM managers and employees, and interest groups who participated in the interviews, briefings, and field trips. Their cooperation and willingness to discuss their concerns with the Team is greatly appreciated.

HISTORY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. WILD HORSE AND BURRO STRATEGIC PLAN

History:

Management of wild horses and burros reached a low point in 1992 when populations on the public lands reached nearly 55,000. This, coupled with prolonged drought conditions in parts of the West, resulted in numerous animals dying from starvation and dehydration. In addition, approximately 10,000 WH&Bs were maintained in temporary holding facilities, sanctuaries and prison training programs at a cost to taxpayers of more than \$3 million per year. As a result, the majority of the WH&B program appropriations were being spent on the placement and long-term care of animals rather than on habitat management or the maintenance of viable herds on the public rangelands.

In 1992, the BLM developed the *Strategic Plan for Management of Wild Horses and Burros on Public Lands* to reduce expenditures on the placement and long-term care of WH&Bs and to redirect program emphasis towards on-the-ground management.

Findings:

The Team found the 1992 Strategic Plan effective in meeting some objectives, but in need of revision. Some of the areas identified are:

i The plan focused on the selective removal of young horses, which are more adoptable than older animals, rather than on the rangeland management of the habitat and the adaptability of the animals. In some instances, this has resulted in skewed age and sex ratios in some herds, which if continued in the long-term, could harm the viability of a herd.

ii The Strategic Plan's focus on selective removal and animal numbers has resulted in limited resources being left for habitat management and health of the land -- the cornerstone of sustainable resource management.

i Funding assumptions in the plan were too optimistic, resulting in the BLM's inability to gather and adopt enough horses to reach appropriate management levels as planned and place appropriate emphasis on maintaining the health of the land.

Therefore, some of the goals and objectives of the 1992 Strategic Plan have not been achieved.

Recommendations:

The Team recommends the 1992 Strategic Plan be reviewed and updated every 4-5 years. Furthermore, the Team recommends that in updating the Strategic Plan:

i Findings and recommendations in this evaluation should be included, and as appropriate, Resource Advisory Councils should be consulted in the reevaluation of the Strategic Plan. In addition, the WH&B Advisory Board, if chartered (see section on WH&B Advisory Board), should also be included in the reevaluation of the Strategic Plan.

ii Provide an annual status report for the Director on all goals and objectives for each herd management area so BLM can better track its progress toward meeting program objectives and plan future strategies and actions.

iii Consider increasing adoption fees to recover increased costs resulting from implementing the Selective Removal policy recommendations contained in this report (see section on Selective Removal Policy).

iv Complete BLM-sponsored fertility control studies to determine which studies should be further researched or implemented and which should be concluded.

2. ORGANIZATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

History:

The WH&B staff was moved to the Nevada State Office on August 14, 1992, as part of the Director's downsizing initiative. Under the supervision of the Nevada State Director, the WH&B National Program Office (NPO) was established. The Division of WH&B Management at the Headquarters office (Washington, D.C.) was abolished. One advisor, attached to the Assistant Director, Land and Renewable Resources (AD, LRR), remained in the Headquarters Office. The AD, LRR retained all authority for approving National level policy, budget allocations among BLM offices and annual work plan directives.

Since 1992, there have been two reorganizations at the Headquarters office. The WH&B program was transferred to the Assistant Director, Resource Use and Protection, in fiscal year 1995 during the first reorganization, and was transferred again in fiscal year 1997 to the Assistant Director, Renewable Resources and Planning, (AD, RRP) as a result of a second reorganization. The authority for the WH&B program now resides with the AD, RRP.

Findings:

As a result of the organizational changes in the wild horse and burro program, coordination among state offices improved, especially in the scheduling and coordination of animal gathers and adoptions. However, also as a result, there has been a lack of effective communication between the National Program Office (NPO) and the Assistant Directors assigned responsibility for the WH&B program. Policy, program guidance, and overall program direction are being made at the NPO without Bureauwide communication or coordination. Decisions and direction for the WH&B activities are being made separate from other National program activities such as rangeland management, wildlife habitat, riparian considerations and other health of the land activities.

With the placement of the NPO into the Nevada State organization, operational duties of the Nevada wild horse and burro program and the National program duties have been combined. As a result, both organizations lost part of their previous identity and effectiveness. The NPO office lead is now responsible for the overall National policy duties of the NPO and daily operations of the BLM Nevada WH&B program.

The Team found this combination to be more than one position/office can handle effectively. This organizational change created a "responsibility overload" in trying to balance the allocation of resources between the National programmatic needs and the operational needs of the Nevada State Office.

Collectively, the Team found the above findings contributed to an atmosphere of mistrust between the public and the BLM, and a lower level of confidence in the BLM's ability to manage the WH&B program, especially in Nevada.

Recommendations:

The Team recommends:

- i The NPO be placed organizationally under the direction of the AD, RRP, to ensure National coordination among all resource programs. The NPO would continue to be located physically in Nevada.
- i The NPO establish a liaison position in the WO to coordinate communications with all BLM customers including all State Offices, National advocacy groups, Congress, the Administration, Advisory Board (if chartered), and others.

ï The BLM Nevada WH&B program be separated organizationally from the National program.

3. MANAGEMENT OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Findings:

Combining the NPO and the Nevada State Office WH&B program into one office has resulted in a loss of effectiveness at both the National and State levels. It has led to several offices interpreting and implementing policies and activities inconsistently. The result is an atmosphere of mistrust among the livestock permittees, the wild horse advocacy groups and the BLM. The level of public trust and confidence in the WH&B program appears to be about the same as before the drought and may be slightly lower in Nevada. Nationally, the number of people who have had positive experiences with the WH&B adoption program appears to be increasing.

Well over one half of the horses and 10 percent of the burros on public lands are found in Nevada. Therefore, the public perception of the entire WH&B program is highly affected by the Nevada program.

Other findings include:

- i Compliance with policy and procedures has not been consistent throughout the BLM.
- ii Recurrent and unresolved allegations of questionable activities on the part of BLM employees, contractors, and other public land users have eroded the public's trust and confidence in BLM's management of the WH&B program.
- iii BLM's response to alleged improprieties has not always been timely, open or conclusive.

Recommendations:

The Team recommends:

- i The NPO be placed organizationally under the direction of the AD, RRP and be responsible for maintaining viable National policies and processes for the WH&B program (see Organizational Considerations).
- ii The BLM Nevada State Office re-establish the WH&B lead position and be responsible for Nevada's WH&B program activities.
- iii The NPO review all practices, regulations, policies and handbooks currently in existence for consistency and eliminate conflicting guidance. Issue or re-issue updated guidance as needed.
- iv All BLM offices with WH&B activities should insure that their program management is consistent with the revised guidance per the above recommendation.

4. WILD HORSE AND BURRO ADVISORY BOARD

History:

The WH&B Advisory Board (Board) is provided for in Section 7 of the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act. Since passage of the Act, the BLM and Forest Service have employed the Board periodically to provide recommendations when major program adjustments were needed. The Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture chartered the first Board in 1986 to provide advice on possible solutions to problems in administering the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act. These problems included the need to establish and achieve appropriate population levels for wild horse and burro herds on public lands. A second Board was chartered in 1990 for a two-year term.

Findings:

The Team found wide differences of opinions among the horse advocacy groups, ranchers, and past Board members as to the BLM's ability to fully utilize their advice and counsel without a Federal Advisory and Committee Act (FACA) charter, as would be provided with the appointment of a National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board. The Team conducting this review was restricted to only Federal and State employees to comply with FACA rules.

The Team found a high level of satisfaction among all those interviewed with the past use of the advisory boards, which provided a forum where issues could be raised and discussed. Some of the concerns surfaced during the interviews were:

- i The BLM lost a sounding board when the Board was discontinued and the management of the WH&B program has suffered.
- i Lack of full representation by diverse interest groups prevents the BLM from building consensus for resolution of issues.
- i BLM's recent experience with the Resource Advisory Councils (chartered under FACA) provides further evidence of the value of public interest represented through advisory councils.
- i Providing a public forum allows for meaningful dialogue to occur which builds trust and confidence between the public and the BLM.

Recommendations:

The Team recommends:

- ï A new WH&B Advisory Board be chartered by the Secretary to advise the BLM Director on WH&B issues. The Board should be rechartered on an on-going basis.
- ï The NPO's WO liaison position be given responsibility for coordinating and communicating with the National WH&B Advisory Board (see Organizational Considerations).

5. HERD MANAGEMENT AREA DESIGNATIONS

History:

Herd areas (HAs) were identified soon after passage of the Act by the BLM to recognize the approximate location of horses eligible for protection and management under the Act. These designations were based on the best available information at the time. HMAs are areas identified by BLM in the land use planning process for the long-term management of wild horses and burros. This process includes public input and review. Basically, HAs identify where the horses were in the early 1970's while HMAs reflect where the horses are located and managed today.

Findings:

Experience and knowledge have grown since passage of the Act. More is known and understood regarding the habitat, behavioral and social needs of wild, free roaming horse and burro herds on the public lands.

The current practice of maintaining a one-to-one relationship between HAs and HMAs is not necessary. Adherence to this practice for other than biological reasons may be unsound and may further complicate and interfere with effective on-the-ground management of the wild horse and burros and their habitat. There are examples of several small HMAs being managed separately, where experience and knowledge clearly shows that bands of horses roam freely among adjacent HMA's.

Retention of a one-to-one relationship can further cloud the fundamental need to review HMAs to determine their suitability to maintain the horse population levels that were determined to be present in 1971 on a continuous basis. The horse population levels present in 1971 may have been representative of temporary conditions and not a continuous "thriving ecological balance" as required by the Act.

The Team found portions of some HAs and HMAs that are administered by two different BLM field offices. This has sometimes resulted in poor coordination, timing, population counts, monitoring, and gathers.

Recommendations:

The Team recommends:

- i The BLM refine its definition of HMAs using current knowledge, data and the Land Use Planning (LUP) process. Where appropriate, combine multiple HMAs to recognize an entire herd.
- i Where multiple jurisdictions exist over a single herd, BLM officials should designate only one field office the responsible for management of a herd.

6. APPROPRIATE MANAGEMENT LEVELS

History:

Appropriate Management Levels (AMLs) of wild horses and burros on the range are the optimum number of animals that ensure a thriving natural ecological balance. The process of establishing AMLs has become a focal point among competing interests for their share of the forage base. Current practices have evolved during the past 25 years since the Act was enacted. Following is a brief timeline:

- 1971-80 Identification of Herd Areas and the historic population levels as required by the Act.
- 1980-88 Land Use Planning processes and decisions establishing Herd Management Areas and Appropriate Management Levels.
- 1989 The Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA) ruled that numbers could not be set solely through the LUP process but had to be based on monitoring.
- 1990- The determination and implementation of "monitoring based" AMLs, utilizing the full range of established monitoring techniques, multiple use decisions, environmental analysis, etc.

Findings:

The Team found:

- ï Disagreement among BLM jurisdictions as to whether AMLs should be defined and expressed as a single number (i.e., 100) or as a range (i.e., 95-105).
- ï Where AMLs have been established, conflicting policies and events prevented some offices from achieving their AMLs in herds (i.e., budget restrictions, selective removal policies, etc.).
- ï Some HMAs are without established AMLs.
- ï Perceived divergence among BLM offices in their interpretation of the 1989 IBLA ruling has created an apparent adversarial atmosphere surrounding the process.
- ï Adversarial atmospheres and relationships among the BLM, livestock groups and horse advocacy groups exist due to prolonged uncertainty surrounding the recurrent examination of the basic land use allocation. Regardless how AMLs are defined, most groups want an AML set.

Recommendations:

The Team recommends:

- ï As AMLs are revisited on a case by case basis, they should be defined for HMAs as a single number with an acceptable range. The breadth of this range should consider the need to reach a thriving ecological balance, the biological/social needs of the herds, economics, cycles of gathering, genetic diversity, and the population at which resource deterioration would be expected to begin.

ï Establish AMLs using the best available data (including monitoring data as required by the 1989 IBLA decision) and include them in the LUP process as Land Use Allocations. Full disclosure and public participation through the NEPA process should be part of the decision process. Establishing AMLs communicates a commitment by BLM to manage viable populations of wild, free-roaming horses and burros on the public lands within defined population levels.

ï Increased emphasis be given to the completion of all related environmental evaluations and analyses to enable the BLM to establish AMLs in areas where horses exist and share range resources with other users.

7. SELECTIVE REMOVAL POLICY

Findings:

The BLM's selective removal policy provides field office guidance for identifying wild horses that may be removed from public lands for adoption. Within HMAs, only "adoptable" horses 5 years of age and younger may be removed. For horses outside of a HMA and on public lands, adoptable horses 9 years of age and younger may be removed for adoption. The remaining horses are returned to the HMA.

Selective removal, as broadly defined, has increased the overall effectiveness and improved the public's perception of the BLM's WH&B adoption program. BLM has been successfully moving towards or achieving AMLs on many HMAs. As a result, horses have been gathered and placed successfully, feedlots have been eliminated, and the number of horses in sanctuaries have been substantially reduced.

However, selective removal as interpreted and applied to some HMAs has had negative effects and has failed to contribute towards achieving a "thriving ecological balance." In areas where BLM started with the number of horses far exceeding carrying capacity, application of selective removal has resulted in horse populations with age, sex, and social structures that may threaten their viability. In some instances, selective removal has prevented BLM from removing enough horses to achieve and maintain AMLs.

Recommendations:

The Team recommends:

- i Selective removal should remain as the fundamental guidance when removing horses. Where AMLs cannot be achieved using selective removal without recurring negative effects, interim removal criteria for the HMA needs to be developed to ensure viable populations on healthy, sustainable habitats. The interim criteria may result in removal of fewer adoptable horses in some HMAs to achieve AMLs. When it is necessary to remove horses for which adoption demand has not been identified, special supplemental handling to enhance their adoptability will be necessary. Supplemental handling may require additional time to allow horses to attain good health, special handling of older horses, and extra marketing for these horses.
- i On areas such as the Nevada Horse Range where sex ratios and age structures have been significantly altered by selective removals, the responsible wild horse specialist must very closely monitor the herd to make sure enough young horses are returned to the range after gather operations to ensure viability of the herd. The number of young horses to return should be determined through careful analysis using all available data, and the wild horse population model.
- i As the Strategic Plan is updated, the selective removal policy should be reviewed.
- i When selective removal is not effective in achieving herd objectives, interim criteria should be developed and employed for each herd until AMLs can be achieved.
- i The NPO should establish guidelines for developing interim removal criteria.
- i When developing interim removal criteria, BLM's population model should be utilized and incorporate all available data for the herd(s) in question. BLM's population model is a computer based management tool which allows wild horse and burro specialists

to forecast herd population trends given a set of parameters. Specialists using the program can also run scenarios to predict what might happen to a herd population should changes occur in one or more of the variables.

8. ADOPTIONS

Findings:

The adoption part of the WH&B program has served the horses, the public and the BLM exceptionally well in the last few years. Development of the Strategic Plan contributed to this success by providing direction and focus to the WH&B program.

By removing only younger horses from the range, the demand for adopting these animals has been raised considerably, and in general, BLM offices with adoption activities have been able to administer adoption activities effectively. However, there is inconsistency in the priority given to compliance among BLM offices. Also, the Team heard that there is inconsistency in adoption requirements and procedures at different adoption sites causing confusion among adopters. Information from WH&B customer focus groups reflected similar concerns.

Achieving AMLs on the public rangelands should increase the demand for adoptable horses (and perhaps broaden "what is adoptable") by reducing the available supply. This action should enable BLM to institute better adoption standards and practices as time goes on.

While adoption has worked well, there is concern among people in the program and some interest groups that horses are being managed for their "adoptability" more than for their "adaptability" to be wild and free roaming. The ability to adopt animals needs to be balanced with factors related to the health of the land and the adaptability of the animals as herd management and removal decisions are made.

Recommendations:

As the Strategic Plan is updated, the Team recommends consideration be given to:

- i Articulating the BLM's mission and goals, and how the WH&B program contributes to BLM's overall success, particularly the WH&B program goals relating to selective removal and adoption policies.
- i Using AMLs, not adoption goals, to guide management actions in the WH&B program.
- i Reviewing those parts of the WH&B program that are functioning well and enhance those activities. For instance, in the adoption program, explore ways to increase the number of adopters through enhanced marketing, such as tele-marketing and video-marketing.

i Reviewing the BLM's WH&B customer survey data and utilize this input to enhance the WH&B program.

9. NEVADA WILD HORSE RANGE

History:

Nevada's only designated wild horse range is within the Nellis Air Force Base. Established in 1962, the Nevada Wild Horse Range (Range) covers 394,000 acres out of the 2,209,326 acre Air Force Base. While the majority of the wild horses occupy lands outside of the Range, BLM's agreements with the Air Force only allow for managing horses within the Range. This is because National Security issues restrict BLM's access to many areas.

In 1990-91, BLM conducted an environmental assessment of the Nevada Wild Horse Range for wild horse suitability using water, distribution of animals and forage utilization as criteria. Based upon this assessment and an agreement with the Air Force, the appropriate management level for the Range was determined to be 1,000 horses. At the time of the assessment there were approximately 5,000 horses on the Range.

Beginning in 1985, and continuing through 1994, the BLM gathered 10,431 animals from the Air Force Base in an attempt to reduce the herds within the horse range to a level which can be sustained in the long-term with available forage and water. These gathers have decreased the herd population, but not to the point where the habitat can recover from severe impacts or where the herd is sustained in a thriving, natural ecological balance.

Findings:

BLM has faced many restraints on the Range that have complicated and limited program effectiveness. Operational priorities of the Air Force have limited access to areas where gathers should occur. There are still more horses on the Range than the range can sustain. By 1996 it was clearly predictable that horses on the range were in severe jeopardy.

Previous gathers manipulated the age structure to create a population with an approximate age of 14 years old, excluding the foal crop. These gathers disrupted normal age band structures for herd interaction, causing additional stress to already critically stressed animals. Also, there are some concerns regarding the sex ratios of the herd.

The Team also found:

i Management of all surface resources is the responsibility of the BLM per the "5 Party Agreement," currently being renegotiated to include non-military uses. The 5 Party Agreement is an interagency agreement among the Department of the Interior, Fish and Wild Service; Department of Energy (DOE), Department of Defense (DOD), Air Force; State of Nevada, Department of Wildlife; and the BLM.

ii BLM's management of resources is compromised by the DOD and DOE missions. Due to national security issues, BLM cannot reasonably manage horses that migrate beyond the "designated areas." All high security classified areas are, in effect, off limits to BLM personnel while military training exercises are being conducted. During the course of this study, emergency gathers were postponed twice due to military training operations.

iii Although there has been a considerable reduction in the number of wild horses on the Range, the number of horses remaining still exceeds the capacity of the range.

Recommendations:

The Team recommends:

- i The team recommends the BLM not be the responsible agency for managing the horses on the Nevada Wild Horse Range and other areas on Nellis AFB.
- i If the BLM is to remain the agency to manage horses and other surface resources on Nellis, the 5 party agreement must be revised to clearly define agency roles among the DOD (Air Force), DOE and BLM as they relate to management of horses and their habitat.
- i Develop a Memorandum of Agreement among the DOD, DOE and DOI at the department level that defines the participation of each department in the management of resources on Nellis and identifies the funding contribution each department will make toward the management of WH&B and their habitat.
- i Use the NEPA process to evaluate the feasibility of continuing management of horses on the Nellis Wild Horse Use Area. Through the NEPA process, pose and answer the following questions:
 - a) Should horses remain on Nellis?
 - b) If so, how many?
 - c) What should be done with horses in restricted areas which serve as a reservoir of surplus horses to the area that can be effectively managed?
- i BLM should take an active role in the on-going DOD/DOE environmental impact statement for implementing water development with DOD and determining BLM access to restricted areas.
- i The appropriate Resource Advisory Council(s) should be enlisted to provide a broad forum for public input into the fundamental decisions regarding the long term future of WH&B management on the Nellis complex.

SUMMARY

The WH&B program provides the BLM with a unique opportunity to demonstrate to other land users and to the public-at-large how to be a good steward of public resources and a good partner in a multiple-use setting. The BLM has not fully capitalized on this opportunity. To be sure, many things have been done well and the BLM continues to learn and improve its management of this complex program. There remains a definite opportunity to reap a good return on the investment of additional attention and resources. That return would be measured in increased public trust and confidence and in visible improvements to the health of the land.

The recent emergencies have drawn attention to the need to change program emphasis from individual animal and adoption related issues to the underlying habitat and herd health issues that are inherent in the Act.

The recommendations contained in the report represent a balanced, reasoned approach to that end.

APPENDIX 1

The Wild Horse and Burro Emergency Evaluation Team members and advisors.

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Advisors to the Team include:

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APPENDIX 2

Following is a briefing document prepared for the BLM Director as a result of the WH&B Emergency Evaluation Team meeting held between August 20-22, 1996.

SUBJECT: Wild Horses and Burros - Emergency Situation

ISSUE SUMMARY:

Wild horses and burros are under tremendous stress as a result of a prolonged drought affecting the southern Nevada. Emergency actions (i.e. gathers) were initiated in June, 1996, in areas most affected by the drought, to provide relief to herds under the most stress and whose health was in jeopardy.

In recognition of this critical situation, the Director convened an evaluation team of state and Federal representatives to 1) provide recommendations for actions in response to the immediate emergency situation, and 2) to take a long term look at the Wild Horse and Burro program and its implementation. This team met August 20-22, and their recommendations follow.

Recommendations:

BLM's first concern is with the humane treatment of the horses affected. The team has identified these emergency actions for immediate implementation:

1. Commit resources for emergency procedures to the extent necessary to address the current emergency.

IMPLICATION: BLM will likely need to commit \$1 to \$2 million over the next 120 days in order to gather, transport, process and maintain up to 4,000 wild horses and burros that were not previously scheduled for removal from the range.

2. In Southern Nevada deteriorated rangeland conditions will necessitate near complete removal of horses in some HMAs. The determination that an emergency exists in an HMA by the authorized officer should suspend the application of the Selective Removal policy to horses removed from that area. If complete removal is required, horses should not be returned to the range unless it is determined and appropriately documented that there is adequate forage and water to support them.

IMPLICATION: The Director will need to waive the Selective Removal policy, which may be controversial among some horse advocates.

3. Conduct immediate reanalysis of animal and rangeland conditions where horses were turned back out in the last 30 days to determine if further removals are necessary.

IMPLICATION: BLM may need to repeat gathers on some HMA's and Nellis Air Force base. The latter will need to be coordinated with DOD, and will require financial support as well.

4. Plan for the disposition and/or maintenance of up to 4000 unplanned horses within next 120 days.

- ï Expand satellite adoptions.
- ï Explore private partnerships.
- ï Conduct legal analysis of all other options.

IMPLICATIONS: This will require contracting for additional holding facilities.

5. Provide intensive publicity of the emergency situation, process and actions taken to care for the horses.

SEE ATTACHED COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

6. Continue the ongoing evaluation of the Wild Horse and Burro program with a completion date of October 1, 1996.

IMPLICATION: Team will need to meet one to two more times in order to develop the review as requested.

7. Define the line of communication between Washington Office, State Office and Field Offices to implement emergency recommendations. Nevada State Director should establish a single point of coordination in Nevada for emergency rangeland evaluations, and subsequent emergency gathers. Director should consider establishing a single point of contact at the Headquarters level for emergency program implementation.

BACKGROUND:

Drought conditions are affecting the southern one-half of Nevada, including Clark, Lincoln, Nye, and Esmeralda counties. Since the Fall of 1995, very little rain has fallen in this region. Total rainfall for the year (measured in the Las Vegas area) is 1.7 inches, of which is 40% of normal. Normal rainfall is 4.2 inches. Other areas have been hit equally as hard. Lincoln County is 50% (est.) of normal, while Esmeralda and northern Nye Counties range from zero measurable rainfall to 1.8 inches. During the summer months, participation has been in the form of thunderstorms and any measurable rain has evaporated quickly in the desert heat. Temperatures have averaged above normal for the past three months, reaching highs of 120 degrees in southern Nye County.

Above average precipitation in 1995 produced abundant forage and water sources for wild horses and burros, wildlife and domestic livestock. The abundance of forage and water left all animals (wild and domestic) in excellent health after the winter months. The abundance of forage, unused by the animals throughout the winter of 1995, has carried the animals through to this time. However, water remains scarce as springs and reservoirs are depleted. Forage is mostly depleted and the vegetation that remains is dry and of little nutritional value. Animals are concentrating around available water sources creating stress to themselves and the surrounding rangelands.

Emergency gathers were initiated in June, 1996 and remain in progress. The emergency gathers were begun in the southern part of Nevada around Las Vegas, where the conditions were the most severe and animal health was deteriorating rapidly. Priority for gathers' has been based on meeting the greatest need first. This has resulted in some herds deteriorating as they await removal operations. The gathering is performed by two BLM contractors working simultaneously. Attachment 1 contains data on the number of horses gathered, and the number of horses being gathered or scheduled for gathering.

POSITION OF MAJOR CONSTITUENTS:

BLM has met with several interest groups concerned with the plight of the wild horses and burros. Three representatives of these groups assisted BLM with information in developing the actions identified above. Other interested parties will be consulted as the review team progresses with the review.

Table 1: Number of Gathered Animals by Herd Management Areas. They are shown in order of gather:

<u>HMA</u>	<u>NUMBER REMOVED</u>	<u>NUMBER REMAINING</u>
Red Rock	194	100
Johnnie	121	90
Muddy Mountain	11	75
Rock Creek	200	464

Emergency Plan for the Wild Horse and Burro Program in Southern Nevada

Communications Plan

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1. Provide briefings, news releases, information letters, and personal contacts with the media and representatives of special interest groups to keep concerned individuals aware of the situation in southern Nevada and appeal to potential adopters who could provide these animals with good homes.
2. Provide personal briefings for the Nevada Congressional delegation and authorizing Committee staff, if necessary, to inform them of action plans and of the progress being made to mitigate the impacts of this drought situation.
3. Provide personal briefings for the Department budget staff and the House and Senate Appropriations Committees to inform them about the reprogramming of funds to meet the needs of this emergency.
4. Establish and maintain lines of communications within BLM to ensure the field, State Office and Washington Office levels of the organization are aware of the drought conditions in southern Nevada, the plans of action to mitigate the effects of the drought, and the potential impacts it could have on other parts of the wild horse and burro program.

Nevada Wild Horse Range (Nellis)	517	1350
Stonewall Mountain	20	0
Gold Mountain	24	0
Silver Peak	49	78
Goldfield	319	0
Total to Date	1455	

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Table 2: Current and Scheduled Gathering Operations by Herd Management Areas:

<u>HMA</u> s	<u>NUMBER REMOVED</u>	<u>PROPOSED TO LEAVE</u>
Montezuma Peak	50	49
Bullfrog	300	25
Caliente HMA	590	360

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White River	275	77
Dry Lake	200	80
Seaman	250	136
Total	1665	

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Action Plan

<u>Task</u>	<u>Responsible Party</u>	<u>Due Date</u>
1. Press Release Announcing Formation of Emergency Team	Washington Office External Affairs/Wyoming Public Affairs	8/12/96
2. Next Step: Press Release on Adopted Recommendations from the Emergency Team	Washington Office External Affairs/Team Info Officer	8/30/96
3. Send Adopted Emergency Recommendations to each AD and State Director	Washington Office External Affairs/Team Info Officer	8/30/96
4. Brief Identified Wild Horse and Burro Interest Groups about Team Recommendations	Team Leader/Info Officer	8/30/96
5. Article about the Nevada Drought and Emergency Gathers for <u>Wild Horse and Burro News</u>	Team Info Officer/Nevada Public Affairs Officer	9/1/96
6. Brief Nevada Elected Officials on Emergency Team Recommendations	Washington Office External Affairs/Team Leader	Early September
7. Brief Department Budget Staff and Senate and House Appropriations Staff on Reprogramming to Meet Nevada Emergency	Washington Office External Affairs/Team Leader	Early September
8. Prepare Special Generic Press Package to Aid with Increased Temporary Site Adoptions Held to Place Animals Gathered in the Emergency Round-ups - Press Release - Public Service Announcements - Video Clips - Flyers - Letters to Past and Potential Adopters	Info Officer	Mid-September

APPENDIX 3

This space reserved for IG Report. The IG report was not available prior to release of this evaluation.