

625-85



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

IN REPLY 4700
REFER TO: (NV-053)

Las Vegas District Office
P.O. Box 26569
Las Vegas, Nevada 89126

JUN 25 1985

Wild Horse Organized Assistance
P.O. Box 555
Reno, NV 89504

Dear Sirs:

Enclosed for your review and comment are amendments to the Ash Meadows Gathering Plan and Environmental Assessment. Both documents have previously been approved, but have been recently amended to incorporate updated information concerning the number of animals to be removed and removal methods (i.e., helicopters will be used). Public hearings concerning the Ash Meadows removal were held on May 29, 1979, and May 7, 1985. An amended 28-day notice was sent to you on June 14, 1985 (amending the notice dated May 31, 1985).

If I do not hear from you within thirty days of the date of this letter, I will assume you have no comment on these amendments to the plan and E.A.

Thank you very much for your continuing cooperation and assistance in regard to our wild horse and burro program efforts in Nevada.

Sincerely yours,

William C. Calkins
Acting District Manager

Enclosures (2)
1 - Gather Plan and Amendment
2 - EA and Amendment

AMENDMENT

Ash Meadows Wild Horse Gathering Plan

This plan is amended to reflect the number of horses to be removed from the Ash Meadows gather area and the method of removal.

The proposal is to remove approximately 150 horses, mules and burros from the Ash Meadows gather area.

The following sections of the gather plan approved on 5/9/85 by the BLM State Director, Nevada are amended as follows:

Number of Wild Horses

Approximately 150 horses, mules and burros are to be removed from Ash Meadows. This number considers data collected in May 1985, population increase from the 1982 census, and horses not counted during the inventory process.

Removal Methods

In addition to trapping and/or driving by horseback, the animals will be driven into traps by helicopter. Helicopter herding will be conducted in such a manner to minimize the risk of injury or other harmful effects to the animals. Helicopter gathering operations are not to be conducted within 6 weeks of the peak foaling period. Helicopter herding will allow foals to stay with their mares or jennies and bands to remain together. Animals will not be herded over 8 miles.

A BLM authorized officer shall supervise all helicopter use as delineated in 43 CFR 4730.7-2.

The following regulations (from 43 CFR 4740.2) cover the humane use of helicopters and will be adhered to in this capture operation:

(a) The use of helicopters is authorized to locate the animals involved and for related purposes such as to transport personnel and equipment. The condition of the animals shall be continuously observed by the authorized officer and should signs of unnecessary stress be noted, the source of stress shall be removed so as to allow for recovery.

Helicopters may be used in roundups or other capture operations subject to the following humane procedures:

(1) Helicopters shall be used in such a manner that bands or herds will tend to remain together.

(2) The rate of movement shall not exceed limitations set by the authorized officer who shall consider terrain, weather, distance to be traveled, and condition of animals.

(3) The helicopter shall be used to enable the authorized officer to look for the presence of dangerous areas (e.g. fences) and move the animals away from hazards during the capture operation.

(4) During capture operations, animals shall be moved in such a way as to prevent unnecessary stress or injury.

Trap Sites

At present, three trap sites are anticipated for the capture operations. Additional trap sites may be needed to capture the horses. Sites are selected based on animal habits, travel routes and topography. The trap sites will be located so the least amount of resource damage as possible will occur. Existing roads and trails will be used and all sites will receive cultural clearance prior to use. If archaeological or other cultural values are found, the trap will be relocated.

Duration of Capture Plan

This capture plan shall be in effect for the gathering of 150+ animals. Gathering should commence in July 1985, and terminate when all of the wild free roaming horses in the Ash Meadows/Amargosa area have been captured.

RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL:

District Manager, BLM
Las Vegas District Office

Date

APPROVED:

State Director, Nevada
Bureau of Land Management

Date

ASH MEADOWS WILD HORSE GATHERING PLAN

The proposal is to remove approximately 90 horses from the Ash Meadows/Amargosa area.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Gather Area

The gather area is the Ash Meadows/Amargosa Valley area approximately 60 miles west of Las Vegas, NV, along the California/Nevada State line. The entire gathering operation will take place in the Ash Meadows/Amargosa area.

Existing Situation

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently purchased private lands in Ash Meadows in private treaty with Nature Conservancy. Most of these lands were under cultivation and interspersed with Federal lands in the area. The purpose of the acquisition was to protect springs containing several species of endangered pupfish and 2 species of speckled dace.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has identified adverse impacts occurring from wild horse grazing. Their Final Land Protection Plan for Ash Meadows was approved June 1, 1984.

Justification

In order to comply with the 1973 Endangered Species Act, Public Law 93-205, as amended, the Bureau can allow no actions which may adversely impact animals or plants classified or recommended for classification as threatened or endangered. Since adverse impacts to such species have been attributed to the wild and trespass horses utilizing the Ash Meadows area, the Bureau must take action to remove the animals from the area. A BLM Habitat Management Plan for the Ash Meadows area was approved by the Nevada State Director on 8/4/80 and references the need to remove all wild horses from the area.

The Bureau is also charged with removing wild, free-roaming horses from private lands when requested by the landowner(s). Private land owners/users have periodically complained of damage to crops and improvements.

Number of Wild Horses

The 1982 census of the area showed 68 horses in approximately 180,000 acres. Of this area, approximately 2,200 acres are in private or state ownership and another 1,200 acres under application for ownership or other use. Approximately 90 horses are to be removed from Ash Meadows. This considers annual increase and horses not counted in the most recent inventory.

Removal Methods

Capture of the wild horses in the area will include use of "bait" or "feed" trapping, riders on horseback and temporary panels, and will be accomplished by the wrangler crew from the Susanville, California district.

The temporary panels will be used to construct traps and holding pens, and must be at least 6 feet high. If needed, wings will be extended from the trap. The entire trap "setup" will be camouflaged with native brush species, if riders on horseback are used.

If riders on horseback are needed, the horses will be driven into the trap(s) and the gate(s) will be closed by hand. If water or "feed" trapping is used, the camouflage will not be necessary, but the gate(s) of the trap(s) must be closed by hand.

If the horses are to be kept at the trap site overnight, feed and water will be provided, at the rate of 10 gallons of water per animal and 2 pounds of hay per hundred pounds of body weight, per day.

Mares with foals will be separated from stallions and mares without foals, if the horses are to be held at the trap site overnight or longer.

Trap Sites

Four to six trap sites may be needed to capture the horses. These sites will be selected based on animal habits, travel routes and topography. The trap sites will be located so the least amount of resource damage as possible will occur. Existing roads and trails will be used and all sites will receive cultural clearance prior to use. If archaeological or other cultural values are found, the trap will be relocated.

Responsibility

BLM personnel from the Las Vegas District Office will approve trap sites, assure humane treatment of horses, assure the capture plan guidelines are observed and determine if destruction of sick or injured animals is necessary. The Las Vegas Wild Horse/Burro Specialist will have responsibility to insure that the capture is conducted in accordance with applicable regulations, BLM policy and this capture plan. The District Range Conservationist will act in this capacity if the Wild Horse and Burro Specialist is not available.

Destruction of Injured or Sick Animals

Any severely injured or seriously sick animal shall be destroyed in accordance with 43 CFR 4740.31. Such animals should be destroyed when a definite act of mercy is needed to alleviate pain and suffering. If capture personnel or the BLM representative cannot determine the severity of the sickness or injury, a veterinarian will be called to advise on the final decision.

Only the COAR/P.I. from the Las Vegas District will be authorized to destroy a horse/burro or authorize the destruction of an injured/sick animal by a veterinarian.

Safety

Capturing and handling of wild horses shall be done in the safest manner possible for the health and safety of the horses, personnel and saddle horses, if used.

Duration of Capture Plan

This capture plan shall be in effect for the gathering of 90+ horses. Gathering should commence in July 1985, and terminate when all of the wild free roaming horses in the Ash Meadows/Amargosa area have been captured.

Processing Captured Horses

The BLM will issue a 28-day notice of intent to gather and notice of intent to impound. Captured horses can be held in existing corrals, built by the former landowner, until transported to a holding/processing area. The horses will be inspected by a Nevada Department of Agriculture brand inspector, prior to being moved to a processing/adoption center.

Inspection of impounded animals will result in their categorization as :
a.) branded animals with offspring, including yearlings, b.) unbranded animal(s) with offspring, including yearlings, with obvious evidence of existing or former private ownership, or c.) unbranded animals and offspring, including yearlings, without obvious evidence of former private ownership. The brand inspector will determine ownership of branded animals and their offspring. The BLM authorized officer will determine, after consultation with the brand inspector, if unbranded animals are wild and free-roaming. The brand inspector will determine, if possible, the ownership of unbranded animals determined not to be wild and free-roaming.

Captured wild horses will be inspected by BLM personnel for obvious injury or illness. Severely injured or sick animals will be dispatched, removed from the capture site and disposed of under applicable regulations, if necessary.

The capture crew will furnish feed and water for the animals for up to 3 days at the capture/holding site, or until a "load" has been captured.

Horses will be segregated according to sex when moved to a holding area. Mares with foals will be further separated from mares without foals.

Disposition of Captured Animals

Captured horses will be held at a central site at or near Ash Meadows until a load has been captured. The animals will then be moved to a processing facility. Captured horses will be inspected by a Nevada Division of Agriculture brand inspector, prior to being transported to a processing/adoption center. Branded or obviously domestic animals will be disposed of in accordance with 43 CFR 4150 and 43 CFR 4713.32.

Captured horses will be fed at the rate of 2 pounds of high quality grass or "mixed" hay per hundred pounds of body weight and furnished with 10 gallons of fresh water per day.

All motor vehicles used to transport captured animals shall, under the provisions of 43 CFR 4740.2(b), be subject to the following reservations/restrictions.

- a. All the transportation shall be in compliance with appropriate state and federal laws, regulations and policies applicable to humane transportation of horses and burros.
- b. Vehicles shall be in good repair, of adequate rated capacity, and carefully operated to ensure that captured animals are transported without undue risk of injury.
- c. Stock trucks or single deck trailers can be used to haul horses to the processing/adoption center. Single deck trucks/trailers forty feet or longer are required to have two partition gates to separate horses and prevent crowding. Trucks/trailers less than 40 feet need only one partition. Vehicles will be inspected and approved by a BLM representative prior to use.

- d. Animals will be sorted by age, size, sex, condition and temperament when being readied for transport, to minimize injury from fighting or trampling.
- e. The P.I. or COAR shall consider the condition of the animals, weather conditions, type of vehicles and distance to be transported when planning for moving the captured animals.
- f. The transport of captured horses/burros will be under humane conditins. Unless otherwise approved by the authorized officer, transport will be limited to a maximum of 24 hours, followed by at least 5 hours of on-the-ground rest with adequate feed and water.

Public Relations

All publicity, formal public contact and inquiries will be handled by the Las Vegas District Office Public Affairs Officer.

Coordination

The Las Vegas District Office will coordinate with the appropriate holding facility to assure proper space availability for the captured horses and that the animals can be handled safely and efficiently.

ASH MEADOWS WILD HORSE GATHERING PLAN

PREPARED BY:

Zerry R. Driver
Wild Horse/Burro Specialist, BLM
Division of Resource Management

02-28-85
Date

RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL:

William L. Quinn
Area Manager, BLM
SRA

3/11/85
Date

Robert L. Wilson
District Director, USDI
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

3/25/85
Date

CONCURRED:

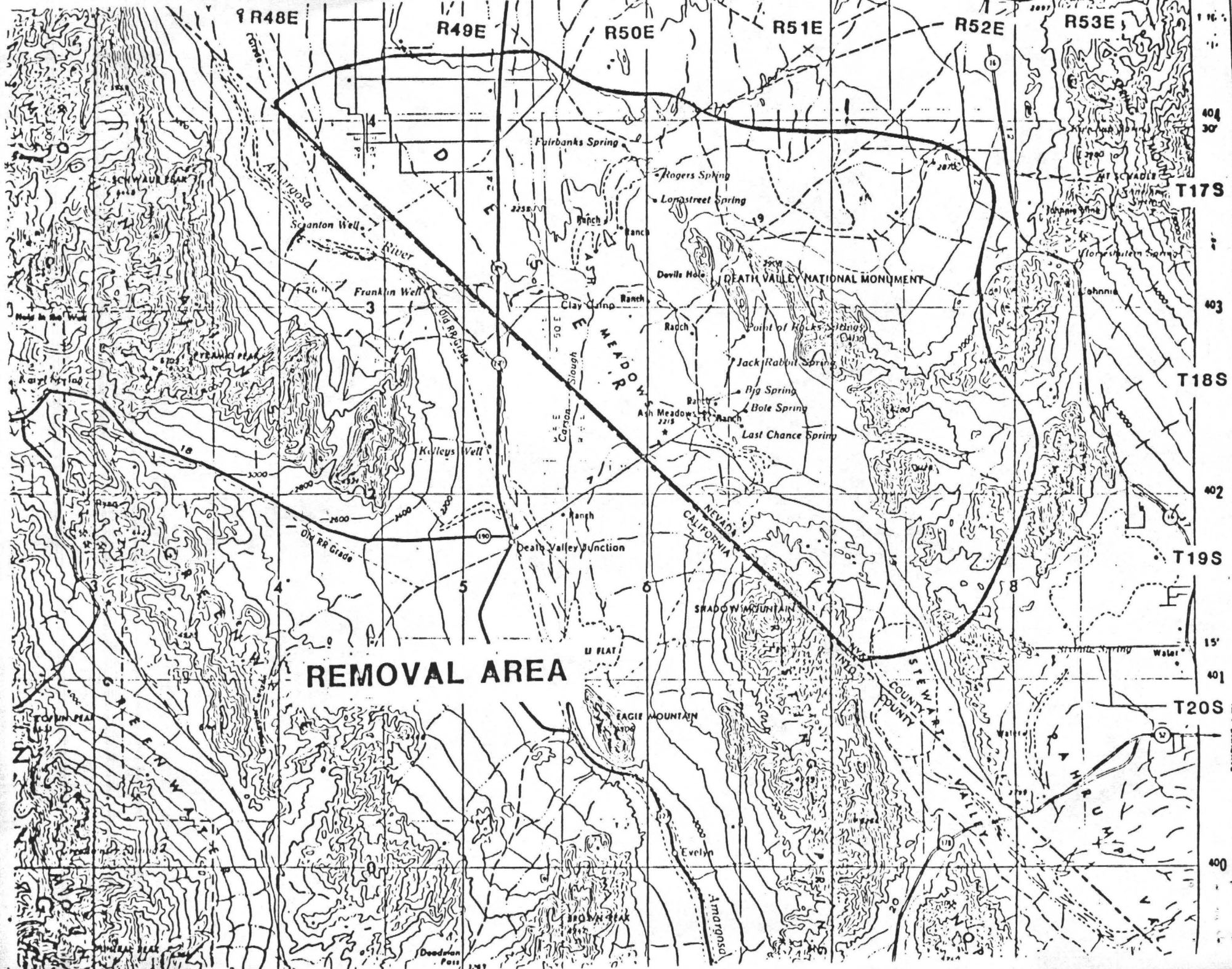
Ken Cowan
District Manager, BLM
Las Vegas District Office

4/12/85
Date

APPROVED:

Loan M. ...
Associate State Director, Nevada
Bureau of Land Management

5/9/85
Date



REMOVAL AREA

ASH MEADOWS

DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL MONUMENT

SHADOW MOUNTAIN

EAGLE MOUNTAIN

STEWART COUNTY

INDY COUNTY

R48E

R49E

R50E

R51E

R52E

R53E

T17S

T18S

T19S

T20S

404

403

402

15'

401

400



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Las Vegas District Office
P.O. Box 26569
Las Vegas, Nevada 89126

IN REPLY
REFER TO: 4700
(NV-053)

Memorandum

To: District Manager

From: Assistant District Manager, Resources
Area Manager, Stateline Resource Area

Subject: EA Amendment for Ash Meadows Wild Horse Removal

Environmental assessment # NV-056-5-50 is amended to reflect a more accurate number of animals to be removed from the Ash Meadows gather area. The proposal is to remove approximately 150+ horses, mules and burros from the Ash Meadows gather area.

All other information in the EA, approved by you on May 22, 1985, continues to be accurate.

Recommended for Approval By:

Area Manager
Stateline Resource Area

Date

Assistant District Manager,
Division of Resource Management

Date

Approved by:

District Manager

Date

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
ASH MEADOWS WILD HORSE REMOVAL

I. Purpose of and Need for Action

The purpose of this Environmental Assessment (EA) is to analyze the impacts of removal of wild horses from the Ash Meadows/Amargosa Valley area. The action is needed to: (1) alleviate damage to threatened and endangered plants and animals and habitat, (2) prevent indiscriminate shooting of wild horses in the area and/or removal of wild horses from the Federal range illegally and (3) stop damage to crops and improvements on private lands by horses. Provisions for removal of horses/burros from the range are contained in Section 4 of P.L. 92-195, the Wild, Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act.

II. Introduction

The Ash Meadows/Amargosa Valley Area contains 90 wild, free-roaming or feral horses. All the horses on Federal range were claimed during the claiming period after the passage of P.L. 92-195. The claim was not allowed due to lack of proof of ownership on the part of the claimant. The horses were judged to be wild and free-roaming under the provisions of P.L. 92-195.

The impact of wild horses on the habitat of threatened or endangered T&E plants and the plants themselves has not been thoroughly studied. However, trampling of threatened/endangered plants and compaction of the soil has been observed around the many springs in the Ash Meadows area.

Prior to passage of the above-cited law, these horses were the target of harassment and capture operations. Animals encroaching on private lands were either captured and used or sold or, in the worst cases, shot. Since the passage of P.L. 92-195, complaints have been made to BLM regarding: 1) wild horses concentrating on cropland during the summer, 2) stallions tearing down fences to breed domestic mares or add domestic mares to a harem, and 3) horses being shot on federal range.

The private lands are fenced, but the wild horses have been tearing down the fences to graze on crops.

Several incidents of horses being shot have been reported recently, but results of investigations have been inconclusive.

Horses have been removed illegally from both Federal range and private lands. Three horses were impounded recently and two of the three were adopted in Las Vegas.

III. Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

A. Proposed Action

The proposed action is to round up all the horses, approximately 90, in the Ash Meadows/Amargosa area (see map; appendix 1), ranging on public domain lands in the State of Nevada.

B. Alternatives

1. Hold no round up (no action).
2. Allow 30 wild free-roaming horses to remain on the Federal Range in the Ash Meadows area.

IV. Planning

No known State or local programs conflict with the Proposed Action. The 1975 Bureau Planning System decisions did not specifically address wild horses or burros in Ash Meadows. However, the 1975 Management Framework Plan (MFP) states that horses and burros in designated herd management areas will be maintained at the 1971 levels until activity plans can be prepared. Ash Meadows was not recognized as a wild horse/burro area, when the Management Framework Plan was developed.

In order to comply with the 1973 Endangered Species Act, Public Law 93-205, as amended, the Bureau can allow no actions which may adversely impact animals or plants classified or recommended for classification as threatened or endangered. Since adverse impacts to such species have been attributed to the wild and trespass horses utilizing the Ash Meadows area, the Bureau must take action to remove the animals from the area. A BLM Habitat Management Plan for the Ash Meadows area was approved by the Nevada State Director on August 4, 1980, and references the need to remove wild horses from the area.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently purchased private lands in Ash Meadows to enhance habitat of several species of endangered pupfish. The refuge manager has orally requested the horses be removed from the area to protect the habitat of the fish and several plant species proposed for listing as threatened or endangered. Their Final Land Protection Plan for Ash Meadows was approved June 1, 1984.

V. Description of the Affected Environment

A. Non-living Components

1. Topography

The area is typical of the lower elevations of the basin and range province. A small range of limestone mountains rising to a height of approximately 4,200 feet runs from the middle of the area in a northwest to southeast direction. The remainder of the area is a fairly level floodplain/bench.

2. Soils

Soils in the area are Aridisols and Entisols. The Entisols occur in washes and on steeper slopes adjacent to the mountains and show little development. The Aridisols occur on alluvial fans and terraces, generally the most stable positions, and show good soil development indicated by the accumulation of calcium carbonate immediately below the soil surface.

3. Water

Two main drainage patterns exist. Overland flow of water in the western and southern sections of the area is into the Amargosa River drainage, and that of the northeast section flows into the dry lake bed in T. 17S., R. 51E. The only perennial surface water that occurs in the area originates in the many springs that arise in and around Ash Meadows. Many of these waters are of prime importance because they provide the environment required by certain endangered species of pupfish, Cyprinodon nevadensis pectoralis, C. diabolis and C. nevadensis mionectes.

4. Minerals

The only known active mining in the area is for clay minerals. The American Borax Company mill is located just off of State Highway 29 in Section 1, T. 18S., R. 49E. The Industrial Mineral Ventures Mill is across Highway 29 in Sec. 29, T. 17S., R. 49E.

5. Climate

The climate is very typical of the southern Nevada Mojave Desert region. Precipitation probably averages less than four inches per year and occurs mainly in short duration summer thundershowers. Summers are long and hot--winters short and mild. Summer daytime temperatures regularly exceed 100 degrees F., while the low temperature in the winter is seldom below freezing.

B. Living Components

1. Vegetation

Vegetation is generally typical of the Mojave Desert. The dominant vegetation type is creosote bush-bursage with various underlying species. This type covers the whole area except for the steep mountain slopes, and those low lands that are influenced by surface water, salinity, or a

very shallow ground water table. The areas that have shallow ground water are characterized by the following species: mesquite, salt grass, salt cedar, cattails, rushes, and other assorted riparian plants. One other type that occurs, which is closely associated with ground water and salinity, is salt bush, which marks the edge of the dry lake and the outside edge of the riparian type.

The following species are found in the lowland, marsh area and are listed in the "Nevada Threatened Plant" book, May 1984, and are proposed for the indicated classification by the Fish and Wildlife Service:

a. Endangered

Astragalus phoenix*
Centaurium namaphilum var. namaphilum*
Eneliopsis nudicaulis var. corrugata
Grindelia fraxino - pratensis
Ivesia eremica
Mentzelia leucophylla
Nitrophila mohavensis

b. Threatened

Cordylanthus tecopensis
Eriogonum bifurcatum
Penstemon fructiformis ssp. amagosa

c. Watch Category

Arctomecon merriamii
Haplopappus brickelloides
Perityle megalcephala var. intricata
Salvia funerea

*Protected by NRS 527, 270 as a critically endangered plant species.

2. Animals

Except for the following, animals occurring in the area are typical of those found throughout the northern Mojave Desert region.

ENDEMIC & RARE ANIMAL SPECIES OF ASH MEADOWS

Common Name	Federal Listing Status a/	Scientific Name
<u>Springs/Riparian Habitats</u>		
<u>Fishes:</u>		
Ash Meadows Amargosa pupfish mionectes)	E	(<u>Cyprinodon nevadensis</u>)
Ash Meadows specked dace nevadensis)	E	(<u>Rhinichthys osculus</u>)
Devils Hole pupfish	E	(<u>Cyprinodon diabolis</u>)
Warm Springs pupfish pectoralis)	E	(<u>Cyprinodon nevadensis</u>)
Ash Meadows killfish b/	-	(<u>Empetrichthys merriam:</u>)
<u>Molluscs</u>		
Point of Rocks-Springs snail	P	(<u>Fluminicola erythropoma</u>)
Sporting goods Tryonia	P	(<u>Tryonia sp.</u>)
Indeterminate Nevada spring snail	P	<u>Undescribed genus and species</u>
Small slender Tryonia	P	(<u>Tryonia sp.</u>)
Point of Rocks Tryonia	P	(<u>Tryonia sp.</u>)
Median gland Nevada spring snail	P	<u>Undescribed genus and species</u>
Minute slender Tryonia	P	(<u>Tryonia sp.</u>)
Small solid Tryonia	P	(<u>Tryonia sp.</u>)
Large-gland Nevada Spring Snail	P	<u>Undescribed genus and species</u>
Longstreet Spring Snail b/	P	<u>Undescribed genus and species</u>
Devils Hole Amargosa Tryonia	P	(<u>Tryonia sp.</u>)
Ash Meadows virile Amargosa snail	P	(<u>Fontellicella sp.</u>)
<u>Mammals</u>		
Ash Meadows vole b/	P	(<u>microtus montanus Nevadensis</u>)
<u>Insects</u>		
Devils Hole riffle beetle	P	(<u>Stenelmis calidae calidae</u>)
Point of Rocks Springs naucorid	PE	(<u>Ambrysus amargosus</u>)

a/ Federal Listing Status

E = Listed as endangered

P = Proposed either threatened or endangered listing

PE = Proposed as endangered listing

b/ Species unseen for several years and probably extinct.

D. Socio-Economic Values

1. Wilderness

No WSAs are located in the roundup area.

2. Cultural Resources

The area is rich in cultural resources, however, many sites are closely related with water. Because of its great size a cultural investigation of the entire area will not be made. Cultural field inventories will be made at each proposed corral site. These site inventories will be made by qualified BLM personnel before any surface disturbance occurs. A cultural resources report will be prepared pursuant to the cultural field inventories and attached to this environmental assessment.

3. Landscape Character (VRM)

Public lands in the area are currently managed for visual resources under an interim Class III designation. This interim management designation is applied only to those lands not covered by a MFP Decision. A contrast rating is normally completed for all projects on public lands where it is determined that the characteristic landscape may be subordinated. A VRM contrast rating was performed and no significant impacts were identified.

This proposal is limited to no surface disturbance except at the trap sites. The traps will be constructed of portable panels and all materials used in construction of the traps will be removed from the sites as soon as the roundup is completed.

4. Land Uses

The public lands in the area are used mainly for mining, recreation, livestock grazing, and wildlife habitat. The Nevada Pupfish Natural Area sits approximately in the center of the area. The private land is either farmed or broken up into small home sites of varying sizes. A few reservoirs have been constructed by former private land owners. Some aquatic habitat has been enhanced as a result of this development.

5. Socio-Economic Considerations

The latest census shows 780 people living in the area. The main social values in the area are Nevada pupfish, mining, and farming. The pupfish are of concern to knowledgeable environmental groups throughout the nation and the world because of their classification as endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The wild, free-roaming horses are of concern to that portion of the public that feel these animals are an important part of our national heritage and should be protected and preserved.

Mining and farming are both prevalent in the area and are primarily of economic interest because of the livelihood these industries afford the local residents.

Economic values — The main values here are farming, mining, cattle ranching, and real estate. Farming and cattle ranching are probably being held in check somewhat because of ground water availability. The problem being, that in the area surrounding the Nevada Pupfish Natural Area, any additional use of the ground water greater than that now allowed, is highly detrimental to the pupfish populations that occur in many of the springs. The mining industry is operating two clay mineral mills in the area at this time. Both mills are modern and are located at the following sites: Sec. 1, T. 18S., R. 49E., and Sec. 29, T. 17S., R. 49E. These industries employ 183 people. Clay material for the mills is being mined in the area and across the State line in California.

The wild horse herd has little, if any, impact on the economy of the area. Forage production in the area is sporadic at best and the public lands do not produce a dependable livestock forage crop every year. The horses turn to farm crops for forage during periods of low or no rainfall.

VI. Analysis of the Proposed Action and Alternatives

A. Proposed Action — Removal of all horses.

1. Environmental Impacts

There are four categories where the environment would be affected: vegetation, animals, aesthetics and socio-economics.

- a. Vegetation: Removal of the wild horses would benefit T&E plants by reducing trampling and soil compaction. With the removal of wild horses, all lower growing vegetation, grasses, forbs and shrubs will be able to gain vigor, mature and produce seed and establish seedlings. The greatest response to rest is shown by riparian plant species. Wild horses spend a great deal of time in riparian, and aquatic sites — watering, grazing and resting in the shade of trees.

- b. Animals: Most of the threatened or endangered animals in Ash Meadows are aquatic and removal of the wild horses could have an adverse impact. In similar areas, where livestock grazing was eliminated, riparian vegetation grew profusely and covered the water surface. Some of the smaller fish were lost. It is possible that the pupfish and dace cannot tolerate a high density of heavy aquatic vegetation.

However, most of the springs come up from pools, 4 to 6 feet deep, with steep or vertical sides. Horses trample the edges of the pools, causing "sluffing" of the banks into the pool, causing the pools to become shallower with more suspended soil particles. Removal of the horses will allow the banks to revegetate and return to the former straight configuration.

Overall T&E animal species would benefit from the removal of wild horses. Removal of the wild horses will have an adverse impact on the animals themselves. The wild horses, when rounded up, will be made available for adoption and will lose their wild, free-roaming characteristics. Some of the wild horses may be injured during the gathering operation and transportation to the processing center. Use of helicopters during the gathering operation will adhere to those regulations outlined in the amendment to the gathering plan and therefore will not significantly impact the wild horses and burros themselves.

- c. Aesthetics The removal of the Ash Meadows wild horse herd would eliminate the wild horses which can now be seen and studied. Many of the residents and visitors of the area enjoy seeing the wild horses in their present habitat.
- d. Socio-Economic Considerations: Complaints of damage to private property by free-roaming wild horses in the area have been filed in the Las Vegas District Office. Removal of free-roaming horses will alleviate this type of damage. It has been verified that at least eleven head of free-roaming horses have been shot over the last 3 years. Five of the wild horses were shot in the open range and six were shot on private lands. The exact reason for the killing of these wild horses has not been ascertained, but elimination of the wild horse population would help if the reasoning behind the shootings was that the wild horse population in the area is too large or that the herd is causing unacceptable damage to resources or private property.

2. Mitigating Measures

The corrals will be located out of sight of any well-traveled roads or human habitation.

All trap sites, if in an undisturbed area, will have an archaeological clearance prior to construction.

Horses will be treated humanely, with sufficient feed and water provided prior to being transported to a holding facility. The horses will be "trapped" or "herded" by riders and the round-up will be started after the foaling season.

B. Alternative 1: Hold No Roundup.

1. Environmental Impacts

a. Plants: Perennial forage plants in the immediate area of Ash Meadows, that are utilized by wild horses, would continue to receive any heavy use. This would be detrimental during years of low rainfall when forage is limited. Both T&E plants and their habitat would be adversely impacted by continued wild horse trampling in the area.

b. Animals: The only animals that may be adversely impacted would be the wild horse herd itself. If the herd is not reduced by man it is likely that it will over-populate and damage its habitat by destroying its forage base. There are no predators of horses known to inhabit the area.

c. Human Values: The wild horses would be available for viewing by the public.

b. Mitigating Measures

None.

C. Alternative 2: Roundup all horses in the removal area and return approximately six studs and 24 mares and foals to the area. All privately-owned horses would be removed and all excess wild free-roaming horses would be made available for adoption by the public.

1. Environmental Impacts

Very much the same as for alternative 1 except that approximately 30 wild horses will remain on the Federal land in the Ash Meadows area.

VII. Short-Term Use Versus Long-Term Productivity

A. Proposed Action

Removal of all wild horses will end short-term use while improving long-term productivity. Benefits will be apparent within a short (5-10 years) period, since the wild horses will not be placing heavy yearlong grazing pressure on the vegetative resource.

Long-Term productivity of the vegetative resource would be improved.

B. Alternative 1

No roundup would provide no short-term productivity benefits and could seriously limit long-term productivity by destroying the reproduction potential of the forage species.

C. Alternative 2 - Same as Alternative 1.

VIII. Irretrievable or Irreversible Commitments

A. With the removal of the horses the only irretrievable commitment is the loss of the animals from the area. At the present time wild free-roaming horses can drift into the northeast portion of the area from the Mount Stirling area. It could be only a few years before they drift into the Ash Meadows area.

B. No irretrievable commitments are made in the "no action" alternative, concerning the animals. The forage resource may be overutilized to the point that recovery will be limited and the horses may have to expand their use area for forage.

C. Alternative 2 - same as Alternative 1.

IX. Persons, Groups, and Government Agencies Consulted

Former U.S. Representative James D. Santini has contacted this office expressing concern in protecting any right that private owners have to these horses.

George Swink, past lessee and operator of the Ash Meadows Ranch, complained to the Las Vegas District Office of the damage that these horses were causing on private land.

Mr. Mazeko, zoologist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and Susan Cochran, botanist, Nevada Test Site both have interest in the biotic communities occurring in the removal area and have expressed their feelings that any reduction in the number of wild horses using the area would be beneficial to all threatened and endangered species occurring in the area.

A public meeting on the proposed roundup was held in the Las Vegas District Office on May 29, 1979. Persons and groups in attendance were: the News Media, National Wild Horse Association and general public. There was no opposition expressed to the proposed roundup. The Ash Meadows proposed roundup was also discussed at a public hearing in Caliente, NV. on May 7, 1985.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service will be notified of any action since we anticipate a positive impact upon the vegetation environment.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has acquired the private lands formerly owned by Preferred Equities Corporation. The Refuge Manager has orally requested the wild horses be removed from the area, to prevent further damage to some of the springs and habitat of several of the plants proposed for listing as threatened or endangered.

X. Intensity of Public Interest

There has been moderately high interest shown by the general public. Private individuals wish to adopt the wild horses to be rounded up. The National Wild Horse Association interest has been in getting involved with the roundup. That is, being able to help in the care of the horses once they are captured and the assignment of the horses to individuals for cooperative maintenance.

XI. Participating Staff:

Ken Detweiler, Marta Witt, Terry Driver, Phil Allard, James Schalnus, Claudia Carlton, Peter Ertman, Stan Rolf, Robert Taylor.

XII. Summary

A. Proposed Action

1. Removal of all wild horses would allow vegetation, especially forage species, to recover from use.
2. Grazing on private lands by wild horses would be eliminated, and privately-owned horses, if any, grazing on Federal range in trespass would be removed.
3. Wild, free-roaming horses can be reintroduced in the area at any future time. Horses can also "drift" into the area from the Spring Mountains and from California.

B. Alternatives 1 and 2

Horses would be left in place, and damage to private property and T&E species will continue. Horses would continue to increase in number, and more wild horses may be shot.

XIII. Appendices

A. Map of removal area.

XIV. Signatures

Team Leader:

5-21-85
Date

Terry Driver
Terry Driver, Wild Horse/Burro Specialist

Recommended for Approval by:

5/22/85
Date

William T. Civish
William T. Civish, Area Manager, SERA

5/21/85
Date

Joe Ross
Joe Ross, Assistant D.M., Resource Management

Approved by:

5/22/85
Date

Kemp Conn
Kemp Conn, District Manager



REMOVAL AREA

DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL MONUMENT

ASH MEADOWS

SHADOW MOUNTAIN

EAGLE MOUNTAIN

U FLAT

Evelyn

Death Valley Junction

Franklin Well

Killeys Well

Fairbanks Spring

Rogers Spring

Longstreet Spring

Devils Hole

Point of Rocks Slings

Jack Rabbit Spring

Dog Spring

Bole Spring

Last Chance Spring

R48E

R49E

R50E

R51E

R52E

R53E

T17S

T18S

T19S

T20S

404

30'

403

402

15'

401

400

SECTION 1