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NELLIS WILD HORSE PROGRAM STRATEGY PROPOSAL

Prepared by Curtis G. Tucker, Caliente Area Manager, and Jule Durfee, Caliente Wild Horse and Burro Specialist

ASSUMPTIONS -

1. Animal Protection Institute (API) will remain inflexible in their position that no horses should be gathered from the Nellis or National Wild Horse Ranges.
2. Any decision to gather horses from the range will be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA).
3. A favorable IBLA decision will be based upon documentation which proves that a "thriving natural ecological balance" does not exist on the range.
4. An IBLA decision will require 12 months minimum time for processing.
5. Existing monitoring data are insufficient to statistically support a favorable ruling and will not be available until the end of 1990.
6. FY'92 will be the earliest that the Bureau can proceed with an uncontested roundup on the Nellis Range. (Fy'91 will be spent under appeal, collecting additional monitoring data, and in preparation of the contract and gathering plans.)
7. The forage base is insufficient to support the existing population.
8. There will be a die-off of wild horses within the next two years.

PROPOSED ACTIONS FY'90

A. Conduct a tour of the Nellis and National Wild Horse Range for any interested wild horse groups. (Tour on October 20, 1989 to include Terry Jay and Dr. Michael Kirk, Nevada Wild Horse Commission; Brian McKinzie, Nevada Humane Society; Dart Anthony, Southern Nevada Humane Society & U.S. Wild Horse and Burro Foundation; Keith Brink, U.S. Wild Horse and Burros Foundation.)

Objectives - 1) to allow them to observe range and animal conditions, form their own conclusions and hopefully gain their support for the Bureau's proposed herd reduction. 2) to focus discussions on joint actions and strategies which will benefit management of the horses rather than continue adversarial relationships which ultimately are to the detriment of the wild horses.

B. Continue to collect monitoring data.

Objectives - 1) to provide data for a legally defensible wild horse gathering operation. 2) to build the long term data base for improved wild horse management.

C. Conduct a tour of the Nellis and National Wild Horse Range for Nevada's US Congressional delegation.

Objectives - 1) to advise them of the issue. 2) to allow them to observe range and animal conditions, form their own conclusions and hopefully gain their support for the Bureau's proposed herd reduction. 3) to discuss additional strategies or solutions to the issue.

D. Proceed toward full and efficient water development for wild horses on the National Wild Horse Range, using all available sources (REECO, BLM, Air Force, wild horse organizations, etc.).

Objectives - 1) to attain maximum availability of water for wild horses. 2) to affect wider distribution of wild horses to provide relief for the range. 3) to demonstrate to all interested parties that the Bureau is committed to proper management of the wild horse population on the range.

E. Explore possible sources of third party funding, research and data collection.

Objectives - 1) to add to the data base for making objective management decisions. 2) to gain an impartial, third party perspective on the issue. 3) to expand the Bureau's ability to implement effective wild horse management on the range.

F. Finalize the Nellis Management Plan.

Objectives - 1) to comply with the legal mandate to prepare the plan. 2) to provide a legal foundation for future wild horse management actions.

G. Develop a public affairs plan for notification of and responses to the public when the horses begin to die.

Objectives - 1) to inform the public of the issue. 2) to allow them to observe range and animal conditions, form their own conclusions and hopefully gain their support for the Bureau's proposed herd reduction. 3) to demonstrate to the public that the Bureau has been correct in proposing to remove the excess horses, building the Bureau's public credibility as capable wild horse managers. 4) to apply pressure on API or any other extreme group to allow the Bureau to proceed with a gather of excess horses. 5) to apply pressure on API or any other extreme group to enter into negotiation, rather than litigation, where differences of opinion exist regarding wild horse management.

NEVADA WILD HORSE RANGE STRATEGY OPTIONS

Prime Directive: Maintain the wild horse population in a thriving natural ecological balance.

OPTION 1

Proceed with writing the Gathering Plan, environmental assessment and preparation of the contract.

A) API will appeal the case to IBLA. Major points of contention include:

- 1) Are existing data sufficient to support a round-up?
- 2) Have wild horses established permanent home ranges outside of the existing NWHA?
- 3) Where should the boundaries for the National Wild Horse Range be located?

B) Verdict will take 12-24 months. The decision will determine that insufficient data are available to support the gather.

C) BOTTOM LINE: Conditions will not improve for horses and the vegetation.

OPTION 2

Postpone any efforts toward a wild horse gathering for this year.

A) Collect monitoring data

B) Maintain existing water projects and develop additional water sources.

C) Conduct semi-annual wild horse census, including locations.

D) Implement proposed actions as outlined for FY'90.

E) BOTTOM LINE: Wild horse condition should improve, the vegetation data base will expand to support the eventual appeal, work months spent in the program will be invested toward a positive, long term outcome, the BLM's support base for management will hopefully expand.

OPTION 3

Obtain professional veterinarian opinions concluding that the animals are in poor nutritional condition, therefore there must not be a "thriving natural ecological balance" on the range.

A) Identify respected third party veterinarians (state, Air Force and private sources) and obtain necessary clearances for range access.

B) Obtain a statistically valid sampling of the population and professional recommendations regarding poor health of the animals.

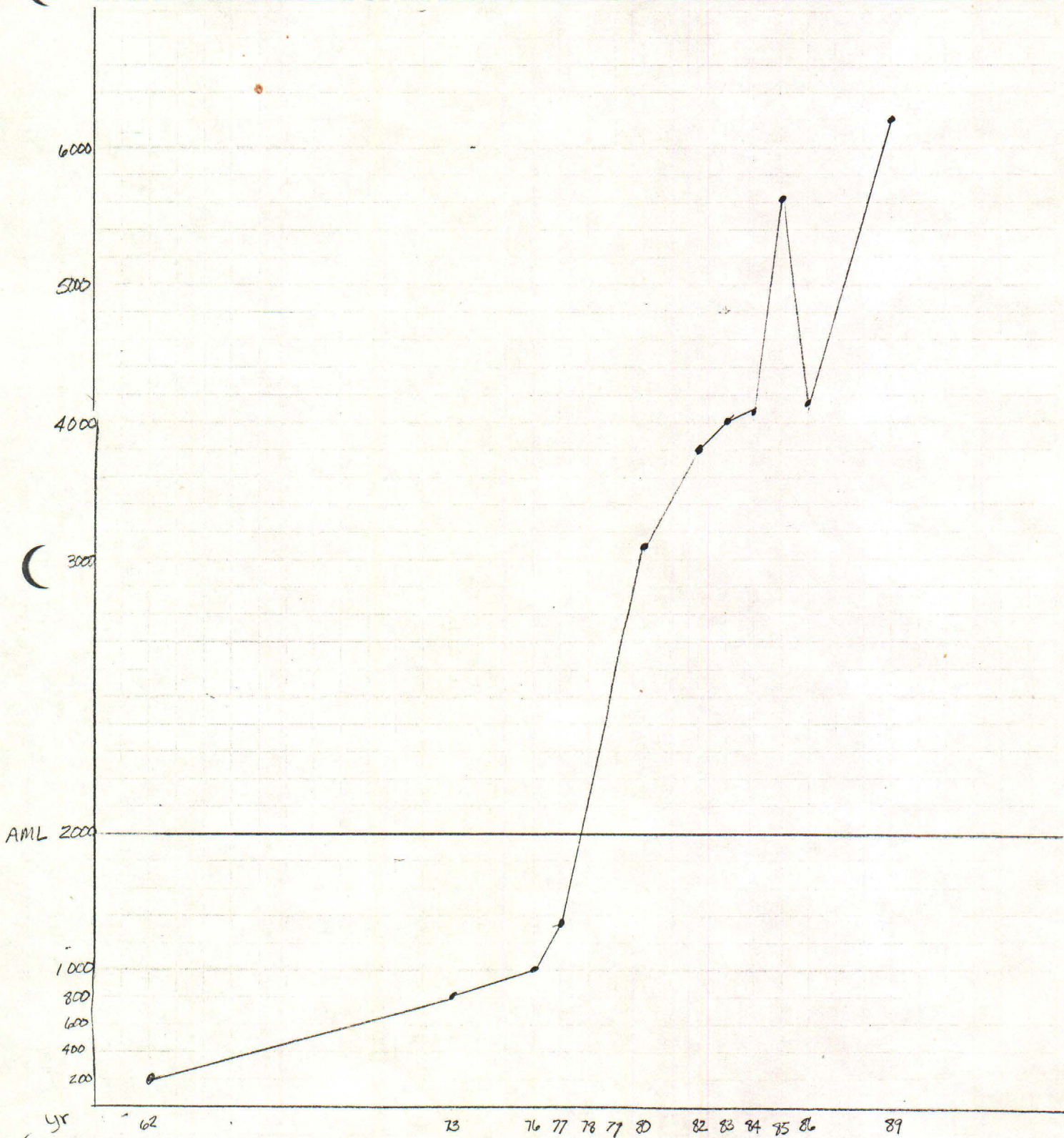
C) Proceed with actions presented in Option 1 above.

D) API will appeal the case with the same issues being raised.

E) BOTTOM LINE: Success of the Bureau's case will rest upon the inference that poor animal condition equates with poor habitat condition. If successful, this strategy would enable the Bureau to gather wild horses a full year sooner than Option 2.

COMPUTATION SHEET

BY _____ DATE _____ PROJECT _____ SHEET NO. _____ OF _____
CHKD. BY _____ DATE _____ FEATURE _____ ACTIVITY _____
OFFICE _____ DETAIL _____

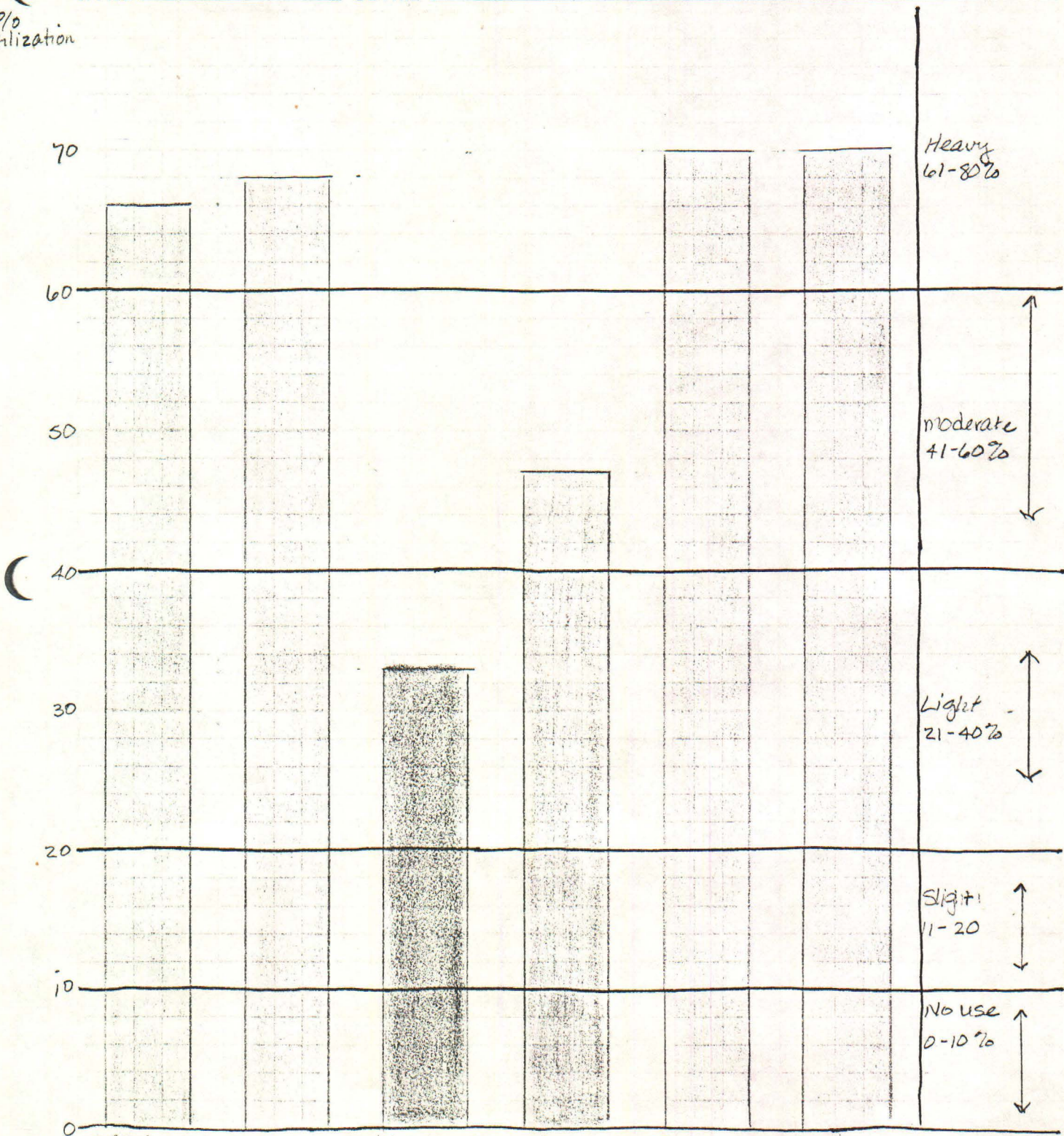


NRC horse population

COMPUTATION SHEET

BY _____ DATE _____ PROJECT _____ SHEET NO. _____ OF _____
 CHKD. BY _____ DATE _____ FEATURE _____ ACTIVITY _____
 OFFICE _____ DETAIL _____

%
 Utilization



ORHY Indian Rice Grass '89
 ORHY 3yr Ave. 86-88
 HIJA Galleta Grass '89
 HIJA 3yr Ave 86-88
 CELA Winter Fat '89
 CELA 3yr Ave 86-89

NRC Utilization levels. (average)

D '89

United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
CALIENTE RESOURCE AREA
P.O. Box 237
Caliente, Nevada 89008
(702) 726-3141

4700
(NV-05514)

TO: Area Manager
FROM: Wild Horse and Burro Specialist
SUBJECT: NRC Monitoring

Oct. 12-14 I read forage utilization in key areas within the Nevada Wild Horse Range (NWHR) and Nellis Range Complex (NRC). Indian rice grass, galleta grass, and winterfat were the most frequent key species. Galleta grass showed light use. Indian rice grass and winter fat showed heavy use for the fourth year in a row. It was difficult to distinguish Indian rice grass from other bunch grasses due to the lack of vegetation. Winterfat has disappeared from a couple of key areas.

On the east side of the Cedar Range, overall utilization was moderate going to light as one traveled south. Horses appeared in good physical condition. Cedar Well was running 1qt/min. Forty head of horses were standing at Cedar Wells waiting their turn to get a drink. Horses are drinking the water as fast as it's coming out of the pipe. Troughs at Cedar Wells need maintenance.

On the west side of the Cedar Range, the forage is heavily used from the northern boundary south to Mellan. Corral and Tunnel Springs were running 1qt/min. The troughs at both springs need maintenance. Rose Spring pipeline was running well. Troughs were full and hundreds of horses were coming to drink each day. I counted 25 head of antelope. There was heavy trailing throughout the area. At Breen Creek (Silver Bow Spring) forage use is severe. I observed about 200 head of horses standing around Breen Creek waiting to get a drink. Horses' physical condition varies. A few were still in good condition. Most horses were in poor condition, mares with colts and yearlings. Some horses were in very poor condition (bag of bones). I doubt the very poor will make it through the coming winter. South of Mellan range and horse conditions improve. Utilization was moderate to light and most horses were in good physical condition.

J. Durfee