

Prepared for: Dir. Dornbeck 8/30/96 Internal Working Document

**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 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 for 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.
  - Expand satellite adoptions.
  - Explore private partnerships.
  - 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, precipitation 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.

**CONTACT(S):** Al Pierson, Emergency Team Lead, 307-775-6001

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
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	

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 <del>400</del> 414	25
Caliente HMA	590	360
White River	275	77
Dry Lake	200	80
Seaman	250	136
Total	1665	

1455  
 1665  
 3120

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

## Communications Plan

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**Purpose:** To establish and maintain open communications with the media, County, State and Federal officials, representatives of special interest groups, and concerned individuals, the Emergency Wild Horse and Burro Program Team will:

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.

## 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. <b>Next Step:</b> 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	Info Officer	Mid-September
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Press Release</li> <li>- Public Service Announcements</li> <li>- Video Clips</li> <li>- Flyers</li> <li>- Letters to Past and Potential Adopters</li> </ul>		