

12-11-96



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Las Vegas District Office

4765 Vegas Drive

P.O. Box 26569

Las Vegas, Nevada 89126



In Reply Refer To:

4700

(NV-052)

DEC 11 1996

Ms. Catherine Barcomb  
Commission For The Preservation of Wild Horses  
1105 Terminal Way  
Suite 209  
Reno, NV. 89502

Dear Ms. Barcomb:

The Las Vegas District has been consumed by emergency situations that have prevented us from responding quickly to your correspondence received in July 1996. In addition, we are also responding to your most recent correspondence of November 1 which we received on November 15, 1996. This correspondence was about our decision documents for the Nevada Wild Horse Range. The below responses are to your specific questions and concerns.

*Red Rock Herd Management Area (HMA):*

Question 1. When did the Bureau of Land Management document heavy use on the primary use area?

The Bureau conducted a utilization inspection in April 1996.

Question 2. Where, when and how did supplemental feeding or watering influence the herd and its primary use area?

Water was hauled to the Wilson Tank storage facility twice during repair operations on the spring development. This action was during the hot portion of the year May/June 1996 and kept the horses in their natural use area.

Question 3. Provide the age, sex, color, condition and recruitment data collect at the gather?

a. Wild horses gathered consisted of 54 head.

b. Age structure:

|       |         |
|-------|---------|
| Colt  | 16%     |
| 2yr.  | old 21% |
| 3yr.  | old 04% |
| 4yr.  | old 04% |
| 5yr.  | old 13% |
| 6yr.  | old 02% |
| 7yr.  | old 04% |
| 8yr.  | old 06% |
| 9yr.  | old 02% |
| 10y.  | old 11% |
| 12y.  | old 07% |
| 13yr. | old 04% |
| 14yr. | old 04% |
| 20yr. | old 04% |

100%

c. Sex Ratio 56% mares to 44% studs.

d. Color Structure:

|          |     |
|----------|-----|
| Sorrel   | 31% |
| Palomino | 28% |
| Buckskin | 17% |
| Bay      | 15% |
| Pinto    | 06% |
| Black    | 02% |
| Albino   | 01% |

100%

e. Lactating mare's were in an average condition class of 4/5 and studs were in an average condition class of 5.

f. Eight foals were present in this gather.

Question 4. Provide the age, sex, color, condition and recruitment data for the surviving herd in the Red Rock HMA?

a. Wild horses released consisted of 35 head.

b. Age structure:

|           |     |
|-----------|-----|
| colt      | 14% |
| 2yr. old  | 09% |
| 3yr. old  | 02% |
| 4yr. old  | 03% |
| 5yr. old  | 14% |
| 8yr. old  | 06% |
| 9yr. old  | 03% |
| 10yr. old | 17% |
| 11yr. old | 03% |
| 12yr. old | 11% |
| 13yr. old | 06% |
| 14yr. old | 06% |
| 20yr. old | 06% |

100%

c. Sex ratio consisted of 49% studs to 51% mares.

d. Color structure:

|          |     |
|----------|-----|
| Palomino | 34% |
| Sorrel   | 17% |
| Buckskin | 17% |
| Pinto    | 15% |
| Bay      | 15% |
| Black    | 02% |

100%

e. Lactating mare's were in an average condition class of 4/5 and studs were in an average condition class of 5.

f. There were five foals released.

**Johnnie HMA:**

Question 1. When did the Bureau of Land Management document heavy use on the primary use area.

The Bureau conducted utilization studies in May 1996.

Question 2. Where, when and how did supplemental feeding or watering influence the herd and its primary use area?

Supplemental feeding and/or watering operations were not conducted by the Bureau. Occasionally the public feeds the animals however, this has no affect on the wild horses in their primary use area.

Question 3. Provide the age, sex, color, condition and recruitment data collect at the gather?

a. Wild horses gathered consisted of 41 head.

b. Age structure:

|           |       |
|-----------|-------|
| colt      | 07%   |
| 2yr. old  | 10%   |
| 3yr. old  | 10%   |
| 4yr. old  | 10%   |
| 5yr. old  | 10%   |
| 6yr. old  | 07%   |
| 8yr. old  | 02%   |
| 10yr. old | 10%   |
| 11yr. old | 10%   |
| 12yr. old | 07%   |
| 13yr. old | 05%   |
| 14yr. old | 05%   |
| 15yr. old | 05%   |
| 16yr. old | 02%   |
|           | <hr/> |
|           | 100%  |

c. Sex ratio consisted of 41% studs to 59% mares.

d. Color structure:

|          |       |
|----------|-------|
| sorrel   | 34%   |
| pinto    | 22%   |
| palomino | 15%   |
| buckskin | 10%   |
| chestnut | 10%   |
| bay      | 05%   |
| grey     | 02%   |
| black    | 02%   |
|          | <hr/> |
|          | 100%  |

e. Lactating mare's were in an average condition class of 3/4 and studs were in an average condition class of 5.

f. There were three foals gathered.

Question 4. Provide the age, sex, color, condition and recruitment data for the surviving herd in the Johnnie HMA?

a. Wild horses released consisted of 27 head.

b. Age structure:

|           |       |
|-----------|-------|
| colt      | 07%   |
| 2yr. old  | 04%   |
| 3yr. old  | 07%   |
| 5yr. old  | 07%   |
| 6yr. old  | 07%   |
| 10yr. old | 15%   |
| 11yr. old | 15%   |
| 12yr. old | 11%   |
| 13yr. old | 07%   |
| 14yr. old | 08%   |
| 15yr. old | 08%   |
| 16yr. old | 04%   |
|           | <hr/> |
|           | 100%  |

c. Sex ratio consisted of 52% studs to 48% mares.

d. Color structure:

|          |       |
|----------|-------|
| pinto    | 37%   |
| sorrel   | 19%   |
| palomino | 15%   |
| chestnut | 07%   |
| bay      | 04%   |
| black    | 04%   |
| grey     | 03%   |
|          | <hr/> |
|          | 100%  |

e. Lactating mare's were in an average condition class of 4/5 and studs were in an average condition class of 5.

f. There were two foals released.

***Muddy Mountain HMA:***

Question 1. When did the Bureau of Land Management document "heavy" use on the primary use area?

Heavy utilization was observed in January 1996 by Bureau personal and utilization studies were conducted in July 1996 by National Park Service personnel to verify that no production had occurred during the spring season.

Question 2. When was condition scoring of the horses and burros completed?

Condition scoring was conducted jointly by the National Wild Horse Association and the National Park Service in July 1996.

Question 3. Provide the age, sex, color, condition and recruitment data collect at the gather?

a. Wild horses gathered consisted of 16 head.

b. Age structure:

|           |  |     |
|-----------|--|-----|
| colt      |  | 13% |
| 1yr. old  |  | 13% |
| 2yr. old  |  | 19% |
| 3yr. old  |  | 13% |
| 4yr. old  |  | 06% |
| 6yr. old  |  | 06% |
| 7yr. old  |  | 06% |
| 11yr. old |  | 13% |
| 12yr. old |  | 06% |
| 22yr. old |  | 05% |

100%

c. Sex ratio consisted of 37% studs to 63% mares.

d. Color structure:

|          |  |     |
|----------|--|-----|
| bay      |  | 44% |
| sorrel   |  | 38% |
| black    |  | 06% |
| bay      |  | 06% |
| red roan |  | 06% |

100%

e. Lactating mare's were in an average condition class of 4/5 and studs were in an average condition class of 5.

f. There were two foals gathered.

Question 4. Provide the age, sex, color, condition and recruitment data for the surviving herd in the Muddy Mountain HMA?

The remaining 13 head of wild horses were not gathered and or processed for age etc. however, the composition appears to be representative of the animals gathered. The only wild horses gathered were those in poor condition and inhabiting the heavy use area around State Route Highway 167 which is unfenced. These animals were gathered to protect their environment and prevent injury to wild horses and/or the driving public.

Question 5. What is the genetic threshold population to sustain the Muddy Mountain Wild Horse Herd?

The Las Vegas District has proposed in the Clark County RMP that the wild horses be removed from this HMA due to a unsuitable and/or incompatible habitat type for horses. The HMA would continue being used by wild burros.

***Nevada Wild Horse Range HMA***

Responses to your correspondence of November 1, 1996:

We would disagree that the Nevada Wild Horse Range is on marginal rangeland. The herbaceous plant vigor and production is low due to heavy use and drought, however, plant composition and density is remarkably good. Also, winterfat occupies the NWHR which supplies and additional food source to the herbaceous forage present, especially during the fall and winter months. The potential productivity for the NWHR is among some of the best in Southern Nevada.

Horses outside the range are associated with other herd areas and are best addressed in their own management plans.

*(Final Environmental Analysis Document)*

Page 1, 3rd Paragraph - The AML is considered to be a relatively long term figure. It is not intended to be adjusted during extremes in weather or each and every year. At each evaluation period the AML is assessed for appropriateness. The evaluation conducted during 1996 concluded that the horse use area (1.2 million acres) could sustain 1000 head before deterioration would begin. It also recommended that the population range between a minimum of 580 head and a maximum of 1000 head.

Page 2 1st Paragraph - The evaluation did not place the cause of the skewed sex ratios on the strategic plan, it stated merely that the ratio needed to be corrected.

A herd of 600 animals with a growth rate of 20-25% would double within 3-4 years. This is especially true for animals that are density dependent, have improved forage condition as a result of massive removals, and improved health of mares. At the time the report was written the results of the fertility control were not known. In addition the management option of re-vaccinating the mares had not been proposed by the research team. Therefore calculations were based on a 50/50 ratio, 25% recruitment and a 600 head population.

Page 2 2nd Paragraph - The data you reference has been collected however, the compilation and analysis of that data has not been accomplished due to continued emergency responses to animals in the field. However, from our observation's the NWHR has thirty year old horses that are still reproducing. However, this is a

small percentage of the whole, also it appears that the approximate longevity for wild horses is 20-25 years. Partial analysis of recruitment data represent that there is a foaling rate of over 50% and that most of these animals have survived. However, the Bureau has conducted two emergency gather's to remove the foal's prior to potential stress periods and has been conducting yearly gather's since 1991. This action has removed most foals before they have had to fend for themselves for a long period of time.

*(Drought Effects Mitigation Plan Document)*

Page 2, 3rd Paragraph - Spiney Hopsage is indeed a forage species on the NWHR. Spiney hopsage was not measured because we did not consider it at the time to be a key forage species. It showed little to no growth.

Page 2 4th Paragraph - The raw data has been gathered; however, this information has not been analyzed to date. The decision you are referring to was based on vegetative data.

Page 2 5th Paragraph - The availability of the results of the fertility control study were not available at the time of the report, and the decision to revaccinate the mares came after the report. Forty per cent of the mares were with foals this spring, at this rate not considering immigration and emigration a 50/50 population doubles every four years. Whether the population doubles in three or even four years is moot. The NWHR population will be reduced to a level that allows the range to recover and allows the herd to thrive. The herd will be allowed to grow, without harassment for 2-4 years. When it reaches 1000 head ( or resource damage begins, which ever is sooner) the population would be reduced to around 600 head. The real issue for the NWHR is the official boundaries. Horses freely roam the entire Tonopah Test Range. The NWHR boundaries are not logical and should be reassessed. Once the boundaries have been analyzed and an agreement struck, then a proper analysis of resource data can begin. In addition, a comprehensive soil and vegetation survey is desirable to establish site potentials for the area.

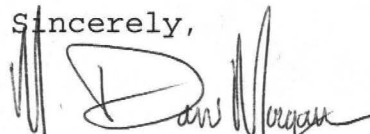
Page 2, 6th Paragraph - Development of waters is imminent. The well is scheduled to be completed in February 1997. Permanent water sources currently support 1000 head. The total use area forage base will support at least 1000 head over the long term. Developing permanent waters in the southern portions of the range will open new areas to grazing and reduce grazing pressure on the northern portion.

Thank you for your interest and comments about the Wild Horse Program. Please let us know if we missed any information you requested. There may be some disagreement in relation to some of our responses.



Please feel free to visit our office to review or discuss the data and responses presented. Contact Gary McFadden, Wild Horse and Burro Specialist, Las Vegas Field Office, at (702) 647-5024, to arrange a meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marvin Dan Morgan". The signature is stylized with a large, looped initial "M" and "D".

Marvin Dan Morgan  
Associate District Manager  
Renewable Resources